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WEDDING CEREMONY PARTICULARITIES AS PER RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF JEWS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Abstract: Bokharan Jews are known to be the communal and ethnolinguistic subpopulation of the Hebrew or Judaic Diaspora. Persons belonging to this nation have lived in Central Asia for centuries. Throughout its long history, Jews committed to smooth integration in the local community. Centuries of co-residence resulted in that the Jews resemble the locals in appearance; they speak local languages as natives, they adopted the culture and way of living. However, no one can state on entire assimilation: the Jews adhere to their religion, they only rarely mix with locals and yet, they still advocate their philosophy, incomparable with others.

Key words: Marriage, Torah, pre-nuptial agreement, marriage proposal, wedding rites, purification rite, secret meetings, dotal property, bride-price, rate for mother's milk.

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Introduction

Currently, Judaism is one of 16 religious confessions, who are running their activities freely and peacefully in Uzbekistan and has its rich religious, national customs and traditions.

It is known that Jews hold their holidays and national ceremonies on the basis of laws and rules, established by the religion. Marriage based on nikah (religious rules based marriage), ensuring stability and happiness marriage is one the main wants of Jews. A number of ceremonies are hold ceremoniously due to establishment of a new Jewish family.

The pre-marriage ceremonies are matchmaking, seeing (meting) the bride, engagement, girl's (bride's) party, which are also held by almost all Central Asian nations. However, Bukhara Jews brought these ceremonies to the level of religious beliefs and these customs have been transferred from generation to generation.

Materials and Methods

According to the Jewish doctrine, nikah is an important prayer, which is considered to a great blessing from God to the Jewish people. According to Talmud: "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" or "A man without a wife is destined to

live without joy, pleasure in life, without Talmud, protection and peace. According to the marriage contract, both young people lose their freedom, take over new duties and obligation from this day on [1].

In beliefs of the Jewish people, on the marriage day, the bridegroom is like a prince and the bride is like a princess and on this very day they both have Divine light and they become creators of their destiny. The ceremony of nikah is the day, when their previous sins are forgiven, and new forces/resources are accumulated for their new plan and they receive prayers of their kin people.

In ancient times, the age of marriage was established 15-16 years for boys and 12-13 year for girls. During the Tsarist Russia colonial period, 14 years of age was strictly determined as the marriage maturity age for girls. However, most Jewish people would not adhere to this rule. Most Cneatral Asian Jew wuld engage their children form their earlychildhood and the children were considered to be "запови бахши" ("garavi bakhshi" (from Persian-Tajik – guarantee of present/designation)). Usually, in the final end, as a result of these verbal arrangements at the age of maturity, children would marry each other, but sometime, for certain reasons, verbal engagement may not end up with a nikah. It is considered that breaking the "garavi bakhshi"



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engagement would bring misfortunes and bad luck [5].

Usually, ancient Jewish people performed marriage ceremonies using the “yenta” process. Orthodox tradition communities still adhere to this custom. Today, many modern Jewish young people get married on love. Nevertheless, future bridegroom has to visit the girl’s father and ask for blessing to marry his daughter and prepare a marriage contract and pay for the bride [3, 560].

Most central Asian Jews used to live in Bukhara and around it. Among Bukhara Jewish community, usually parents had to engage the young couple, look for a matching bride for the future groom, the “khastgor” process and arranging and holding the wedding. One of relatives of future groom visits the future bride’s parents for matchmaking. Once the matchmakers agree with each other, the engagement ceremony takes place at the bride’s house. This involves the future groom visiting the girl’s father and asking for his blessing to marry his daughter. The following issues are mutually agreed during the engagement process:

- the amount of money to be given to the girl’s father;
- fixing the wedding date not falling on the Shabbat or main Jewish holidays;
- Nikah/marriage contracts, in other words, agreement of terms and conditions of tuba contract.

According to Talmud, marriage/nikah is a sacred tie and its strength depends on three actions:

- 1) husband dedicated part of his property to his wife to get her agreement/consent;
- 2) husband prepares “*kuba*”;
- 3) at mutual consent husband and wife enter marriage/nikah relationships. Purchase of marriage rings is considered symbolic meaning of this [7].

Jewish marriage weddings consist of two main parts: *ширини хӯри* (*shirini khuri* - from Persian-Tajik – eating sweets/sweets things) and wedding itself. The but, if any relative of the bride or groom die unexpectedly, the wedding is postponed because of the funeral and mourning [5]. In addition, two more ceremonies are held during the wedding process: “*kidushin*” – getting clean/innocent [3, 560], the ceremony when the groom puts a ring on his wife’s finger and declare her his wife and “*khupa*” – the ceremony of groom taking the bride to his house [6, 185].

Relatives, neighbours and friends of the bride and groom and rabbis participate at the engagement ceremonies. First, the groom’s father sends sweets and nabat to the bride’s house. The rabbi or very respected elderly people of the family distribute these sweets to the participants of engagement and congratulate the girl’s father. As a symbol of engagement, some remaining part of the sweets is distributed to the acquaintants, who cannot participate at engagement.

After the engagement, the pre-wedding ceremony is held on a fixed day of the week. In this way, on a Wednesday or Thursday the ceremony of “*qudobin*” (or *qudobinon* (from Persian-Tajik – seeing/meting of –in law parents). The groom’s family sends sweets and presents to the house of bride. At this ceremony the men and women gather in one room, and the community are shown the presents, sent by the groom’s side. After *qudobinon* they hold the ceremony of “*ro’binon* (from Persian-Tajik – seeing the face)”. Often, this ceremony is held on the same day as the *audobinon*. On *ro’binon*, the groom gets acquainted with the relatives of the bride and meets (dates) the bride for the first time. Relatives of the groom are the first to see the girl/bride. Then she is left alone and the groom brings some food on a plate and some wine in a glass and hands it over to her.

After the first meeting/dating until the wedding, the groom often visits the bride’s house, even, sometimes, he can stay at the bride’s house and have meetings/dates with the bride secretly. The secret meetings are called “*bakhida boz*” (play with the presented/designated). After *qudobinon*, preparations, and collecting, purchasing of clothing is started.

According to Jewish traditions, one week before the wedding the bride and groom should be holding certain ceremonies without seeing each other:

- The groom announces the wedding in the synagogue in the ceremony called “*ufruf*” and after prayers, he invites all his co-believers to the feast;
- The bride should perform a special getting cleaned/innocent ceremony called “*mique*”;
- At Jewish weddings men wear *yarmulkes*, while women wear ordinary white dresses, and the bride wear her bridal veil [8].

Orthodox Jewish call the engagement ceremony as “*Kabalat-panim*.” At the feast ceremony, they organise a separate feast for the bride and groom. The bride’s side arranges feast for their kin and relatives and sit at a special place. While the groom also sits at the high place of a tablecloth usually, preparation of the marriage contract is finalised on this day and people read/pray *Talmud* verses [3].

On Friday before the wedding, they arrange a ceremony at the bride’s house called “*takhzanon*” (from Persian-Tajik – setting of clothing in folds), where they demonstrate the clothing/dresses of the bride. *Kayvon* solemnly shows all the clothing and other things to the attendants. On Saturday evening, they arrange “*shabi dukhtaron*” – girls’ party, sometimes the groom and his friends also attend this party.

After the girls’ party, on Sunday they arrange “*hammobaron*”, i.e., taking the bride to the banya (washhouse) and after that they perform the ceremony of “*qoshchinon*”, i.e., they clip the bride’s eyebrows for the first time and another feast tablecloth

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is spread. The groom pay all costs of this ceremony himself.

The special cleaning/getting innocent/decent ceremony called “*miqve*” is carried out in the following way: in presence of all women, the girl takes off all her jewellerys and while groom prays, the bride washes herself. The groom bears the costs of this ceremony as well [7].

Bukhara Jews also have a ceremony of “*hinabandon*” i.e., painting/putting henna extract on the brides’ hands, which is held at the bride’s house and another festive tablecloth is spread. Only women take part at this ceremony. On Tuesday, they sign the “*ktuba*” marriage contract. The contract is written in Yiddish, the clothing and associated things collection “*chezi*” and its value is written in their mother tongue. The amount of bride money is also agreed.

The clotng and associated thing of the bride include wmoen’s clothies, matrasses and cushions, golden and silver jewellery. The minimum amount of such colection is called “*setvi*” and it contains 15 each of dresses, women’s pants and kerchiefs, matrasses and cushions [5].

The Jewish bride’s side family should prepare everything for happy life of the young couple, including preparation and furnishing accommodation for living, while the groom’s side should prepare respective household gear [9].

On Wednesday, they hold the *ceremony of kidush* at the bride’s house. This ceremony is also performed with enormous feast, singing and dancing and many guests [5]. Generally, one can see combination mix of many nations in pre-wedding and nikah wedding ceremonies of Jewish people. Once can hear music and songs and watch dances of Uzbek, Tajik, Iranian, Arab, Turkish, Spanish and Caucasian people [2].

At the wedding, the bride’s head should be covered with something. Because the Rabbis legal status bans them reciting prays to God and prayers in presence of married ladies with uncovered heads because the women with open (uncovered) head are considered naked. Until 19th century in Europe, before the secular culture was introduced to their life, used walk with covered heads. The situation has changed by now [10].

For cleaning themselves both physically and mentally, the groom and bride take fasting on the wedding day like Yom Kipur. Nikah (religious marriage ceremony) is performed attended by only close relatives under a baldachin to protect them from eyeing. The visitors must not have any locks or tied thread in their hands. One of the women enters the “*chimildiq*” (large piece of cloth hung in the corner) and sew the clothes of both the bride and groom together. The nikah ceremony ends by the groom putting a ring on his wife’s finger and he Rabbi reciting the Nikah prayer [5, 255-256].

After completion of nikah ceremony, the Bukhara Jewish groom takes the bride to his house. In ancient time they used to take the bride on horse packs. Nowadays, they take her on latest produce luxury cars. After arrival to the groom’s house, the groom meets her with a mirror and then this mirror is taken around the feet for three times. This practice is a symbol of wish that the happiness of the new family be clean and transparent like this mirror. Then the ceremony of “*shabi zanon*” starts at the groom’s house. He gives gifts to the bride and her relatives and takes her to his room. This room of pleasure is called “*dari hujra*.” The wedding festivities end with joy and singing and dancing. Next morning the ride’s mother, after they receive the news that she proved to be virgin, she sends bread and nisholda (sweet jelly eating made from sugar and eggs). On Sunday, the bride’s girlfriends visit her for the “*choykunon*” (cup of tea) ceremony to have tea together. And on Monday, they arrange the last “*shabi javonon*” ceremony. On day eight after the Nikah, all ceremonies end and the bride starts her life as a housewife and proceeds with household works [5, 256].

Bukhara Jews like eating lamb food and chicken and they treat the guest with such food [5, 255-256].

Jewish ceremonies are modified as the times past. Central Asian Jews have special customs called “*brides money*” and “*money for mother’s milk*”. In addition, grooms taking the bride for a three rounds around the fire or dancing of grooms relatives and friends around the fire are signs of pyrolatry that had existed in the territory of Central Asia. Nowadays, on a wedding day, visiting various (worshipping) places, driving around/seeing various sightseeing sites of cities together, taking photos for future memories are now some of the newly/recently introduced customs and traditions and most young people practice such [4].

Conclusion

The same very tradition has become customary for all brides and grooms in most cities and town of Uzbekistan irrespective of their nationality. In addition, it is a widespread custom among Uzbeks to prepare complete sets of clothing for bride and groom, numerous morasses and cushions, carpets, crockery-dishes and other things and utensils that are required for a new family. The tradition of giving bride money and “*token for mother’s milk*” to bride’s father is still kept to in all regions of Uzbekistan among Uzbeks.

The following can be said in conclusion:

- From ancient days, Central Asian Jewish people had always been part of the society of the region, and took a specific position in its social and economic life;
- They fully adhere to the holy book of Judaism Talmud and other sources;



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- Jewish people raised creating a family to worshipping level;
- The Jewish people of the region perform Nikah/marriage ceremonies by strictly adhering to the orders and rules and traditions that had been preserved from ancient times;
- Each ceremony and ritual has its name, they are mainly expressed in Tajik words and phrases. For instance, qudobinon, ro'binon, shabi zanon, shabi javonon and others (қудабинон, рўбинон, шаби занон, шаби чавонон);

- Central Asian Jews had been living together with the local population in friendship, peace and cooperation, took and mutually enriched/modified some features of customs and traditions of the people of this region;
- Preservation and mutual enrichment of the Jewish people customs and traditions until now is reflection of true religious tolerance in the region for centuries.

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