



Rites of Passage in Baltistan: A Case Study of Village Keris, District Khaplu

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with research findings regarding rites of passage, the initiation ceremonies such as birth, transitions early days to puberty, coming of age, marriage and death. These ceremonies are ritual events that mark a person's transition from one status to another, between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group. Rites of passage show anthropologists what social hierarchies, values and beliefs are important in specific cultures. The present research was conducted in village Keris in District Khaplu Baltistan. Ethnic distribution of the population along with the initiation ceremonies performed by the natives in Baltistan has been discussed in detail. Their reciprocal relationship, gift exchange especially at the eve of birth and marriages and the meals served during the ceremonies has also been discussed. Social roles performed by different relatives as well as the outsiders have been included. Social hierarchy and the marriage preferential system have also been highlighted. The data presented in this paper has been collected by using qualitative anthropological research techniques.

Keywords: birth, marriage, death, ceremonies, endogamy, exogamy

INTRODUCTION

A rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another. The concept of rites of passage as a general theory of socialization was first formally articulated by Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* to denote rituals marking the transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group¹. The concept of

¹Van Gennep, Arnold (2010). *The Rites of Passage*. Routledge Chapman & Hal.

the rite of passage is also used to explore and describe various other milestones in an individual's life, for any marked transitional stage, when one's social status is altered. Gennep's work exercised a deep impact on anthropological thought.² Milestones include transitions from puberty, year 7 to high school, coming of age, marriage and death. Initiation ceremonies such as baptism, akika, confirmation and Bar or Bat Mitzvah are considered important rites of passage for people of their respective religions. Rites of passage show anthropologists what social hierarchies, values and beliefs are important in specific cultures.³

According to Van Gennep rites of passage are divided into three different stages or phases which include separation, transition and reincorporation. He calls these stages as *preliminal rites*, *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and *Postliminal rites* respectively.⁴ During the first stage people leave their present position or status and move from one place or status to another. Separation phase includes symbolic behaviour that detaches an individual or a group from an earlier position in the society.⁵ In this phase normally there is a detachment or cutting away from the previous position. This is often done ceremonially through symbolic actions and rituals. The liminal phase is a transition period between positions or states. During this stage one leaves one's place or state but not yet enters or joins the next position. The position on an individual normally is very ambiguous at liminality or liminal phase.⁶ Third phase which is referred as reincorporation is normally completed in ceremonies by performing different ritual.⁷ After completing the rites new identity of the individual is expected and he enters into the society with a new status. This stage is linked with extravagant rituals and ceremonies. According to Van Gennep, "In rites of incorporation there is widespread use of the 'sacred bond', the 'sacred cord', the knot, and of analogous forms such as the belt, the ring, the bracelet and the crown."⁸

² Garces-Foley, Kathleen (2006). *Death and religion in a changing world*. ME Sharpe.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite_of_passage

⁴ Van Gennep, Arnold (1977). *The Rites of Passage*.

⁵ Turner, Victor W. (1969). *The Ritual Process*. Penguin.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Van Gennep, Arnold (1977). *The Rites of Passage*.

LOCALE OF STUDY

Baltistan is the northwest portion of the Indus basin. It is present between Karakrum and Hamallya ranges. In its north there is Sinkayang (Province of China), in south there is Kashmir, in east it is Ladakh and in the west Gilgit is present. All the area of Baltistan is present within 35 and 36 degrees N and 75 and 77 degrees E. Some of the highest mountains of the world are there e.g. Mashobrum (K-1, height 7820 meters), Rgashabrum (K-4 height 8035 meters) and the most famous Chagobrum (K-2, height 8615 meters). The largest glaciers of Archic regions are also present on the mountains, e.g. Siachan, Biafo, Baltoro, Chogho, etc. At present total area of Baltistan is 10118 square miles and the population according to 1983 census is 223,000 persons, and another one Lac have gone to other places.

The important centers of Baltistan are Skardu, the administrative center of Baltistan, Rondu, Shigar, Khaplu and Khar mong. Khaplu is present on both sides of Shaque River. It starts from Koris and ends at the border of China. This valley is present in the southeast direction from Skardu. Like other parts of Baltistan, Khaplu is also surrounded by the high mountains like K-1, K-6, K-7, K-12, and K-13. Siachan glacier is also present in Khaplu. The temperature in Khaplu is often less than Skardu. The village Keris is present in Khaplu district, 35 K.M from Skardu. If one travels from Skardu to Khaplu, one will find Keris on the left side of Shaque River. The muddy road, which passes through Keris is very narrow. The walls of the houses are very close to the road. The big vehicles cannot move on it. This village is divided into 15 hamlets namely 1- Aoural 2- Charathang 3- Dango 4- Youljug 5-Banpa 6- Aurowa 7- Sumalsowa 8- Kashwa 9- Binakhur 10-Shaghrun 11- Mirpaykhur 12-Bershung 13- Panzil 14-Thung 15- Rahimabad. The biggest among these hamlets is Aurowa having 80 households and the smallest is Banpa, which has 9 households only. The total number of the households according to the information is 1000 but by calculation it would be cannot get this figure.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

By “methodology” we mean the philosophy of the research process. This includes the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards or criteria the research use for interpreting data and reaching conclusions. Whereas by “method” we simply mean the research technique or tool used to gather data. Methodology of the current research was based upon qualitative anthropological research methods which include socio-economic survey, participant observation, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, case studies and focus group discussions were used to collect empirical data. For socio-economic survey 100 households were selected through simple random sample. We choose two key informants in the village on our personal judgment basis, which knew most of the people in the village and their socio-economic conditions. Participant observation was used in order to get first hand and accurate information about the sampled families. Our female researcher participated in the daily activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with the elder members of society to get detailed information. Case studies were conducted to get a detailed presentation of data related to different events. This research was conducted in 1990s.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of the population living in Baltistan is Balti. A few settlers from Peshawar, Gilgit, Chitral, Kashmir and Punjab have settled in Skardu. Although Balti is the main language of the area, Urdu is also widely spoken. There are six different ethnic groups living in Baltistan which include Balti, Brocho, Shakari, Khor, Brokpa and Mon

Balti are the local people. Brocho have come to this area from Indus valley, Gilgit and Nagar. Their language was Shina. Khor are Turkish people and Shakari have been migrated here from Europe. These four races are enjoying equal states in Society. They all speak Balti language. The Brocho have slightly different dialect. Their appearance is also a bit different from the Balti. All these four races are considered as Balti.

The word *Brakpa* means the people of high lands or highlanders. Ali Shar Khan Anchan, the king of Baltistan, brought the thousands of the people from Gilgit, Chitral, Chalas and Darail in 1615-1620 and then again more people were brought in 1645-1670 by his grandson Shah Murad as war prisoners. These people were forced to settle on the mountains from the defense purposes. Their duty was to create resistance against the enemy attacks from the mountains. Other than this they have to do the entire inferior works e.g. musicians, cobblers, carpenters etc. Before these people in 10th and 11th century some people migrated from Chalas and Indus Kohistan and settled in the mountains. Later these people were suppressed by the locals and forced to do the inferior works. These people are called as Brokpa. They, the war prisoners of 16th century and the emigrants of 10th and 11th century are different in dialect and physical appearance. They can be recognized.

'*Mon*' is a North Indian tribe who migrated towards north in 3rd or 4th century and settled in Ladakh and Baltistan. Later the natives suppressed this '*Mon*' tribe in Baltistan and inferior services were taken from them. They were treated as slaves. They were compelled towards music. This '*Mon*' tribe was completely endogamous. Later some Brokpa were also forced toward music and they had to adopt it as a profession. The Brakpa, professional musicians, were also called as Mon because of the same profession. Until now all the people who adopted music as a profession are called Mon. The amateur musicians are not considered Mon. The original Mon tribe is no more present in Baltistan but they are still present in Ladakh. In Baltistan all the Mon are Brokpa or Balti who have adopted music as their profession. In Skardu, Randu and Kharhong the Mon are Brokpa and in Khaplu and Shiger the Mon are local people. The Brokpa Mon are also endogamous.

These entire six races speak Balti language. Generally the natives divide the people into 3 groups Balti, Brokpa and Mon. Balti, Brocho, Khor and Shakari are almost mixed together and considered as Balti. They have almost the same

respect in the society. Brokpa and Mon are considered separate and inferior. At certain occasion I asked my informant why you are Baltis? He said because we speak Balti language. Then I asked, what Mon speak? He said Balti. Then again I questioned why they are not Balti when they also speak Balti language? They reply was “They are inferior”.

All the people belonging to the different races are divided into the occupational groups, which they called *sier* in Balti language and when they speak Urdu they call it *kom*. The occupational groups in Keris include Choo (raja), Wazir, Khan, Zamindar, Thakur (barber), Garba (blacksmith), Heelum (cobbler) and Mon. These groups have a hierarchy. Choo (raja) and its family have the highest status in the society. Then are Wazir, Khan, Zamindar, Thakur (barber), Garba (blacksmith), Heelum (cobbler) and Mon respectively. Mon have the lowest status in the society. Both Mon and Heelum are considered inferiors, but the Heelum have a slight edge on Mon.

In Keris there are 10 households of Makhpoon (raja), 12 households of Sadat, 16 households of Thakur, 2 households of Garba, 20 households of Tarkhan, 4 households of Heelum and 12 households are of Mon. The other occupations are Thaskan (weavers), Mastri (mason), and Ghunches-sum-khan (tailor). These occupations are considered as learnt skills. Anybody can do these works. These are not like Mon, Heelum, Thakur etc. The son of Thaskan will not be considered as Thaskan as it is in Mon, Heelum, Thakur etc. Sadat is not an occupational group. They trace their descent from Hazarat Ali. They have been migrated from Iraq. These people have equal status to raja.

Mon and Heelum marry each other but no other groups give their daughter to them. There are very rare cases when the girls have been taken from the Mon or Heelum. Once a Balti boy got married with a Mon girl in this village against the will of his parents because it was his second marriage and to girl was very beautiful. Tarkhan, Garba and Thakur, Zamindar (all other than raja, Sadat, Mon and Heelum) give their daughter to each other. Sadat and Makhpaan give

the girls to each other they do not give their girls anywhere outside. Sadat boy can bring a girl from outside.

Until 1972 rajas have the maximum powers and were the ruling class. The powers of raja were transferred in heredity. After the death of raja his eldest son used to become raja. The younger brothers of raja were called as khan. They were considered No. 3 in social hierarchy after raja and Wazir. The Wazir was second in command. The raja rule was abolished by the central government but the social hierarchy is still the same with raja on the top.

The rajas were completely endogamous when they were in power and their girls did not visit their parent's house after marriage. Even they can not see the faces of each other because in spite of the rivalries the rajas used to exchange the girls and they never wanted anybody to know their secrets, so they never allowed the girls to visit their parents and the parents did not want it too because they thought that their daughter would tell their secrets to their husbands. They could not stop exchanging their girls with the rivals because otherwise they may have to give their girls outside (other than rajas). Now after 1972 they have started exchanging the girls with Sadat families.

All the people belonging to the different classes or occupational groups are called as "Pa" for example all the people from raja family will be called as Choopa. *Choo* is a Balti word for raja. The Wazir family will be known as Wazirpa. Same is the case with others. Khan family is Khanpa, Heelum is Heelumpa, Garba is Garbongpa, and Mon is Mon or Monpa.

The word '*pa*' is also used for other than these occupational groups. All the people having in one village are divided into different '*pa*'. All the people who trace their descent from one man up to three or four generations are one '*pa*', e.g. there is a man Ali. His next 3 to 4 generations will be Alipa. In the occupational groups to be more specific the name of the person is also used with '*pa*' like Monpa Rozi. Rozi is a Mon and his next generations are Monpa Rozi.

RITE OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage are found throughout the indigenous cultures of the world but vary from culture to culture. In most of the western societal the rituals are performed which look like rites of passage but some very important structural and functional components are missing. Baltistan is a traditional society where the rites of passage are performed with a great zeal and enthusiasm. Here in this paper we would discuss birth, marriage and death rituals.

Birth Ceremony

At the time of delivery the expecting woman are not taken to the hospitals except the complex cases, which are taken to Skardu. At the time of birth an expert woman mostly 45-55 years old comes to help them. In Urdu and Punjabi this woman is called *dai* and in Balti language she is called *choo choo min mee angon*. *Choo choo* means milk, *min mee* means to give and *angon* means mother. So *choo choo min mee angon* means the mother who gives milk. Mostly these expert women are from the same family. If the mother of expecting woman is alive then there is no need of any other woman. If mother is not alive then any other elder woman of the family will come for the help. If no body from the family is around then other woman are called for help. They can be from any family or group. The most expert women of the village were 'Mon'.

Choo choo min mee angon is informed a day before the delivery and she stays with woman (mother of newly born baby) for two days after the birth. If she is mother of the woman, she stays for 7 days after birth. Healthy and brave women do not take help from *choo choo min mee angon*. They give birth to their children by themselves. They just take some help from any young lady of the family. These expert women (other than mother) are given shalwar kameez and chadar when go back after the birth of child. The people who do not afford the above mentioned clothes give them cooked or uncooked food, which they can take home. It could be ghee, flour, sugar, and coconut oil etc. They just have to make them happy. If these women are from outside the family, money is also given to them.

Choo choo min mee angon make *bhallay* (a round shaped eatable prepared by the flour of millet) from the flour of *bajara* which is given to the mother just one or two hours before the birth when the pains start and also one or two hours after the birth with *garee ka tail* (coconut oil). Both the things are hot in nature and are very useful during delivery process. Just after birth *choo choo min mee angon* gives a proper shape to the newly born baby with her hands. She holds a soft cloth in her hands and presses the head of baby to make it round. Nose is pressed to make it pointed. Eyes and other parts of the face are also touched to give them better shape. After this process child is given bath with the flour of barley. This flour is prepared well in time before the birth. Two months before the birth barley is put into the water until the small branches come out. Then it is dried and ground to make it flour. This flour is sweet and it is called as *rSap*. This *rSap* is made more refine before giving bath to the baby. Then it is mixed with water and pasted all over the body of the child and then washed with warm water. This bath is given to the baby in a round vessel, which is called *thali*. During the bath soap or any other thing is not used because it could damage the sensitive parts of the child for all the life. The eyesight may become weak. After washing the baby is covered with a soft cloth of *phallain*.

After giving bath to the baby *isman* (a seed found in plane areas of Baltistan) is burned in a pot. The fragrance of the smoke is given to the baby and the mother. The pot is rotated around both of them. Then the child is given to the mother for feed. After feeding clothes are worn to the child. These clothes are a shirt and a cap. Trouser or any thing else on the legs is not worn. The shirt is made up of wool and is long enough to cover the legs also. After wearing the clothes child is put into the *gahwara*, which is locally called *sambo*. This *sambo* is a skin of sheep having all the wool on it. About 2-3 kilogram of the dried and ground waste product of goat is put on the woolen side of the *sambo* and then baby is put on the same side. First of all the baby is properly covered with *sambo* and then *sambo* is covered with another cloth. After every 24 hours the ground waste product is changed. This *sambo* is to keep the baby warm. If the baby is

born in winter it is kept in *sambo* for the six months and if the season is summer then it is kept for one week only. So the duration depends upon the seasons.

The girls wear shalwar at the age of 6 months immediately after they come out of *sambo* and the boys start wearing shalwar at the age of 3 or 4 years. They wear it for the first time on any Thursday or Friday. In olden days the boys used to wear shalwar for the first time of the age of 8 years on any Friday. Up to that age boy wears a long shirt of a woolen cloth, which is locally called *patu*.

The people start coming to congratulate the parents of newly born baby from the very first day. They bring gifts for the baby in cash or kind e.g. clothes, wheat, *garee ka tail* (coconut oil) etc. Some relatives or friends bring a handkerchief to fix with the cap of child. This handkerchief is called *lafis*. The expensive gifts are given on the birth of a boy and on the birth of a girl the gifts are often of low cost.

The relatives who came to congratulate are served with *marzen*. For the preparation of this *marzen* barley is baked in a black metallic vessel, which is a little bigger than *karahi* (pan like vessel bigger in size) in Punjab. This vessel is called *sanjhan*. When this barley becomes red the fire is put off and when it becomes cold it is ground to make flour. This flour is called *zan*. This flour is mixed with boiling water (1k.g. water and $\frac{1}{2}$ k.g *zan*) with the help of a wood. After mixing it is put in a plate or a dish in the shape of a small heap. On the top of heap a hole is made to pour ghee or *garee ka tail* (coconut oil). This *marzen* is eaten with the help of fingers by mixing *zan* (flour of baked barley) and ghee or *garee ka tail* (coconut oil) whatever is poured on the top. The friends and other villagers who come to congratulate are served with tea only. Most of the times father's sister comes to congratulate before rest of the people, because she has more love for her brother.

On the birth of a boy the smallest gift will be Rs.10 or 3 *topas* (a vessel used for measuring especially grain) of *garee* (coconut), which costs Rs.12. The birth of a

boy is celebrated in a better way. On the birth of first boy a grand party is given to the relatives and the villagers. For this party rice and meat is cooked in the house. The birth of boys other than first is not celebrated in that fashion, even then food is served. The people from all the houses of the same hamlet are invited. If the father of newly born baby boy is rich, he invites each and every person of the hamlet and if he is poor, he invites one person from each house. The people of the same hamlet being closer to each other consider this party as their right. One man or one woman from each house has to be invited on the birth of every boy even if the father is very poor. This party is given one day after the circumcision, which is normally done on the 7th day. The *thakur* (barber) does the circumcision. There are two expert *thakur* in Keris. After the circumcision and before the party the Holy Quran is recited.

Thakur is invited for the circumcision at home. Food is served to him according to his will or taste. A number of 7 or 14 *rSapkhur* (a special type of chapatti) with an amount of RS.10 to 200 or even more is also given to him. They relate the figure of 7, 14 or 21 with no of days of week because week is good in Islam (according to informant). On the next day *takhur* will again come with one of his relatives for reading Quran and the party. On this day a hen is given to him. In olden days Quran was not recited and the party was also not given but the *takhur* used to come on the next day to see the boy. Food and a hen were given to him in those days also. If the hen is not available 1 *topa* of 5 *pows* of *garee* is given to the *takhur*. This 1 *topa* of *garee* is called *stachoo rSoo blang*. *Stachoo* means sweet, *rSoo* means *garee* and *blang* is *topa*.

With all the other relatives and friends *choo choo min mee angon* (traditional birth attendant) will also come to attend the party, which is given on the 7th day after circumcision. In olden times on 7th day after circumcision *rSapkhur* was made with the help of the some flour, which is used to give bath to the baby. This flour can be prepared in the spring season only. So the people prepare it well in time before the birth. If they do not prepare they have to bring it from other houses.

The *rSapkhar* is a chapatti. For preparing this chapatti, *rSap* (above-mentioned flour) is mixed up with the flour of wheat. Then water is put in this mixture of flours and rubbed with the help of hands in a wooden vessel made up of *chakhma* (a type of wood). This vessel is called *thallow*. This *thallow* is plain like a *parat* (a type of vessel) in Punjab. Then about 200-300 grams of flour is given a round shape with hands and put in a black metallic vessel placed on the fireplace. This metallic vessel is locally called *too*. In Punjab it is called *tawa*. The round shaped flour automatically spreads on 'too' when it is heated and it takes the shape of chapatti. After cooking, '*garee ka tail*' is put on this chapatti.

After circumcision these *rSapkhar* used to be distributed among the people who come to congratulate in the first 7 days. Five *rSapkhar* were given to each house. These chapattis were not given to the people who did not come to congratulate the parents of newly born baby. Now days there are few people who make *rSapkhar* on the 7th day after circumcision. They only give a party to the natives. On the birth of a girl no party is given. The people do come to congratulate and bring the gifts but so expensive. The *rSapkhar* is also not given to them.

Marriages

Some people prefer endogamy (marriages within the family) and others practice exogamy (marriages outside the family). In some cases the preference is given to the cousins or the relatives only. Ember and Ember have defined marriages as,

“Marriage is a socially approved sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. It is presumed both by the couple and by others, to be more or less permanent and it subsumes reciprocal rights and obligation between the spouses and their future children.”

(1976)⁹

Mann says,

⁹Ember, C. R., Ember, M. & Pastemalk, B. (1976). On Conditions Favouring Extended Family Households. *Journal of Anthropological Research* Vol.32, No.2,

“Firstly, a RITE OF PASSAGE whereby an unrelated man and woman leave their FAMILY of origin and begin their own family of procreation; secondly, a relationship that is normally expected to last beyond the time necessary for procreation. It is also a legal contract, which when amplified in judge-made law... normally involves an assumption...that it is the wife's duty to perform housework and childcare and the husband's duty to support the family financially.”

(1983)¹⁰

The average marriage age for boys and girls in Keris is 18 to 26 and 15 to 18 years respectively. In some cases people marry their daughters at the age of 10 to 12 years. Normally it happens if the groom has to go abroad or secondly if nobody is there to take care of the girl properly. Sometimes child marriage is also practiced. The girl of 5 is married with a boy of 8 or 9 years. It happens if the parents are very old and want to get their children married in front of them. In these cases the brides keep on living with their parents until they become adult. On occasions like Eid or *Shabrat* the brides do come to the house of groom's parents. Sometimes the father thinks that after his death his son would not be able to get married, so he gets him married at a very early age.

The boy's parents select mostly the girl as a suitable spouse for their son. Father being a supreme authority has a power to make the decision. Both the boy and the girl are asked if he or she likes the proposal. Their will is given a proper consideration while making decision. There are some cases of love marriages but in those cases the boys do not get their share of property as a punishment for going against the will of their parents.

For marriage preference is given to FBD (father's brother's daughter) because of the property. The second preference goes to MBD (mother's brother's daughter) because the mother's brother has to do a lot during the marriage. He spends a lot of money. In case if they have more than one suitable option in the family then

¹⁰ Mann, M. (1983). *Student Encyclopedia of Sociology*. UK: Practice Hall Inc.

the girl is selected through *fal* (draw). For this *fal* Holy Quran is opened from anywhere and first two or three lines are read from the page, which comes in front. If there is anything positive written in those lines it means 'yes' and if negative is written then it is 'no'. By this method they can save their relations with others because this way they accept the refusal easily as it is the will of God.

After selecting the girl the MB (maternal uncle) of boy takes the proposal to the girl's parents. If the parents of the girl accept the proposal they give something sweet to eat to the MB, which could be *paratha* (fried chapatti), *marzen*, apple, melon, etc. Nothing sour is served to him at this time. They also cook rice without any type of meat because meat is considered as a sign of enmity. If the girl's parents refuse the proposal or ask for some time to consult their relatives the MB do not eat anything from there. After when the given time for the consultation is over the MB goes again for the conformation. Now if the girl's parents refuse a tension and hatred develops between the families and if the proposal is accepted then MB goes again to fix the date for marriage, which is normally a month from the day it is fixed. The amount of *mahar* (amount paid by the groom or his parents to the bride or her family at the time of marriage or in case of divorce) is decided and *nikahnama* (contract form of marriage) is filled by *molvi sahib* (cleric) on the same day. On the next day *nikah* is read at groom's house, where MB of the bride signs the *nikahnama* as her representative. If MB is not present, then bride's brother signs for her. The bride does not sign. All the relatives of bride come to the groom's house at the time of *nikah* where they are served with food from groom's parents. First of all the guests are served with sweet tea and *azok*. *Azok* is a kind of *paratha* but in a different shape. First it is made round and then opposite sides are folded inside. It is fried in ghee on *too* (pan used to make chapatti). After *azok* and tea food is served which normally includes rice, *zan* chapatti, or *marzan* with best quality ghee or oil. After the food salty tea is served. After this tea *gree* (coconut), *stargha* (walnut), *stathu rSoo* (sweet ghee) and *halman-i-pharing* (dry apricot) are brought for distribution among the guests. These things are called as *phakhastat*. In the end the groom's relatives including father, brothers and mother's brother apologize by saying,

“sorry we could not serve you properly.” After this all the guests from bride’s side go back and the ceremony is completed.

After 7 days of this *nikah* MB of groom goes again to the bride’s house to fix the date for marriage if they want to do it earlier. MB goes alone. He is served with food, which includes rice, *rSapchor*, chapatti, meat etc. After the meal groom’s MB tells them that he would bring *skatphiong* (to call or to inform) a week before marriage. The time between *skatphiong* and marriage cannot be more than one month. *Skatphiong* is a gift in kind, which includes 1 kg of best quality ghee and 5 kg flour. This gift is meant for bride’s family only. This is a sort of announcement or an indication of marriage. In return to this *skatphiong* coconut oil, dry apricot, and some money (Rs.70 to 100) are given to MB. This gift in return is called as *snot zook*. *Snot* means vessel and *zook* means to return. So it means return of vessel. At the time when MB takes *skatphiong* he is again served with food. After this occasion both parties start preparations for the marriage. They start sewing the clothes and collecting the eatables. The bride’s parents make clothes for bride and the groom’s parents make clothes for groom. Only 1 or 2 shalwar kameez suits are made for the bride by the groom’s parents. These must be of a very good quality. If the bride’s family is posh and well off family, they would ask the groom’s parents not to bring these clothes. In olden days it was considered as help but now it has become a fashion. Imported clothes are given. Mother’s brother of groom takes these clothes to the bride’s house. This particular gift is called as *bakh pShish* means bride’s clothes.

One day before marriage MB of groom takes 20 kg of flour, 1 kg of ghee and 1 kg of *mahandi* (henna) to the bride’s house. These things are called *sermo-sick-zan*. This time he is served with *marzan*. On the same day *Quran-khawni* (recitation of Quran) is arranged at bride’s house and dinner is given to the natives by the bride’s parents according to their financial position. The celebration goes on through out the night. All the girls stay together and sing songs. These songs could be of any type, mostly the film songs. The girls keep on joking the bride and enjoying themselves. This day is called as *sermosick*.

On the day of marriage, if the bride is eldest among the sisters, her parents take 30 *khurba* (it is like a chapatti weighing $\frac{1}{2}$ kg) and 30 *rSapkhur* (bigger in size than normal weighing almost the same) from groom's parents. MB of groom takes these things to the bride's house before noon. From these *khurba* and *rSapkhur* 10 each are returned to groom's mother's brother. He keeps 5 each for himself and give rest of these to groom's father. This return of 10 *khurba* and 10 *rSapkhur* to MB is called as *lochfi khurba rSapkhur*. *Lochfi* means which comes back. The remaining *khurba* and *rSapkhur* are distributed among the bride's relatives by her parents. If the bride is not eldest among the sisters then there is no need of making *khurba* and *rSapkhur*. The flour equal in weight to these things is given to the bride's parents, which is not meant for distribution among the relatives. It stays with the parents. Again MB of groom takes this flour to the bride's house.

On the day of marriage right from the morning the groom's parents start preparing for the lunch, which has to be served to the villagers and friends. The bride's close relatives, who include parents, brothers and sisters, do not attend this party. The food is sent for them at their house through anybody. Other relatives of the bride attend the party. On the same day in the afternoon the friends of the same age group dress up the groom. After getting ready he visits bazaar on a jeep in the company of his friends. In olden days horses were used in place of jeeps. This visit of bazaar is called as *sallakharad*. After this visit the groom comes home and changes his dress. This dress includes a yellow shirt (mostly of *boskey*), a white shalwar of cotton (*latha*), a waist court, a chadar, (called as *chakrim-pakar*) and a *phagari* or cap. A *phagari* tied with *safa* (a piece of cloth normally used to cover the head) or a Gilgiti cap is used. *Baltut* is fixed with the cap. The close relative females of the groom with the help of sheep wool make this *baltut*. It has 9 to 14 small strings tied to each other from one end in such a way that the knot becomes the center. One end of each string is tied with same type of wool by rotating it over. This central knot of *baltut* is called as *khorgat*. The *khorgat* is fixed on the center of the cap and all the strings come

down all around the cap. The length of each string is from the center of the head to the ears. The wooden tool, which is used to make *baltut* is called as *phang* and is brought by *Mon*.

When the groom comes back after the visit of bazaar his mother's brother goes to bride's home to fix the time for arrival of *barat* (marriage procession). After deciding the time bride's family starts making arrangements for the dinner and the friends of bride get her ready. The bride's mother's brother makes all the arrangement for the dinner. The parents bear the expenditures. On the other hand the groom's side keeps on enjoying. The groom's friends praise him in, which are called *kasida*.

In the evening just before leaving for the bride's home the groom wears the same dress again. The neighbours bring *chafay* (flour of *satu*) or *khuspay* in a dish with ghee on it at the door from where the groom has to come out. In case if the neighbours do not bring than the friends or relatives bring these things. The neighbour having the flour in his hand stands by the side of the door. When the groom comes out he touches the flour and says *salat* (praise of Holy Prophet). At this time smoke of *isman* (a seed found in plane areas of Baltistan) is again rotated around the groom. First time it was rotated at the time of birth. *Isman* is also used on occasions like Eid and *Quran-Khawani* (recitation of Quran). After this groom moves towards the bride's home with a group of people called as *barat*, which includes all types of people i.e. parents, relatives, friends, ladies, gents etc. The *barat* moves on foot if the houses are near to each other, otherwise they use jeeps. In olden times horses were used. Now the people do not have horses therefore they have to use jeeps. Before entering the bride's house the groom again touches the *chafay* (flour extracted from millet) or *khuspay* (a type of flour) and say *salat* (praise of Holy Prophet). Here bride's neighbours bring this flour. *Isman* is again rotated around the groom. After this he goes and sits at the place, which has been especially prepared for him. Rest of the people sits on matting. When all the people sit bride's mother's brother brings *phakhastat* (*gree*, *stargha*, *stathu rSoo* and *halman-i-pharing* which are distribution among the guests after

nikah) and gives it to the groom's mother's brother. Then sweet tea is served to all the guests. After tea water is brought near every body for washing hands and then dinner is served to the guests at the place where they are sitting. This dinner may include rice, *marzan*, meat, chapatti, vegetables, etc. *Marzan* is must in every marriage. After dinner hands are washed again. At this stage bride's mother's brother brings another *phakhastat*, which only includes *khubani kee gree* (the nut inside the apricot) for distribution among the guests. The bride's mother's brother makes all the arrangements for dinner and *phakhastat*. After *phakhastat* the bride's father gives an amount of Rs.1000 (not fixed could be more or less) to the groom. The same amount is given to the groom's mother's brother by the bride's mother's brother. This money also goes from bride's father's pocket but through bride's mother's brother. Then an amount of Rs.50 to 100 is given to groom's father and mother each by bride's mother's brother. Rs.50 are given to each brother, sister, mother's brother's son, and father's brother. Rs.20-30 are given to *halpa*, the helper of mother's brother who makes the arrangements. The groom keeps *faa* as his helper or caretaker who also gets some money i.e. Rs.10 to 20. All these gifts in cash are called as *skunthak*.

After *skunthak* any close relative female of the bride brings her out of the home for departure. Same procedure is adopted when bride comes out as it was done with the groom. The neighbours bring *chafay* or *khuspay* in a dish with ghee on it at the door from where she has to come out. She touches the flour and says *salat* (praise of Holy Prophet). Smoke of *isman* is rotated around her. She sits in the jeep for departure. The lady who brings her out of the home goes with her to the groom's house. This lady is called as *mangan*. Other than *mangan* 20 to 30 relatives also go with bride. This process of departure is called as *seniopo*. Before the bride enters the house of groom *chafay* and *isman* are brought at the door.

Dinner is served to all the relatives of both sides at groom's place. His father makes all the arrangements for the dinner. After the dinner the guests go back except those who have come from distant areas. Next day all the relatives of

bride come to grooms place for lunch. Mother' brother of groom make all arrangements for this dinner and bear all the expenditures.

Death Rituals

When a person dies his neighbours send messages to the relatives and friends about the death. Some of the close relatives are already there if the person is seriously ill and close to death. The people start coming at the house of the dead person just after the death. '*Quran-Khawani*' starts immediately after the death in the house. All the people read one or two *suparas* (chapters) of Quran who come to see the dead body. They give some money to the eldest of the family where the death has taken place. They also bring chadars to put on the dead body over his or her *kafan* (white cloth which is worn to the dead body). In olden days the people used to bring something in kind but now they bring in cash. All the relatives who come to visit the house in first three days bring tea or something to eat because there is no cooking in the house for three days. The people other than relatives do not bring any thing to eat.

The bath is given to the body according to his or her will. Only that person gives him or her bath whose name has been mentioned by him/her in his/her will. In case of a male's death *molvi sahib* (cleric) from the mosque also comes to help in bath. If no name is mentioned in the will, than *molvi sahib* gives bath to the body. After bath *kafan* is worn to the body, which is brought by the family. The *phatta* (rectangular piece of wood sizing normally 6'x4') on which the bath is given and the *charpai* (cot or bedstead), which is used to take the body to the graveyard, are brought from the mosque. In most parts of Baltistan this *charpai* is like a box, which is covered from the top also. But in Keris this *charpai* is like a wooden stair. The dead body is tied on it with the help of a rope. Before taking out the house the face of the dead body is shown to the people present at home. After showing the face the body is taken to the graveyard by a group of people, which include the males only. The females stay at home. This group is called *janaza* (funeral procession). People lift the *charpai*, stay in front of the group and move towards the graveyard. The people lifting the *charpai* keep on changing so that

every one should get his turn to give shoulder to the *charpai*. They keep on reciting *Kalama-e-Shahadat* on the way to the graveyard. *Nimaz-e-Janaza* (the prayer offered for the deceased before its burial) is offered at graveyard. After *Nimaz-e-Janaza* the body is put in the grave with the help of two men who go in the grave. After putting the body in the grave his face is taken out of the *kafan* and turned towards *Kaba*. A stone is placed in the grave touching the forehead of the body as if he is in the position of *sajda* (a position during prayer when forehead touches the ground). After putting the body in the grave it is closed by fixing stones on the top after which the *molvi sahib* (cleric) recites a *dua* (supplication). After supplication, *molvi sahab* and other people put some mud over the stones on the grave normally thrice with the back of the hands. Then any one or two persons put all the mud over the grave to cover it completely. This brings the grave slightly higher than the ground level in a rectangular shape. Now some water is put on the grave to make it firm and solid. In the end people say *fatiha* (prayer for deceased) and come back. At time of burial all the males of the village come at the graveyard. The close relatives come back to the home of the deceased and rest of the people leave for their homes.

Recitation of Holy Quran starts immediately after the burial and continues for 5 to 7 days by the side of the grave or some times at home. Some people continue it for 40 days. Quran is recited by *quaries* (students of madrasa). About 80 years ago the Quran was recited in the graveyard near the grave by *quaries* because it was thought that giants come and eat the dead body and recitation of Quran protects the body from them. No body has ever seen any giant but many times they found the grave open and the body missing in the first three days. The number of *quaries* who recite Quran by the side of grave could be 15 to 30 or even more. They are paid for this as much as the family could afford. They do not claim for any fix amount. The chadars, which were brought by the people to put on the dead body, are also distributed among the *quaries*. Mostly close relatives provide these *quaries*. One family may provide 1, 2 or even 3 *quaries*.

The third day after death is called as *khanmo*. On this day people come for recitation of Quran in the afternoon. All the people who come are served with food, which is mostly *marzen*. It could be rice with meat also. The meat cannot be beef. It has to be mutton or chicken. All the expenditure on this occasion is borne by the family of the deceased.

The close relatives do not wash and change their clothes after the death till the *khanmo*. On the third day after *khanmo* the close friends, neighbours or relatives come and wash their hands. 'Thakur' also comes for shaves and haircuts of the male members to make them fresh again. After washing hands the married sisters and daughters go back to their homes. The relatives from their husband's side come to take them home. Again on 40th day Quran is recited and food is served to the relatives or cooked food is sent to the mosque for distribution. This food could be rice chapati or meat. One of these food items is must. Other than this could be *marzan* with ghee or tail and vegetable.

On *Shab-e-Barat* of the same year when somebody dies the grave is repaired. The *fatiha* is offered and food is distributed among the people whoever are present in the graveyard when the grave is repaired. Mostly in Baltistan the graves are made in 'L' shape, which are locally called as *lahor*, but in Keris the grave are made straight. These straight graves are called as *mazar*. The wooden boxes are not used in the graves to put the body in. the graves are just covered with the big slabs of stones.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, indigenous peoples have developed rituals and ceremonies to help make sense or celebrate a change in position, circumstance or relationship. Some sort of ritual often accompanies births, marriages and death. In addition, the transition from one life stage to the next is honored. Puberty rites and coming of age ceremonies are celebrated around the world. Sadly we often associate them with horrific mutilations, or cultural practices which out of context we cannot understand. Over time some have also become diluted,

commercialized, or rejected by the youth for whom they are intended. In times or cultures where the cultural value of ritual is recognized, often the greatest effort was given to the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood – and yet paradoxically it is the one that is now most often lost. Although birth and marriage and death were marked, the greatest importance was given to the puberty rite as it was recognized that this was the most crucial transition to get right, both for the individual and the community.

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