

PARH'NA: UNVEILING THE MATRIMONIAL TRADITIONS - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF SERAIKI SPEAKING BALOCH TRIBAL MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN SOUTH PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explores the matrimonial customs of the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community residing on the western outskirts of Rahim Yar Khan in South Punjab, Pakistan. Through immersive fieldwork and in-depth interviews, the research documents traditional wedding rituals, their symbolic meanings, and the socio-cultural values they embody. Set against the backdrop of South Punjab's ethnic diversity, historical shifts, and ecological constraints, the study examines how marriage functions as a site of identity formation, gender negotiation, and cultural preservation within this community. By tracing the historical evolution of marriage studies and situating the findings within broader anthropological and feminist frameworks, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how these customs adapt to contemporary influences while retaining their indigenous essence. The study serves as both a scholarly contribution and a cultural archive for a region often overlooked in academic discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Historical Evolution of Marriage Studies:

The study of marriage has a rich and diverse history within anthropology, evolving from early Victorian perspectives to contemporary feminist and gender-focused approaches. Early Victorian anthropologists often viewed marriage as a universal and monolithic institution, reflecting their Eurocentric biases. They used evolutionary theories to suggest that societies would eventually progress from "primitive" forms of marriage to more "civilized" ones.

Key anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan played a significant role in shaping early marriage studies. Morgan's work, particularly his book "Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family" (1871), laid the foundation for kinship studies. He categorized societies into various kinship systems, which had implications for marriage practices.

As anthropology evolved, scholars like Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown

introduced functionalist perspectives. They argued that marriage served essential functions in society, such as regulating sexual behavior, reproducing and socializing children, and creating alliances between groups.

The feminist movement of the 20th century challenged traditional anthropological views of marriage. Feminist anthropologists like Eleanor Leacock and Sherry Ortner critiqued earlier research for its androcentric biases and failure to consider the role of women in marriage systems. They highlighted the importance of studying gender relations within marriage and the impact of these relations on women's lives.

Contemporary anthropologists, including Linda Stone, have continued to explore the complexities of marriage. Stone's work, "Kinship and Gender: An Introduction," delves into the intersection of kinship and gender, shedding light on how gender identities shape and are shaped by marriage

customs. She emphasizes the need to consider the agency of individuals within marriage systems.

2. Marriage as a Social Institution:

Marriage is a social institution that varies widely across different societies and cultures. Its practices and meanings are deeply rooted in social norms, values, and traditions. Fortes, Stockard, and Stone's works provide valuable insights into this aspect.

Fortes, in "Kinship and the Social Order," emphasizes the role of kinship relations in maintaining social order. He argues that kinship systems serve as a bridge between the familial and political realms, and marriage plays a central role in structuring these relations.

Stockard, in "Marriage in Culture: Practice and Meaning across Diverse Societies," explores the diversity of marriage practices worldwide. She highlights that marriage can serve various purposes, including economic cooperation, social status, and procreation, depending on the cultural context.

Stone's "Kinship and Gender: An Introduction" discusses how different societies construct and interpret marriage as a social institution. She underscores the need to consider the cultural and gender-specific aspects of marriage customs and their significance within particular communities.

3. Gender and Marriage:

Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping marriage rituals and expectations. Stone's work, among others, provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender and marriage.

Gender identities influence marriage customs and expectations in profound ways. Traditional gender roles often dictate specific roles and responsibilities for men and women within marriage. These roles can vary widely across cultures, ranging from patrilocal or matrilocal residence patterns to the division of labor within the household.

In many societies, marriage rituals reinforce and perpetuate gender norms. For example, dowry practices can reflect the economic value placed on women within marriage, while bride price may symbolize the transfer of economic

responsibility from the bride's family to the groom's.

Feminist and gender theories have highlighted the power dynamics within marriage, challenging traditional patriarchal structures. They emphasize the importance of considering how gender roles and expectations impact individuals' experiences within marriage and how these dynamics can change over time.

4. Marriage in South Asian Context:

South Asia is known for its diverse and complex marriage customs, influenced by factors like arranged marriages, dowry, and caste and class distinctions.

Arranged marriages are prevalent in South Asia, where families play a central role in selecting suitable partners for their children. These marriages are often seen as a means to strengthen social and economic ties between families.

Dowry practices, while illegal in many South Asian countries, continue to persist. They involve the transfer of wealth from the bride's family to the groom's family. Dowry-related issues can lead to gender-based violence and discrimination.

Caste and class intersect with marriage customs, as they can influence partner selection and social status. Endogamy, or marrying within one's caste or class, is still common in many South Asian communities.

5. Economic and Environmental Factors:

Economic and environmental factors significantly impact the timing, duration, and selection of marriage customs and rituals.

In agrarian societies like those in South Punjab, the agricultural calendar often influences the timing of marriages. Marrying during the harvest season, when families have more resources, is common. Additionally, economic stability, influenced by successful harvests, can affect the ability to afford elaborate wedding ceremonies.

Environmental factors, such as climate, can also play a role. Extreme temperatures in summer months may make it impractical to hold large gatherings, leading to a preference for winter weddings.

The availability of resources, including water sources, can affect settlement patterns and,

consequently, the availability of potential marriage partners. Communities may choose to live near water sources to support agricultural activities and access to fresh water. In conclusion, the study of marriage is a multifaceted field within anthropology and sociology. It has evolved from early Victorian perspectives to contemporary feminist and gender-focused approaches. Marriage is viewed as a social institution with diverse practices and meanings across different societies and cultures. Gender plays a central role in shaping marriage rituals and expectations, and the South Asian context brings unique factors like arranged marriages, dowry, and caste/class distinctions into focus. Economic and environmental factors also have a significant impact on marriage practices. These factors must be considered in conjunction with various theoretical frameworks to gain a comprehensive understanding of marriage customs in the Seraiki speaking Baloch community and their broader cultural significance.

Marriage in Seraiki Wasaib

Seraiki Wasaib is an inclusive term; it includes the geographical locations of the southern regions of Punjab province as well as the Seraiki population inhabiting these regions. The term is also inclusive of the material as well as non-material culture of the Seraiki population. The wasaib stretches from the central fertile lands of the Punjab province southwards down till the northern border of Sindh province. From the vast plains covered with yellow sand dunes located in the west of Punjab towards the hilly bordering regions of KPK and Balochistan in the west all form part of the land, known to the indigenous Seraiki people as 'seraikistan', literally meaning, the land of the Seraiki people.

A major section of this region comprises of the Cholistan desert. The natives used the term 'Rohi', when referring to the Cholistan desert. The vast desert spreads across the Pakistan-India International border line and forms part of the state of Rajasthan in India.

As with most of the desert regions located near Earth's equator, the Rohi is primarily devoid of any green plantation, though centuries of environmental climate shifts have

resulted in a few low growing varieties of trees (namely keekar and date palms) and shrubs to survive the extreme harsh barren conditions of the region.

Temperature soar as high as fifty-two degrees Celsius in mid-summer months of May and June, while severe harsh summers last till the end of November, making it a live 'solar oven' for a major part of the calendar year.

Deep inside the desert, the Human settlement too is quite scarce. Particularly due to unavailability of any fresh water source nearby in the desert region, though there are a few communities who choose to live in such otherwise inhumane conditions. A major segment of the Seraiki population resides in the eastern and western regions of south Punjab. These include the districts of Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur.

Rahim Yar Khan: Ethnic and religious composition

The district of Rahim Yar Khan is in the southern most region of Punjab province. It borders the Indian state of Rajasthan towards the east and south-east while Sindh's Gotki district lies towards its south. Punjab's least developed district, Rajanpur is located westwards to Rahim Yar Khan. To the north, the ancient city of Multan is situated.

Rahim Yar Khan district together with Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar districts once formed the now defunct, Princely state of Bahawalpur. Due to its geographical proximity with the nearby provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and Rajasthan (India), the population of Rahim yar Khan is multi-ethnic in composition. A significant portion of the urban population consists of Baloch migrants from Balochistan. Likewise, the Sindhi population who had migrated from the mainland Sindh are also settled in various parts of the city. Meanwhile, the 'Punjabi abadkars' as they were initially called, form the lifeline of the district's economy. These people either migrated from the eastern Punjab regions like Jalandur, Ludhaina, Ferozpur, Amritsar etc. after or during the 1947 Indian partition or re-migrated from central Punjab's plains to the raw but fertile plains of south Punjab. The agricultural lands in south

Punjab are irrigated by a series of canals built under the canal irrigation system stemming from the mighty Indus River. With the passage of time, these migrants came to be known as 'Punjabis'.

Apart from the migrated populations from Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab, the indigenous population of Rahim Yar Khan district prefers to be called, 'Seraikis'. The term 'Seraiki' is relatively new, as it is only recently being recognized as a 'political' identity in the academic circles.

The district of Rahim Yar Khan apart from being multi-ethnic also boasts of multi-religious populations. The Christian missionary initiatives undertaken during the times of British imperialist Raj in India has resulted in a considerable Christian community now residing in the domains of the city of Rahim Yar Khan. Inside the premises of the city, there are more than Three Christian Churches built to serve the local Christian population. There also exist a convent School built by the Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century.

In addition to the converted Christian populations a few devoted families that follow the Sikh faith also reside in the city. These families practice traditional eastern medicine (hikmat) or work as cloth merchants to earn their living. There does not exist any functional 'Gurdwara' for the Sikh Community to offer their prayers in the domains of Rahim Yar Khan city. Media reports confirm the existence of Buddhist communities inside and around the city suburbs exist, but I failed to identify any such population during my research.

According to the 2017 population census, the district has the highest number of Hindu population in the Punjab province. This makes the Hindu population the majority among the religious minorities living in the Rahim Yar Khan district. This population is spread across the district, with the oldest settlement located in the city center while a majority preferring to remain settled in the city's suburbs. A few of these Hindu communities reside in the desert that surround the western lands of the city. The western regions of the district Rahim Yar Khan are primarily populated with the Seraiki

speaking Baloch communities. Initially, these communities migrated from bordering regions of Balochistan and spoke Balochi but with the passage of time they adopted the language of the land they settled in.

This ethnographic study was conducted in such a Seraiki speaking, Baloch community residing in the western suburbs of Rahim Yar Khan district.

Literature Review

In the Human society, the concept of 'marriage' as a social practice is as old as the history of human civilization itself. Much like human's own expectations regarding their marriages in societies around the world the anthropological study of the concept of 'marriage' has experienced a series of transformations since the last century.

Historically speaking, the lens through which anthropologists and social scientists have studied the concept of 'marriage' has reflected their own times and their own lives. For instance, the English Victorians studied marriage data of people who were on the 'frontiers of colonial expansion', and 'judge' it against a universal model of human progress. For them, marriage was of central importance if one intends to understand human society. This was partly since they 'idealized' themselves in their own lives when it comes to marriages.

For the first generation of field-based anthropologists, the prime objective was to collect empirical data regarding marriage. The believed the institution of marriage as rigid traditional structures which were guided by '*conformity to normative rules and obligations.*'

In his book, titled, '*Kinship and the social order*', (Fortes 1969) covers a variety of marriage related topics. He places forward two central arguments; first, kinship relations and institutions must be understood as balanced between familial and politico-jural domains, and second, that kinship is fundamental and autonomous and thus not a by-product of the material factors. He traces the history and evolution of the kinship theory from Lewis Henry Morgan through the mid-20th.

Only when the Western world got influenced by the idea of 'feminism', anthropologists developed an interest in exploring how marital

relationships get affected by gender identities. (Stone 2014) examines the institution of marriage and kinship through the lens of gender identities. This approach helped in understanding the concept of marriage with a new perspective. Researchers have been divided on the opinion as to what lies at the core of marriage as an institution. While most associate it with childbearing and parenthood, others believe it is the economic sharing and sexual access leading to reproductive success. Another point of debate has been the question of identifying marriage in terms of 'emotional relation and subjectivity or a social structure or in case of south Asian communities, economic transactions/strategic choice. (Stone, 2014) uses case studies to explain how inheritance, descent, and post marital residence affect relationships between the married partners. The work is published in a book explaining the intersections with gender systems and strategies of marriage alliances. (pp.175-205)

(Stockard 2002) provides brief accounts of the four case studies showing the cross-cultural diversity in marriages. He compares an egalitarian foraging society, premodern, patriarchal China, a matrilineal Native American group, and polyandrous ethnic Tibetans. The author highlights the differences between these societies to reflect how the status of spouses can be affected by productive systems and post-marriage residence.

Problem Statement

The research endeavors to meticulously capture and preserve the time-honored customs and rituals that constitute the fabric of matrimonial celebrations within the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community dwelling in the outskirts of Rahim Yar Khan, South Punjab. Its overarching goal is to delve deep into these traditions, unraveling their intricate layers to unravel the socio-cultural tapestry that defines the Seraiki Baloch community's identity. Moreover, the research also embarks on an illuminating journey through time, investigating the historical evolution and transformation of these customs, shedding light on how they have been influenced, adapted, and preserved across generations. By

exploring this rich cultural heritage, the research aims to paint a vivid portrait of the Seraiki Baloch community's collective identity, preserving and promoting these age-old traditions for posterity while recognizing their dynamic nature.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this study is rooted in the rich tradition of ethnographic research, which relies on immersive fieldwork to capture the essence of cultural practices and societal norms. In the case of this research, the primary focus was to comprehensively document the traditional marriage customs of the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community residing in the suburban areas of Rahim Yar Khan city. The following sections detail the methodology, including data collection, participants, and data analysis.

Data Collection:

The primary data collection method adopted for this study was in-depth, open-ended interviews. Over a span of three months, I engaged with various members of the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community to collect oral narratives and firsthand accounts of their marriage customs. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, allowing for a personal and interactive exploration of the subject matter.

The choice of open-ended interviews was deliberate, as it allowed respondents the freedom to narrate their experiences and perspectives in their own words. Such qualitative interviews are invaluable for delving deep into the cultural nuances, beliefs, and traditions that shape marriage rituals within the community.

Participant Selection:

The participants in this study were carefully selected to ensure a representative sample of the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community. The selection criteria included diversity in age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity aimed to capture a holistic view of the community's marriage customs and traditions, considering potential variations across generations and social strata.

Additionally, participants were chosen based on their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge about traditional marriage practices. Their insights were instrumental in constructing a comprehensive picture of the subject.

Question Design:

The interview questions were meticulously crafted to probe various aspects of traditional marriage customs. These questions were informed by existing literature on ethnographic research and cultural studies. The inquiries aimed to elicit detailed information about the customs, rituals, and beliefs associated with Baloch marriages.

Key themes explored in the interview questions included the planting of tree saplings, the selection of suitable matches, the role of elders in matchmaking, gender dynamics within marriage rituals, the economic and environmental factors influencing customs, and the historical evolution of these practices. By focusing on these themes, the research aimed to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of the subject.

Data Analysis:

The collected data underwent a rigorous analysis process. Qualitative data analysis techniques were employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights from the narratives shared by the respondents. This involved a systematic review of interview transcripts to extract meaningful information. Thematic coding was used to categorize the data into themes and subthemes, allowing for a structured organization of findings. This process facilitated the identification of cultural symbols, practices, and the evolution of customs over time.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations played a central role in this research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study and their rights as contributors. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to protect the identities and privacy of the respondents.

Triangulation:

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing information obtained from different participants and corroborating it with existing literature on the subject. This approach helped ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research outcomes.

In summary, the methodology employed for this study revolved around immersive, open-ended interviews with diverse participants from the Seraiki-speaking Baloch community. Through systematic data collection and analysis, the research aimed to uncover the intricate tapestry of marriage customs within the community, shedding light on their cultural identity and the evolving nature of these practices over time.

Findings

Much like every human society of the world, marriage celebration is of central importance in Baloch community. It marks the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the groom and the bride. The rituals practiced as part of the marriage ceremony vary considerably regarding region and economic status of the families involved. In the Baloch traditions, marriage is considered a relation that is 'larger than life' in its essence.

An ancient practice followed by the Baloch community is the plantation of a tree sapling (generally, peepal) on the birth of a female child. As the child grows so does the sapling. Both are taken care of by the family of the girl. By the time the girl reaches puberty, her early teen years, it is her time to get married. By now, the sapling that was planted at her birth had also become a fully grown tree. This tree is then cut down and its wood is used to make furniture that would become part of the bride-to-be's dowry.

Searching a suitable match

Another reason for considering the marriage 'larger than life' is the fact that in majority of the cases, the match is made by the elders of the families of the bride and groom even before their birth. If this is not the case, the Balochs always prefer to find a suitable match for their children within their close family, i.e., maternal, or paternal cousins. In case no

suitable match exists, they consider searching for a possible match in their extended families or tribes. There is a high probability that they will find a match within their tribe.

Traditionally, the Balochs did not marry outside their tribe/caste, but new age has brought changes to the once rigid customs. Modern Seraiki speaking Balochs do marry outside their castes. Though a preference for 'Baloch' tribal history remains. Due to this careful selection of spouses, the bond of marriage is held very sacred and to celebrate the beginning of this bond of marriage, a series of traditional customs are performed by the families of the bride and groom since generations. These celebratory customs span well over ten days and nights and are celebrated in full zeal and zest by the participants.

To explain my findings, I have divided the responses of my respondents in three sections, namely i) The *Buttee* celebrations, ii) The *Parh'na* and iii) The *Valima*. The customs performed on these events will be discussed in the chronological sequence as they are celebrated by the respective Baloch community.

Mengni and Butte

After a suitable match is selected, the groom's family visits the bride's family for presenting a gift of new clothes often accompanying with shoes and jewelry to the bride-to-be. This custom is followed by visits from their respective friends and family to congratulate the person on their marriage. The following morning, the tradition of *butte* is celebrated at the bride's house. It involves a series of practices focused on the beautification of the bride. The application of *ubtan* is considered of upmost importance while celebrating *butte*. *Ubtan*¹, is applied on the legs and arms of bride by her close friends and traditional 'tappas'² are sung in celebration of this occasion.

Kanda Dayna

This is the custom that follows next in *butte*. *Kanda dayna* involves sending a formal

invitation, called 'bulawa', to join the the groom's family and friends on their third visit to the bride's family for the formal finalization of the marriage proposal. This task of sending invitation is traditionally the duty of women from the community's 'Mirasee'³ house'. This lady visits the groom's relatives and friends houses and orally invite them (on behalf of the groom's parents) in joining for the said event. The lady informs of the time at which the guests should reach the groom's house the following day. It is important to note that traditionally the lady who gives 'kanda' is the wife of the community's barber (hairstylist) called 'nai' in native language.

The next day by the afternoon, the groom's extended family and friends gather at groom's place. They then, in the form of a procession move towards the bride's residence. The groom's family bring homemade sweets⁴ along as a sign of love. Once they all reach the bride's house they present her with gifts which they have brought along for the bride. These gifts generally include a wedding dress, along with dry fruits and mehndi⁵. This ceremony concludes with an official announcement made by the elders of both bride and groom, now confirming the new bond between the two families.

Interesting to note here is the fact that it is almost impossible for either of the two families to step back from this point. This is primarily due to the social pressures involved.

Mangh

Recently, this tradition is also referred to as 'mangh', which can be loosely translated as 'mangni' in Urdu language and engagement in English. After the official announcement of the newly formed relationship, the tradition of *butte* concludes with a celebratory dance, this is performed by the male members (constituting of cousins, as well as friends) of the groom's family, to share the happiness of their beloved brother. This collective dance is called 'jhoomar khailna' and involves people

³ Person who is held lesser in respect and status due to their adopted profession

⁴ Traditional sweets made of ghee, sugar and wheat

⁵ Heena, a grounded herb used to make floral tattoos on bride's hands

¹ a herbal mixture used to cleanse the skin

² folk songs

moving in a circular motion, swinging their arms and hands to the rhythm of the music that is being played in the background. *Jhumar* is a dance form that is prevalent in this part of the world since ancient times. It is known as 'attan' in the neighboring Sindh, KPK and Balochistan provinces. Though each region has its own slight variations.

Jhumar is also performed by the bride's male members in order to celebrate the auspicious event. 'Nagaras'⁶ are also played as a public announcement of the engagement of bride and groom and the celebrating that is taking place on the formation of this new relationship. Dancing to the music continues all night long. Though the major custom observed under the *butte* is over, celebrations continue for the next six to seven days, at both, the bride as well as the groom's place.

The duration of *butte* celebration is generally limited to 3-4 days recently, as the probability of occurrence of a death of a loved ones, in either family would mean the postponement of the marriage and repetition of the whole cycle of the events next year, as a result the marriage gets delayed for one whole year.

Another importance aspect worthy to mention here is the duration of the marriage ceremonies. Most of the marriages that take place in the Seraiki speaking Baloch communities are arranged in early winter, generally from mid Nov onwards till mid Feb or the start of spring season. A significant reason for observing this schedule is the fact that the geographical region where this community resides, experiences severe hot temperatures in summer months, making it impossible to arrange or participate in such a public gathering.

In addition to this, there is another economic factor involved. This region is predominantly agricultural, producing cash crops like wheat cotton and sugarcane. Of these three crops, cotton and sugarcane are most profitable for the farmer to cultivate and both these are ready to be harvested in early winters and mid winters respectively. By the time, it is mid-November, the farmer is relatively in a stable financial position. This means that he can

afford to bare the expenses incurring on the marriage of his son or daughter.

Following the old traditions, almost all the marriage customs of Seraiki speaking Baloch communities are performed after sunset on the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th days of the lunar calendar. The reason for observing such dates is the relatively bright twilight in these nights of the month which is necessary as it provides light arrangements in the ceremonies. Until recently, electricity was not available in a vast majority of these regions, and it is still unavailable in regions bordering Balochistan province.

The next custom marks the beginning of the formal three days events of marriage.

Male

Male is the first of the three consecutive events that are celebrated in a Baloch marriage. The word 'male' literally means to meet, it refers to the meeting of all the relatives of the groom and the bride in their houses, respectively. It is roughly equivalent to the traditional function of 'mehndi' as celebrated in south Asian weddings. The custom starts with the barber's wife giving another kanda (invitation) to the relatives and friends of groom on behest of the groom's parents for the three days events that are to be followed. In a similar manner like before, an invitation is sent via the mirasee lady to inform all the relevant people of the dates of the events usually a day earlier than the start of the first event.

The family of the groom arranges for a live music performance for the guests. Generally, famous Seraiki singers are invited to perform on this event for the entertainment of the audience. This is followed by serving of high tea, arranged by the parents of the groom for their relatives and friends. At the bride's place, a similar arrangement is setup. *Mehndi* (heena) is applied to bride's hand by her friends as part of the celebrations. Songs are sung and *Jhoomar* is performed by all the attendees.

Parh'na

This is the most important of all the marriage traditions of a Baloch wedding. It is performed on the next day after 'male'. As already informed by the mirasee lady of the time and venue, that is traditionally the

⁶ Leather coated drums

residence of the groom, the friends and relatives of the groom gather at the invited place. They then leave for the bride's place, this time with the groom accompanying them. Once the 'ba'raat⁷ reaches the bride's house's entrance, a grand *jhumar* is performed and loud music is played. This sends a signal to the bride's family that the groom's family has arrived. The bride's family welcomes the groom's family and soon afterwards, *Nikkah*, the Islamic requirement is performed by the local religious scholar. As soon as the *nikkah* is concluded, sweets are distributed amongst all the family members. This is followed by the serving of hi-tea arranged by the bride's family for the guests.

Once legally becoming husband and wife, the bride and groom perform a series of traditional rituals that form the heart of the Baloch wedding. The first amongst these is the tying of knot of the groom's *kurta*'s edge with the bride's *dupatta*. This is a symbolic representation that from this day onwards, the two bodies are joined as one. This is followed by another ancient customs that involved the family's eldest lady. Once the bride and groom are seated, the lady gets hold of both the spouses and slightly nudge their hands together this for seven times, while singing a traditional folklore, the rest of the audience sing and clap along. This custom is considered another act to enhance love and cooperation in the future lives of the couple.

After these customs are performed. There is a custom of displaying the 'Jahaiz'⁸ material gifts which the bride's parents' gift to the bride followed by the display of the gifts by the groom to his wife. The final custom performed, before the *rukhsati* is the payment of 'neondra'. Neondra is the form of a monetary gift for the newlyweds from the members of the family and friends. A person is nominated by the family of the groom to collect the neondra, The guests then deposit the monetary gift to that person who records the amount gifted along with the name of the guest. The record is kept safe and it is the considered the duty of the groom's family to payback the initial amount as well as a portion

over it as neondra to every guest who had paid it initially. This custom is followed by the *rukhsati*.

Rukhsati

This is the final marriage custom performed as part of *Parh'na*. After wedding vows are exchanged, the Holy Quran is held over the new bride's head, as she then leaves with her husband for his house, bidding farewell to her family and friends, thanking them for all the love and care they bestowed upon her for all those years. The groom's friends and family also leave for their houses. Arrangements for dinner are made but no food is served to guests. Instead, it is sent to all the relatives and friends of the groom in the utensils they had earlier brought along them. Traditionally, it is the duty of the groom's family to make sure each and every utensil which they have received is filled and delivered at the right address. This concludes the celebration of *Parh'na*.

Valima

The final of the three-day events concluding the marriage traditions of a Baloch wedding is the *valima*. It is the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and is generally celebrated on the day after *Parh'na*. It involves the arrangement of lunch for the friends and family of the groom and bride by the groom's family. This marks the completion of the traditional customs performed at a Seraiki speaking Baloch community's marriage ceremony.

Conclusion

Marriage traditions forms a significant part of a community's socio-cultural identity. Much like other characteristics, it also continues to evolve with changing times. The Seraiki speaking Baloch communities, like other communities in their surroundings have adopted this trend. Traditionally the marriage ceremonies lasted for around seven to ten days but with the passage of time, many once integral customs performed on their marriage ceremonies are not followed anymore by the younger generation.

These traditions form rich and essential part of the cultural heritage of the Seraiki speaking Baloch community. A large number of these

⁷ A wedding procession

⁸ dowry

customs are solely native to this community as it is shaped by their extreme environment. From their delicious culinary habits to their colorful symbolic clothing and exotic jewelry, the traditional customs practiced by the Seraiki speaking Baloch communities in their marriages are no less than a living miracle. These practices provide an essence of past lifestyles in a rapidly changing world, and thus and can be considered as a true example of cultural diversity in Pakistan.

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