

## THE RIGHT TO MARRY IN ISLAM: SCRUTINIZING CUSTOMS OF MARRIAGES IN THE *PASHTUN* BELT OF PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**  
*Pakhtunwali; Pakhtun; Islam; Marriage; Customs;*

Marriage is one of the Islamic personal practices which the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged within the Muslim *Ummah* (community). Especially for those who could afford it. An eminent relationship has been observed between Islam and the custom of the *Pakhtun* people. In *Pakhtun* apart from Islamic injunctions, the *Pakhtunwali* (*pakhtun* social organization) serves as a pillar of society and tends to bring social harmony and integrity through the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political aspects of *Pakhtuns* living in their demarcated territory. The current study focuses on different customs of *Pakhtun* which have been misconceived with regard to Islamic injunctions and which are the prevalent laws of the *Pakhtun* and of course the regulator of *Pakhtunwali*. The research particularly emphasizes customs of marriage which are barriers to marriages in contemporary *Pakhtun* Muslim society. The paper juxtaposes the *Pakhtun* customary practices relating to marriage with Islamic injunctions. In order to do so, different types of respondents in the area of Peshawar

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Pakistan were interviewed. In the end, the paper recommends that Prophetic traditions should be introduced in marriages in the *Pakhtun* area of Pakistan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marriage and the family institution occupy a very pivotal position in the Islamic legal system (Muhammad Tahir Mansoori, 2009). This can be judged from the fact that Muslim jurists consider the protection of the family institution among the five fundamental objectives of *Shari'ah*. The *Qur'an* describes marriage as *mithaqan ghaliza* (a sanctified contract). The phrase *mithaqan ghaliza* implies that marriage is a sacred and sanctified contract, which is higher in status than ordinary civil contracts. Marriage in Islam is essentially a righteous act and an act of devotion ('*ibadah*') (Muhammad Tahir Mansoori, 2009). Islam is the religion which has simplified everything including the contract and practice of marriage for all the believers. In this regard, the Almighty Allah has revealed through his noble Prophet (pbuh), the Glorious *Qur'an*, which contains all the dos and dont's. The revelations have been explained by the Prophet (pbuh). To this end, in relation to marriage, the Prophet (pbuh) was reported to have said:

“O young men, whoever among you can afford it, let him get married, for it is more effective in lowering the gaze and guarding one's chastity. And whoever cannot afford it should fast, for it will be a shield for him.” (Bukhari, 5066: Muslim, 1400).

This shows that the marriage institution can only be practiced by those who have the ability and means to do so. This comprises the ability to maintain a spouse, to provide her food, clothing and shelter. History had demonstrated *Pakhtuns* as true Islamic believers who have recognition for the acceptance of Islam as a whole (Arab Naz, 2011). The social structure and ideological formation of *Pakhtuns* is almost completely dominated by Islam throughout the course of social and religious life as *Pakhtuns* strictly abide by Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) along with their own code of life known as *Pakhtunwali* (Arab Naz, 2012:63). *Pakhtunwali* and Islam are ideally treated as the same; however, the former is embedded in a long historical context and traditions that have been in practice among Afghan tribes living in Afghanistan, *Khyber Pakhtunkhawa* (former NWFP) and Baluchistan (Khan, 2011). But there are customs of marriages in *Pakhtun* society, which should be analyzed according to Islam, *inter alia* *Jahaiz*, *Naindara*, *Akhtar shawqadar*, *Janj*, *Pakha Azada*, and *Kwezhdan*. This

paper examines the practice of these customs of the *Pakhtun* belt of Pakistan and elaborates the traditions administered at the time of the Prophet (pbuh). These customs of *Pakhtuns* have been scrutinized to assess whether they are privileges or barriers for the new generation in contemporary Muslim society.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research work is based on the following objectives

1. To study Islamic customs of marriages as practiced during in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions.
2. To explain the customs of *Pakhtun* society in conducting marriages.
3. To compare the practice of marriage in Islam and the customs in *Pakhtun* society in order to decide which customs are acceptable or non-acceptable.
4. To look into whether the customs of the *Pakhtuns* regarding marriage are privileges for the younger generation.

### RESEARCH METHODS AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The collected data has been analyzed qualitatively and discussion of both religion and *Pakhtunwali* in respect to women's rights' delegation has been made. The research study has been approached through an integrative perspective on religion. A doctrinal method of research was used while preparing this paper. Interviews of different inhabitants of *pakhtun* were conducted by the author and were analyzed according to the functional aspects of the religion with respect to the *Pakhtun* community. Most of the *Pakhtun* customs have essentially been taken from the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith* (Sayings of the Prophet) in respect of women's rights. Society requires social solidarity to a certain degree, value consensus, harmony and integration between its component parts. The role of religion is thus dominant in most relationships between human beings and this applies in the case of the selected community under study e.g. *Pakhtun* society. But there are some customs which is regard to marriage stop the poor from marrying such as in *Pakhtun* society. Islamic customs concerning marriage are compared with *Pakhtun* customs in order to encourage the elimination of bad practices in conducting marriages in the *Pakhtun* belt and open the door for the poor youngsters to get married in simple way.

## CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

In Islam, marriage is a legal and mutual contract between a man and a woman, with a view to be husband and wife and build upon the spirit of love, affection, cooperation, harmony and tolerance, resulting in each party feeling at ease with the one, and consequently finding tranquillity, contentment and comfort in the company of the same. The *Qur'an* has described this relationship between man and woman, which brings love, harmony, trust and compassion, in the most moving and eloquent terms,

“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your [hearts]” (*Qur'an* 30:21).

“And marry those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace; and Allah is Ample giving, Knowing.” (*Qur'an* 24:32)

Marriage is the way and custom of the Prophet (pbuh). There is a *Hadith* of the Prophet (pbuh) that says:

“When a man enters into matrimonial contract, he has indeed made his religion half perfect. Then let him fear for the remaining half” (*Baihaqi*)

The social order of every society evolves around several instincts, and out of those two not only are powerful but rather have a lot of influence on the society, they are the natural appetite or hunger and the sexual desire. The former signals the need for the preservation of the individual whereas the later deals with the preservation of descent, especially the lineage of mankind. For this reason, almost every society in this world has made certain rules in order to secure itself. But the *Shari'ah* has developed a unique system for the preservation of its subjects, its values, the society and mankind at large (Shahzad Iqbal Sham, 2000: 10). There are certain objectives behind the introduction of *nikah* for the attainment of which Allah, the Almighty has commanded man to lead his life under a system. A study of the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith* of the Prophet (pbuh), shows that the significant objectives of marriage are *inter alia* protection of human morals, establishment of Islamic society and love and affection among spouses (Shahzad Iqbal Sham, 2000: 10).

This is the strongest of bonds, in which Allah unites two Muslim partners who come together on the basis of love, understanding, co-operation and mutual advice, and establish a Muslim family in which children will live and grow up, and they will develop the good character and behaviour taught by Islam. The Muslim family is the strongest component of a Muslim society when its members are productive and constructive, helping and encouraging one another to be good and

righteous, and competing with one another in good works. The righteous woman is the pillar, cornerstone and foundation of the Muslim family. She is seen as the greatest joy in a man's life, as the Prophet (pbuh) said:

"This world is just temporary conveniences, and the best comfort in this world is a righteous woman" (*Sahih Muslim*, 10: 56).

Allah has given men freedom and urges us to

"Marry the women of your choice" (*Qur'an*, 4: 3).

Likewise women are given the right to select a man of their choice:

"A girl came to the Prophet (pbuh) and informed him that her father had married her to her cousin against her wishes, whereupon the Prophet (pbuh) allowed her to exercise her choice. She then said, 'I am reconciled to what my father did but I wanted to make it known to women that fathers have no say in this matter'" (Ibn Majah).

Islam has given simple guideline and a simple way to get married; there is no barrier to stop Muslim men and women from marriage. It is clearly stated in the *Qur'an*:

"And marry those among you who are single (i.e. a man who has no wife and the woman who has no husband) and (also marry) the *Salihun* (Pious, fit and capable ones) of your (male) slaves and maid-servants (female slaves). If they be poor, Allah will enrich them out of His Bounty. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creature's needs, All-knowing (about the state of the people)" (*Qur'an* 24:32).

Abu Bakar (r.a) elaborates from the above verse that people should obey Allah in His command of *Nikah*, since because of the marriage He will provide you more wealth as He has already promised (Muhammad Umar Al Damyati, 2004:203). Ismail Ibn Kathir in his commentary '*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*' elaborates the above verse of the *Qur'an* saying that "And marry those among you who are single (i.e. A man who has no wife and the woman who has no husband)" involves a command from Allah to marry. A group of scholars adopted the opinion that it is an obligatory matter. It is recorded that Ibn Mas'ud said "seek the richness through marriage". It is also recorded from the *hadith* of Prophet (pbuh) that "there are three whom it is a right upon Allah to help: the one who gets married seeking chastity; a slave who tries to emancipate himself by paying to his master and the one who fights for the Sake of Allah (Ismail Ibn Kathir, 2007: 1454). Prophet (pbuh) urges the youth to get married,

"O young people! Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty, and whoever is not able to marry, should fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual power" (Bukhari, 62: 4).

There is no criteria for giving out dower (*mahar*), but if you had given the latter a *Qintar* (of gold i.e. a great amount) for dower (*mahar*) take not the least bit of it back (*Qur'an*, 4: 20). The Prophet (pbuh) gives options to provide something according to the financial capacity of a man:

"A woman came to the Prophet (pbuh) and presented herself to him (for marriage). He declined her offer of marriage.' Then a man said, 'O Allah's Apostle! Marry her to me. The Prophet asked him, 'What have you got?' He said, 'I have got nothing.' The Prophet said, 'Give her something, even an iron ring.' He said, 'I have got nothing.' The Prophet asked (him), how much of the Quran do you know (by heart)? He said, 'So much and so much.' The Prophet said, 'I have married her to you for what you know of the *Qur'an*.'" (Bukhari).

Marriage is a major step in one's life. It is a matter of great responsibility that should by no means be taken lightly. However, it should not be complicated to the point that if one does not have enough cash to hold an elaborate ceremony with hundreds of guests, one cannot get married. Quite simply, a marriage in Islam is solemnized by a marriage contract and a *walimah* (marriage feast) that follows once the marriage has been consummated. The *nikah* constitutes a proposal from one party (*ijab*) and acceptance from another (*qubol*) in the presence of witnesses. The *walimah* is simply a dinner to celebrate the marriage, since marriage is, after all, a joyous occasion. The *nikah* can be held at the local *masjid* or at home, while the *walimah* can be anywhere: one's apartment, backyard, or basement, the *masjid*, a park, a restaurant, a community center, or anywhere else. As well, on the occasions of *nikah* and *walimah*, long speeches and an elaborate program are not required. It is observed that in rituals and customs we tend to waste enormous amounts of money and time on things that simply are not needed. Anas (r.a) describes one of the *walimah* hosted by the Prophet (pbuh).

"The Prophet stayed for three days at a place between Khaibar and Medina, and there he consummated his marriage with Safiyya bint Huyay (r.a). I invited the Muslims to a banquet which included neither meat nor bread. The Prophet (pbuh) ordered for the leather dining sheets to be spread, and then dates, dried yogurt and butter were provided over it, and that was the *Walima* (banquet) of the Prophet (pbuh)" (Bukhari, 62: 23).

In another report, Anas (r.a) says that the Prophet (pbuh) "Gave a wedding banquet with Hais (a sort of sweet dish made from butter, cheese and dates)." (Bukhari) There is nothing wrong with having an elaborate ceremony in a fancy banquet hall and full-course meal prepared by a caterer, but the fact of the matter is that neither of these are the essential elements or requirements for a valid marriage. If one wishes to hold the

ceremony in a banquet hall with a full-course meal, that's perfectly fine, but it should not be taken as a requirement. Islam forbade conditions whereby a society could fall into difficulty and in this spirit one may say that loan large loans sums of money are often wasted for weddings The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said:

“The marriage which is most greatly blessed is the one which is the lightest in burden [expense]. However, if people are well catered for, without extravagance and show, there is no problem with that either” (Bayhaqi).

A show of extravagance was definitely not how our beloved Prophet (pbuh) celebrated. In fact, wasting Allah's bounties is something Allah has warned us against: “But waste not by excess: for Allah loves not the wasters” (*Qur'an*, 6:141). It can be difficult to swim against the tide of fancy and extravagant marriages, but surely it's worth swimming against the tides that go against Allah's commands and the example set by the Prophet (pbuh). It is stated in the *Qur'an*, “Follow me and My Messenger if you love me, Allah will love you too”. Why are we so hesitant and reluctant to follow what the greatest personality of this universe did but rather blindly follow pathetic traditions in our wedding ceremonies. The acts of *Jahliya* (ignorance), shamelessness and the acts which lead to *fitnah* (discard) can never make a marriage successful and blessed. We are not simply to follow our customs or desires or society but to obey and follow the golden path shown by Allah and His prophet (pbuh) (Syed Athar Husain, 2011).

### ABRIDGMENT OF PAKHTUN CUSTOM

*Pakhtunwali* is considered as “the way of life of the *Pakhtuns*,” and it is said to be the identity and communal way of people belonging to the *Pakhtun* belt including the unwritten but defined centuries old static rules and customs (Ahmad, 1976). *Pakhtunwali* includes the central concept of *nang* (ego), which signifies honour and shame, as well as other various sub-components including *namus* (honour) and *tura* (sword) (Glatzer, 1998). In this research discussion on *Pakhtun* customs and the way they conduct their marriages is studied. There are different stages and a long procedure from marriage proposal to the *rukhsati* (final marriage) in *Pakhtun* culture. The customs of *Pashtuns* are totally different from other societies. The marriage customs of *Pakhtuns* plays a immense role in strengthening ties between families, but at same time creates financial obligations for the families.

Different customs are practiced in the *Pakhtun* area of Pakistan, which have great impacts on society and family life. The purpose of customs is to give happiness and provide a solid relation between the

families. At the same time customs are obstacles to youngsters who wish to marry their beloved. This research discusses six aspects of customs of the *Pakhtuns* who live in Pakistan, namely *Kwezhdan* (betrothal), *Jahaiz* (dower), *Naindara* (to share money), *Akhtar shawqadar* (sharing of gifts in specific months), *Janj* (occasion to transfer wife) and *Pakha Azada* (free visitation). First *Kwezhdan* (betrothal) is the common practice of parents who wish to get their sons married to pretty and virtuous girls of respectable families. But in the tribal areas what is more significant is to attach more importance to the strength of the arms and the family influence of girls' parents than her beauty. It is analyzed that at present, a future bridegroom is consulted while selecting a girl and her consent are not considered even in educated families (Azim Afridi, 2010). Secondly *Jahaiz* (dower) is a transfer of parental property at the marriage of a daughter (Jack Goody, 1976:6). This is where the girl is gifted by her parents' items of furniture and other household goods for her usage in her new home. Some would even give cows and sheeps. The girl's parents also provide their daughter with a trousseau made up of clothes, shoes and handbags. This is partly to make the transition of moving home easier. The girl is expected to adorn herself in fancy clothes at least up to a year after the wedding (Anum Tahir, 2008). Thirdly *Nandara* (to share money). This is a situation where friends and relatives of the bridegroom contribute money to lighten his financial burden.

It is some sort of financial assistance repayable to the donors on a similar occasion. A proper record of the subscription is maintained and the names of the subscribers are entered into a notebook for future reference (Azim Afridi, 2010). Fourthly, *Akhtar Shawqader* (occasion to transfer gifts) is a custom practiced after the engagement and before the final marriage ceremony of bride (*Rukhsati*), Special kinds of gifts are sent to the girl which include clothes, shoes and sweets in special months of the year. (Azim Afridi, 2010). Fifthly *Janj* (transfer of the wife); on the day of marriage the bridal procession is named *janj*. The inhabitants of society will wear their best clothes, and the ceremony starts at noon with musicians leading the procession (Azim Afridi, 2010). Sixthly *Pakha Azada* (visitation), which is visits between the families of the engaged. This custom starts a few days after betrothal. The prospective bridegroom's parents pay a visit to the girl's house and present her with a gold ring or suit of silk clothes (Azim Afridi, 2010).

### **EVALUATION OF MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN ISLAM AND PAKHTUN SOCIETY**

Islam is a complete code of life which describes each and every aspect of life. The social system in Islam is geared towards the preservation of the human race and the protection of the society. Islam recognizes the importance of the family, and it has established rules with the aim of



protecting it. The family is built through the legal contract of marriage between a man and a woman (Abu Tariq, 1997: 34). Islam recommends an easy way to get married and to make a family. There were never Islamic customs which might detract from the happiness of the newlyweds.

Basic derivatives of Islamic custom are shown in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh). As discussed earlier various *ahadith* show that there is no custom barrier in Islam. The Prophet (pbuh) urges the youth to get married and advises them that if they can afford marriage then it should not be delayed, but if someone does not have sufficient resources, he should fast (Bukhari, 62: 4). On one occasion a person came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said that he did not have any wealth. The Prophet (pbuh) advised him to get married. When he got married his financial position remained the same and he came again to the Prophet and the Prophet advised him to marry another woman and he married a second time on the advice of the Prophet (pbuh). This shows that the financial position of a man cannot stop him from getting married. Even as we discussed earlier, there is no criteria for *mahar* (dower). In the *Qur'an* it is elaborated: "But if you had given the latter a *Qintar* (of gold i.e. a great amount) for *mahar* take not the least bit of it back (*Qur'an*, 4: 20).

Prophet (pbuh) gave the option of giving something for the privilege of getting married according to the man's financial position. As mentioned earlier, a woman came to the Prophet (pbuh), and presented herself to him (for marriage). Another companion of the Prophet offered her marriage, while he did not have anything to give as *mahar* (dower) and the Prophet (pbuh) gave her hand in marriage to him. In *Pakhtun* society the customs are different and the *mahar* and other needs are too much. This has minimized percentage of marriages. The custom of *jahaiz* (dower) in *Pakhtun* is totally different from Islamic customs. It is stated in the *Qur'an* that Allah does not put a human under a burden they cannot afford. *Jahaiz* is the good tradition for the honour of *Pakhtuns* girls but it should not be a burden on the families. However, when a large amount of money is spent extravagantly it is sad because there are so many better uses for the hard-earned money. After all, the amount of money spent on the ceremony has no positive effect on the life of the couple.

Abu Hanifa (an eminent Islamic jurist) even not allows dissolution of marriage contract on the ground of not providing maintenance. He argues that if the husband is poor, he cannot be blamed for that. They quote the verse of *Qur'an* in which Allah says:

"Let him who has ample means spend in accordance with amplitude; and let him whose means of subsistence are scanty spend in accordance with what God has given him: Allah does not

burden any human being with more than He has given him{and it may be well that} Allah grant after hardship}” (*Al- Qur’an* 65:07).

This verse illustrates that the Qazi (Judge) even not dissolve a marriage contract if the husband is unable to pay maintenance. In *Majma’ al-Anhar* it is stated that the judge should not order separation between wife and husband if the husband is poor. (Damad Afandi, 1319 h: 498). This proves that poverty is not a barrier in conducting marriages.

The life of our Prophet (pbuh) is a guideline for all Muslims. The Prophet (pbuh) conducted the marriage of His beloved daughter Fatima (r.a) without following any custom; even her husband [Ali (r.a)] was not present at the time of marriage (Muhammad Ashraf Ali, 1913: 355). Islam has also given the concept of Prompt and defer dower and the husband can pay after the marriage contract. This shows that in Islam there are no customs which restrict a poor man from getting married. Marriage is an occasion for celebration, but wastage of enormous amounts on a celebration should be discouraged.

The customs of the *Pakhtuns* are not founded on Islamic law. In Islam there is no concept *inter alia khwagdan, akhtar shawqadar, Khpa* Azada and Nandara, which put families tied by marriage in a difficult situation due to the financial burden. The custom of *kawagdan* is a created custom of *Pakhtun* society while marriage in Islam has been seen as a way of uniting influential families and clan and no third loophole to conduct any other function while conducting marriage. It is worth mentioning that a lot of money is spent in marriages starting with *kwagdan* (engagement) and ending months after the *Rukhsati* (final bride), which has caused suffering to the life style of the Married couple as in the case Gul Rashad (Interviewed by author: Pakistan, 19th August, 2015). Many of our family gathered money first and after that the parents started searching for a girl for their son, *Pakhtuns* are following very rich marriage customs and prefer to observe *pukhtuns* ordinary traditions compared to Islamic ones (Usman Habib, interviewed by Author: Pakistan, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2015). These customs are definitely not according to the sunnah of Prophet (pbuh). In fact, wasting Allah’s bounties is something Allah has warned us against: “But waste not by excess: for Allah loves not the wasters.” (*Qur’an*, 6:141)

In a nutshell, from the evolution of Prophetic and *Pakhtuns* customs, subsequent illustration has been conducted. *Pakhtun* is an old tribe which have accepted Islam whole heartedly. They are following *Pakhtunwali* (*Pakhtun* social organization), but sometime it contradict the prophetic customs, which have created confusion and hardship for society. Islam provides right of marriage to every male and female in a dignified and simple way. In *Pakhtunwali* this practice is being made complicated. This matter is important that *Pakhtuns* are all Muslims, if some customs

contradict prophetic traditions then why it is not replaced with Islamic ones.

## CONCLUSION

Islam encourages Muslims to marry and recommends marriage as part of their Iman. There are no criteria for the dower. The purpose of a dower is to safeguard the woman, it does not mean that if a male is not able to pay he will not marry. The *sunnah* of the prophet has clarified that it is better to pay dower, but at the same time the Prophet (pbuh) also urged that if someone did not have the ability to pay, this would not restrict him from a marriage contract. So *mahar* is not an obstacle on the path to marriage. The *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) is universal and it should be followed everywhere in the world. *Pakhtun* as a nation comprises Muslims who have their own peculiar customs, and of course, this sometimes contradicts Islam. Likewise marriage customs in *Pakhtunwali* sometimes contradict Islamic teaching. There are customs like *Kwazhdan*, *Naindara*, *Akhtar shawqadar*, *Janj and Pakha Azada* which are practiced for the prosperity and honour of partners. But at the same time these customs have created problems for the couples who wish to marry. It is quite alarming that these customs have no relation with religion and the burden of expenditure is on both of the families. This has reduced the number of marriages. It is recommended in this research that reasonable modification should be introduced so that the new generation may not suffer more and the people may be aware of their Islamic culture.

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