



## GENDER DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE AMONG PASHTUNS IN KASHMIR: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

**Dr. Farah Qayoom and Dr. Fayaz Ahmad Bhat**  
Department of Sociology University of Kashmir,  
Hazratbal Srinagar .



### ABSTRACT:

*Marriage as a social institution not only regulates and legitimizes sexual relationship between males and females but demonstrates role and status of women. Marriage as a social institution has many gender dimensions which are generally ignored or taken for granted by people. In most of the tradition societies women has either no say or very little role in the affair of marriage and related practices and ceremonies. The marriage of Pashtuns popularly known as Pathans is largely governed by Pashtunwali a code of life determined by Patriarchy. There is almost uniformity in the practice of marriage among Pashtuns across the globe, however some studies have also brought forth the “changing face of marriage for Pashtun Diaspora” (Rahman, 2015).*

*The present study analyses the practice of marriage among Pashtuns in Kashmir and explores the gender dimensions of marriage among Pashtuns in Kashmir by employing ethnographic method. On the bases of micro observations and analyses study found that the institution of marriage is highly influenced by gender and women is at receiving end.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gender, Marriage, Pashtuns, Kashmir and Sociological .

### INTRODUCTION:

Pashtuns or Pathans in Kashmir are original inhabitants of North West Frontiers of Pakistan. They have migrated to valley of Kashmir 150 years back due to violent conflict in their home land. Despite living over more than one hundred and half century over in Kashmir valley they have retained their social and cultural identity and Pashtunwali still dominates their daily life. This is evident from the fact that in this long span of period there are very few cases of exogamous marriage wherein mates were selected from outside community from among local Muslims who belong to same faith and follow same school of thought. A very few cases of exogamous were reported very recently which were nor arranged by parents. Pashtun generally show reservation in exogamy but they resist tooth and nail the marriage of their daughters outside the community. They feel ashamed to marry their daughters outside the community. In mate selection females has no say. The rights even guaranteed to women by Islam in matters of marriage are taken away when they violate and clash with Pashtunwali, what has been termed Islamic lag by Bhat (2019)<sup>1</sup>. Generally it is believed that communities and groups even very traditional are influenced by the changing social environment.

<sup>1</sup> Islamic Lag according to Bhat, Fayaz is a phenomenon among Muslim communities where there is clash among with respect to religious reaching and practice of the people. When it is denial of rights to women religion is brought forth in the disguise and name of religion women is denied her due but when religion is providing or guaranteeing any right that is taken away without any logic which shows lag in the preaching of religion. It is clash between practical and

Bhat (2018) after comparing social relations and society with liquid argues that no society remains static as society and social relations undergo through change with changing environment. However, with respect to Pashtun society in Kashmir there is hardly in apparent change among the community. The community has been able to retain their age old tradition and customs. Majeed a prominent historian on Kashmir quoted by Sayeed (2011), maintains that Pashtuns “did not mix with the Kashmiris in general and they created their own societies to sustain themselves” A close examination of the things reveals that as a chemical protects liquids from environment effects or minimize the effect of changing environment on the liquid in a similar fashion Pashtunwali protects the community from local culture, education and modernization or minimizes their impact. The institution of marriage acts according to age old tradition where gender is playing determinant role.

### METHODOLOGY

The study is an ethnographic study. The data was collected through participation observations and group discussions. The male researcher of the study generally engaged himself with male members of the society while and female researcher participated with females of the community. She participated in domestic chores of the community to have deep insight on the issue. The field was carried out in two phases the first phase which was carried out by the first author as part of her PhD work from 2012 to 2015 and 2<sup>nd</sup> phase was carried out from May 2017 to February 2019 with special purpose and focus to understand gender dimensions of marriage among Pashtuns in Kashmir.

### HISTORICAL BACKGORUND OF PASHTOONS IN KASHMIR

Pakhtoon migration from Afghan areas to their present localities in Kashmir Valley began between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and is a part of recorded history, Lawrence (1895, Dewan 2008 and Singh 2000 Qayoom, 2017, Qayoom and Bhat, 2018)

For centuries the tribal areas in north-western Pakistan have been an epicenter of conflict. As many as 70 major conflicts are believed to have occurred in this region in the last 800 years (Kerr, 2010). The belligerents in these conflicts have changed over time.

Most of the available literature on the history of Kashmir does not discuss Kashmir Pakhtoons as a separate ethnic group. Nor does it throw any light on the fact as to how these people arrived in Kashmir valley. The passing reference is found in the works of Lawrence (1895), Dewan (2008) and Singh (2000) who call Pashtuns as people of Afghan origin residing in Kashmir.

It is because of the socio-economic constraints coupled with political turmoil, that these people always yearned for greener pastures with suitable political and social environment offering better and remunerative opportunities in order to lead a peaceful and settled life. Infact, it is a common saying in Afghanistan that anyone who crosses over the *Khyber Pass* to the Indus Basin *never returns* (Dhar 1989). The migration of Afghans to the plains of Indian subcontinent across the *Khyber Pass* has been an obvious outcome of the inhospitable conditions, wars, and tribal feuds. It has been gradual and continuous.

Because of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire which was established in Kashmir in 1586 A.D by Akbar, Kashmir passed into the hands of the Afghans in 1752 A.D.-1818 A.D. The province, as such remained under their control upto 1818, when the Afghans got ousted by the rising Sikh power. During the Afghan period, some 32 Afghan Subahdars came to rule Kashmir. They were accompanied by a large administrative outfit including their personal servants, soldiers and fortune seekers (Lawrence, 1895, p.353).

In the same period not only Kashmiri Muslims but also Kashmiri Pandits were appointed to senior government positions in Kabul. Many of the Muslims stayed on, never to return to Kashmir.

---

theoretical Islam when it is suppression of rights of women in lines of tradition Islam is brought forth while as when it is their rights in Islam even Islam is ignored and kept away.

During the same period, a substantial Kashmiri Muslim diaspora came to be formed in what is now called the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

Similarly, some of the Afghans also migrated to Kashmir from Afghanistan or North West Frontier (Dewan 2008, 390). Kashmir valley had started receiving earlier batches of Afghans during Ahmad Shah Durrani's rule in about 1753 A.D. In the subsequent years, other groups too came as and when inter-tribal feuds in their home took place, forcing migration from their native land. "Much later it was Maharaja Gulab Singh, the new Dogra ruler of Kashmir who offered them employment opportunities especially for the purpose of guarding the frontiers of the kingdom and in return granted them land Jagirs and settled them in colonies of their choice"(Lawrence, 1895: 353).

Over a period of time, various batches of immigrant Afghans settled in upper reaches of the valley with a view to occupy the virgin lands with abundance of water. The Afghans are stated to have entered Kashmir via district Baramulla, where they camped for some time. They also moved upwards in the north-west to the South-east of Kashmir in search of suitable greener pastures and arable land. This is how they came to Ganderbal, Pattan, Mattan and other places in the valley (Indu& Ashok, in People of India: Jammu and Kashmir: 51).

In the valley of Kashmir, Pakhtoons are concentrated mainly in Districts of Anantnag, Baramulla, Kupwara and Ganderbal (Qayoom 2017). Many Pakhtoons of *GutliBagh* state that the migration occurred due to poverty and lawlessness in the areas called EllaquaiGhair and Yaghistan. They assert that the British Raj failed to accommodate the Pakhtoons which further added to their mobile nature (Qayoom 2017).

### The Selection of Mates

Mate selection among Pakhtoons sometime takes place even before birth of children. Two families before the birth of their children promise that they shall marry their children when they will grow up. Sometimes after the birth of girl and boy in two families parents of the children promise to marry their children. On occasions when there is dispute in the families the marriage is called off. Sabreen's and Haneef's families had promised that they will marry their children before their birth. Haneef was born with physical disability in legs despite resistance from Sabreen she was forced to marry Haneef.

Yasir's and Moomina's parents have promised to marry their children after their birth everything was going well with both families they were exchanges gifts on special occasions and festivals. Yasir and Moomina started to develop liking and they were eager to get married said Sara cousin of Moomina but two families had some dispute and marriage was called off. Yasir to punish parents of Moomina married within few days another girl.

Almost in all cases parents chose mate for their children. Generally it has been observed that parents take or try to get the opinion of male children but females have no say at all. Male members of a family particularly elders take a call on it and decide the matters of family even the very personal issues of women.

### Perception of Marriage among Pashtuns

The Pakhtoons in tandem with the Islamic Law (Sharia) regard marriage as a Sacrament. They believe it to be the most important event in the life of an individual. The primary goal of marriage as per them is the regulation of the sexual urge and procreation of children. Being a Patriarchal society, the Pakhtoons lay great emphasis on the birth of male progeny.

The Pakhtoons are an exogamous group at clan level and consanguinity is practiced. Cousin marriage is thus a predominant form of marriage among them. Whenever and wherever possible they avoid marrying their daughters to the members of the local Kashmiri Muslim population<sup>21</sup>, though they belong to the same faith as them (Sunni Islam).

Their boys can however, procure brides from the local population without much opposition from the family. Adult marriage has not gained much ascendancy among them. Marriages are mostly arranged. Traces of Polygyny are found among them as it is allowed in Islam under certain conditions,

but the number of wives should not exceed four. In cases where Polygyny is practiced, the number of wives was found not to exceed two.

Serial monogamy is also a prevalent form of marriage amongst them. The men whose wives die usually find a second wife without much difficulty.

“Marriage is an important institution in the society. Prophet (SAW) prescribed it for his Ummah. It is not good to stay unmarried unless there are valid reasons for the same. That is the reason a widower does not face much difficulty in finding a match”, says Haleem Haider Khan, a Pakhtoon in his 60’s.

Though sanctioned by religious laws, Pakhtoons abhor the idea of a Talaq or divorce. The word Zantalaq (one who has divorced his wife) is considered an abuse and against the Pakhtoon man’s sense of honor. Divorce may be due to adultery and maladjustment, and is granted under religious laws. Divorce compensation is to be given by the husband to the wife and either party is at liberty to divorce. It is very rarely that a Pakhtoon woman has initiated divorce proceedings against her husband. Remarriage is permissible in case of either sex, be it a widow/widower or a divorcee.

Many Pakhtoons of GutliBagh have established marriage alliances with their coethnics living in districts of Baramulla, Anantnag and Kupwara. “Since Pathans live in districts of Anantnag, Baramulla and Kupwara, we have brought brides from these places and given our daughters too in marriage there. This is not a new trend. It exists from old times. My mother who is about 70 years old is also from Anantnag district married way back in early 1960’s”, says Mohammad Sohraab Khan who works in the police department.

### Some traditions associated with Marriage

The Pakhtoons call the bride as Naavi and the Groom as Shwala.

Since the Pakhtoons marry their children at a young age, the search for a suitable marriage partner does not take much time. The marriages are predominantly arranged. After the bride is selected, it has to follow up with the formal tying of the knot i.e, Engagement which is called Kojjdann. After engagement the girl is called Changala (betrothed).

The period from the engagement to the actual wedding varies as per certain conditions depending upon the families of the bride and the groom.

To decide the date of the marriage, a few relatives from the groom’s side visit the bride’s side on a selected day. This practice is called Preekunn.

A peculiar tradition prevalent among the Pathans is that on the day of Mehendi (NakreezeShpaa) i.e. evening before the wedding day, marriage the Pakhtoon girls do not stay in their natal home, but in the natal home of their mother i.e, their maternal uncle’s house.

The groom’s side is called „Jhanjaan and the bride’s side is called „Maanjan. Among the Pakhtoons of GutliBagh, the tradition is that the Bride and Groom do not board the same vehicle. The relatives from the bride’s side take the bride to the groom’s house.

Earlier the marriages were not celebrated with much pomp and show, but now there are a few changes. The men dance at the weddings. They light fire crackers. The women too sing Pashto songs, but only close relatives are allowed to enter the female quarters.

They don’t give gold ornaments to the bride unlike the local Kashmiri people. The wedding trousseau of a bride consists of some sets of clothes (SalwaarKameez), a few shawls, sweaters, artificial jewelry and other such items.

On a few Eid’s after the marriage, the kins from the natal home of the bride usually the brother goes with a set of new clothes, mehendi (Nakreezey) and some jewellery like earrings and bangles which she wears on the day of the Eid.

At the time of the marriage, friends and relatives gift the bride and the groom with money called Naindra. Many Pakhtoons believe that this money has a social significance. It lightens the financial burden on the two families contracting the marriage alliance. An amount equal or more to Naindra has to be repaid to the donors on similar occasions in their families.

### **The Day of the Wedding (Waddeh)**

The day of wedding is important days of marriage and with this the marriage reaches to logical conclusion as per Pashtun tradition.

The groom's party leaves for the bride's home early in the morning. To avoid conflict on Mehar<sup>22</sup> in presence of the party accompanying the Jhanja, usually the Nikah is solemnized one day prior to the departure of the Jhanja. Unlike the local Muslims, no Nikahnama is written and the Nikah takes place orally in presence of witnesses.

Earlier there was a tradition among them that when the groom went to get his bride, the brides relatives would hoist a flag on the tallest tree in the vicinity in the area and the groom had to shoot at the flag in one go usually with a bow and arrow, if he succeeded, he would be given the bride otherwise he had to return without the bride crestfallen. This practice according to many Pakhtoons was a test to check the strength of the groom to protect the bride through the turpitudes of life. However, like in many tribes, this practice too amongst the Pakhtoons is extinct now.

Again unlike the local Kashmiri tradition, the groom does not have a full course meal at his in-law's house, but only tea. After he finishes with the tea, he accompanied by a close relative of the bride goes to pay regards to his mother-in-law (Khakhay) and touches her feet. In turn, the mother-in-law offers him a dessert usually Darbaish, sharbat, halwa, kheer or like and he puts some money in her hand. She then gifts him and the relative accompanying him some gift usually clothes Surmadani (Boskhakaii) handkerchief. During this meeting, a few female relatives of the bride also meet the groom and exchange gifts in both cash and kind. While the Jhanja party is having tea, the relatives of the bride take her to her new home.

On the arrival of the bride, she is made to sit in a room. The female relatives and only small boys and girls sit in that room. Men mostly prefer to stay outside. While the veil is still on her face, an aunt of the groom brings the Holy Quran and makes the bride read a few pages. Thereafter, a newborn male child is put in her lap and she is made to see him expecting that she also will give birth to male child first. Male child is also put in the lap to bring prosperity in the home and peaceful stay to bride in grooms home. The groom's sisters bring a big plate containing boiled rice and place it before the bride. She is then made to spread ghee and sugar on the rice and mix it. The mother in law feeds her with some of this rice and the rest is distributed amongst the relatives present in the house. After this, the bride goes to pay her respects to her father-in-law (Sekharr) who gives her some money.

The veil from the newly married bride's face is not removed till the third day. On the third day of marriage, female relatives from the bride's side bring an assortment of Gulgulli, some local made bakery like cakes and Darbaish to her new home. Then they comb the bride's hair, remove her veil and she is then allowed to enter the kitchen and perform domestic chores.

Dowry is non-existent among them. However, now some families have started giving electric appliances and furniture to their daughters.

Both bride's and groom's side hire the local cooks called Wazasto prepare the traditional cuisine of Kashmir called Wazwaan for the guests. However unlike the locals they prefer beef to mutton in their Wazwaan feast.

### **CONCLUSION**

Pashtun society in Kashmir is Partirichal in nature and Pashtunwali govern every institution including the institution of marriage. Islamic Sharia (SunniHanafia) interpretation and jurisprudence is followed by Paktuns in Kashmir. Gender is playing vital role in the process of marriage from Mate selection to Weddah in which women is at receiving end with no say on the affairs which are directly related to her. In the process of selection woman has no say, she has no take even on the ceremonies and rituals followed before and after marriage.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

The paper is based of few works conducted earlier by the authors earlier. Major contents of the paper have been reserved from Farah, 2017 which was submitted for the award of PhD at the

department of Sociology University of Kashmir, Hazratbal Srinagar Jammu and Kashmir India. However, separate field work was carried out by the authors for this papers and new literature on the theme was consulted to materialize the present paper. During the field visit and survey of literature gender dimension was taken into care which was not the case earlier.

## REFERENCES

- Bhat, Fayaz Ahmad (2019). Role and Contribution of Women in Society. In AbidiAzra (ed) Feminism in India. New Delhi. NCUPUL.
- Bhat, Fayaz (2018) Redefining Sociology. Germany. Lambert
- Dewan, P (2008). Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh. New Delhi. Manas Publications
- Dhar, I. B. (1989). Social Economy of the Pakhtoons of Kashmir Valley. (Unpublished thesis): Centre for Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir.
- Kakar, P. (2011). Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority. URL: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>, accessed on 29/09/2014
- Kerr, B. R. (2010). A Progressive Understanding of Pashtun Social Structures amidst Current Conflict in FATA. *Conflict and Peace Studies*, 3 (4), 4.
- Lawrence, W. R (1895). The Valley of Kashmir. United Kingdom. Tral
- Qayoom, F. (2012). Sociological profile of the Pakhtoons of Kashmir: A case Study of Ganderbal. *Journal of Society in Kashmir*, 2, 67-72
- Qayoom, Farah (2017). Socio-Cultural Identity and Diaspora: A Study of the Pakhtoons in Kashmir. PhD (Thesis). Submitted Department of Sociology University of Kashmir, Hazratbal Srinagar
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2018) Pakhtoons at Crossroads: A case Study of Pakhtoons in Kashmir. *Asian Resonance* Vol.7 Issue .4 October, PP,114-120
- Qayoom, Farah and Bhat, Fayaz.A (2018) Sociological Profile of Pakhtoon Community in Kashmir. *Periodic Research*. Vol-7, Issue,2 November PP,44-50
- Rahman, S.S (06, April 2015). The Changing face of Marriage for Pashtun Diaspora Women. Gandhara. Retrieved from [gandhara.rferl.org/a/marriage-pashtun-diaspora-women/2642128.html](http://gandhara.rferl.org/a/marriage-pashtun-diaspora-women/2642128.html)
- Sayeed, N (5, Dec 2011) Pathsns in Kashmir Preserve Identity. The Wall Street Journal. [Blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/12/05/pathans-in-kashmir-preserve-identity-amid-conflict/](http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/12/05/pathans-in-kashmir-preserve-identity-amid-conflict/)