

## Women roles in weddings: ethnography of wedding rituals among Rajput in Punjab, Pakistan

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### **Abstract**

*Among Rajputs wedding ceremony has own procedures and events which is carried out through rituals. These rituals carry the symbolic meanings and symbolic representations for the people who practice and endorse them. This article ethnographically investigates the wedding ceremony along with the rituals performed among the Rajput people living in a small town in central Punjab (Pakistan). The research is qualitative study with participant observation and in-depth interviews as the main tools for collecting data. The study reveals that certain rituals performed during the wedding days perform two major functions. Besides providing the amusement and festivity, they produce, reproduce and reinforce stereotypical roles of women within the community. Secondly, they help bride and groom to go through a transformation of their status by assigning their new roles and expectations as husband and wife.*

**Keywords:** Weddings, rituals, women, roles, Pakistan

### **Introduction**

In human life transition from one phase to another phase of life is inevitable. There are some rituals that are performed and help the individuals to change their social status from one to another. Marriage is one of ritual which generally considered a land mark in woman life. It brings many expectations and responsibilities for woman as a wife and most of the time changes its life completely. Her role as a wife is far different from as a daughter. Achieving the role of wife she passes through many pre wedding rituals which help her to learn, train and educate herself is brought through the performance of rituals. Victor Turner has elaborately described the definition of ritual. He says that "*in rituals people are induced to want what they must do. In this sense, ritual action is akin to sublimation process....Symbolic behavior actually creates society for pragmatic purposes*" (1974:56). Therefore rituals are not just actions or festive activities

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performed on social events but they carry social and multiple level symbolic meanings (Turner, 1967) for the people who practice and acknowledge them. In simple words it means that by participating in rituals people affirm the authenticity of the ritual and the prevailing order in the society. Moreover, these meanings must be explored through the “indigenous interpretation” (Turner, 1967:50) of the people where it is practiced.

In this research wedding rituals and their symbolic interpretations are explored and mostly carried out by women and the gender ideologies prevalent in the group transmit through these rituals from one generation to another. The prevailing male social order is taken as a standard norm and by practicing of certain ritual it is reinforced, reproduced and maintained in within a social group. It is interesting to note that women are the carry out the rituals which bear their stereotypical roles and maintain and then transmit them into next generation. During wedding days certain rituals are performed that reflect women social status in the community.

During the wedding days it is becomes important for the people to marry two individuals according to the pre-determined norms and values of the society for the functioning of the society. Turner (1969, 1995) is of the view that rituals are social processes in which members of the social world witness an individual who undergo a status passage. The people who witness this process support the individuals(s) defining and enforcing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for the individual. Rituals are grounded in ideological traditions and thus may be considered inappropriate to change (Oswald, 2000; Oswald and Suetr, 2004). As they are embedded in the institutional and social network norms regarding women’s and men’s family roles it, people who practice it do not let them to change and maintain them within the group. Coltrane (1998:19) claims that *“because society has fewer outward mechanisms for regulating gender, family rituals and other family practices become the central carrier for the meaning of gender.”* The similar norms and values of the larger group which Durkheim ([1893] 1997) names as collective conscience morally bind the community together. In the case of wedding rituals family and friends practice and enforce the social norms and rules associated with the role of the bride and groom.

## **Research methods**

This is an ethnographic qualitative study and most of the data collected during wedding ceremony was based on my participation in couple of marriages there. I conducted in-depth interviews for the indigenous interpretations of the rituals. My interview guide consisted of two basic themes and then each theme was divided further into small and simple questions. One theme is concerned with the rituals the way they are performed and second theme explored the cultural milieu between rituals and its interpretation by the women who practice it.

The study is conducted in a town Wahndo, in District Gujranwala (Punjab) where Rajputs community live. I conducted the interviews from those women who participated in rituals and willing to participate in research process and knew about the relevance and importance of rituals in wedding events. I conducted 10 interviews in total. All the interviews were conducted in Urdu language while some of the women answered me in their local language, Haryanvi (Mohajiri as local women call it) language. This language is a linguistic mixture of Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu languages. Transcription and translation of the songs were done with the help of local women. Informal talks provided me diverse and mixed views. These views helped me in cross-checking the data I obtained from my participants.

## Wedding rituals among Rajputs

For the Rajputs the most physically active, dramatic, and symbolic events are wedding and birth ceremonies (of boy) demonstrate the social and religious features of culture. Weddings rituals are gendered and structured events. Though predominantly participated by women and yet reinforces gender stereotypical roles within the social group. Additionally these rituals reflect the entrenched ideology of the woman's place in the communities (Mason, 1975). Wedding rituals are comprised of many days that make them notoriously elaborated and grandiose (Egler, 1960). However due to many reasons they are not as elaborated as they used to be in past times.

In Rajput wedding generally three days are the most important days. They have their special names in local language which is generally people known to the local people and they know what is going to happen in that particular day. Therefore on each day certain events take place that are unique to that particular day only. These events are arranged in sequence for each day. Within each particular day couple of rituals takes place which finally leads to the day of wedding. In each reserved day serial events take place which comprises of many rituals or series rituals. Therefore rituals are planned events which make a sequence and lead to the wedding day.

Rituals make it possible to understand the organization of maleness and femaleness in relation to a particular society. As well as suggest how dominant ideologies are not merely complied with, accommodated, and reinforced but also resisted and interrogated.

Mostly, they are also accompanied by symbols such as a color of dress, a thing or lyric of a song with culturally recognized meanings. These symbols along with the culturally sanctioned meanings transmit from one generation to another through songs and performance of rituals. These symbolic meanings are important for the couple who is going to be married as well as for people who are present in the ceremonies. Each ritual takes care of the social hierarchy and the relationships which exist between them. The status of the relationships exists within the social hierarchy are acknowledged by the people who participate in them and believe in the ideologies by which these rituals are performed.

In Rajputs, wedding rituals generally start within a week, and after performing each ritual or series of rituals in each day, ends with the taking away of the bride to the home of the groom. Wedding used to take many days in the past but now situation has changed in the community. There may be various reasons but now due to economic and time constraints wedding days have been reduced in numbers. One of the respondents was of the opinion;

*We would like to have elaborated ritual days but due to economic reasons we have limited the days. We cannot afford to serve relatives who usually come to stay in rituals days in bride or groom's houses. People, who can afford money and can bear expenses for food and other necessities, still practice elaborated weddings. I wish I could afford and have an elaborated wedding (rituals) of my son!*

However, people who could afford economically and don't have time constraints they hold elaborated weddings.

There are four major rituals that take place during wedding days. The wedding or *barat* days has couple of event but all the events occur on the same day.

- 1) *Dua-e-khair* (pre-wedding event)
- 2) *Butna/heldi*
- 3) *Henna*

- 4) Wedding day/*barat* day
  - i) Preparation of *barat*
  - ii) Arrival of *barat*
  - iii) *Vidai*
- 5) Day after wedding

### 1. Dua-e-khair (pre-wedding setting)

After finding a suitable match for a girl and a boy the proposal acceptance ceremony takes place. The ceremony is called *Dua-e-khair*. In the past, this process used to involve barber's wife who would take active part in match making between the two families. In past times it was not unusual that the elders of the boy arrange marriage for their son even without visiting girl's family. However, now time has changed and women of the family visit different (Rajput) families for match making. When there has been an agreement between the two families, a small ritual is performed in girl's home by exchanging sweets. On this occasion, wedding date is fixed and a prayer is offered for the happiness of the couple. This ceremony ascertains certain expectations that define roles for boy and girl who may go to start new life as husband and wife.

On this event, girl's family arranges for lunch and tea eatables. A symbolic action from the boy's family is taken to prepare the girl to be ready for her future roles in her conjugal home. For example, the boy's family and especially the father-in-law (if he is not there than any maternal uncle from boy family) gives money (according to economic his status) to the girl as a token of agreement and honor for the bride. The money given by her father-in-law symbolizes her status as an important part of some other family i.e. a man's wife. This also signifies the dominant position of the two men (father-in-law and her husband) in her life.

One of the respondents shared her views about her daughter's *Dua-e-khair*;

*My girl is lucky that her father-in-law gave him 3000/RP<sup>1</sup> on her Dua-e-khair day! Otherwise some miser people give very little amount of money on this day. It is matter of prestige for girl and boy family too. For girl's family they are honored and their girl is valued by her in laws. For boy family, it is show off for money and wealth. Hence it is important ritual for both families.*

One woman has other point of view which is as under;

*I like the ritual but the money which father in law gives to girl is derogatory. I see it as token money for a girl who is now becomes property of her in-laws. That is ridiculous!*

Along with the contradictory views of few the people, this ritual is still continuing within the community. The people, who are not convinced to perform it, are compelled to practice it because of the social pressure and family prestige by living in the community. Due to this social demand, the girl's parents who may have given less money, do not let other people know if their daughter gets less money on *Dua-e-khair*. Therefore this ceremony is not much related to girl's personal prestige but serves as a prestige of men's wealth and honor which is symbolized through girl identity as a future daughter in law.

The change in the status of the girl symbolizes the many changes she is about to undergo in terms of home, social environment, age, and responsibility. She is also taught in a subtle way that she must accept the authority of the males in her in-laws and natal home who are responsible for her economic and social responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Pakistan currency.

Usually, the boy and the girl are not present on the occasion and all this ceremony is performed in their absence from the scene. However, they know what is going on in the meeting. It is expected that the girl should not come before her prospective in-laws as a sign of respect. No songs are performed on this occasion though it is a festive activity. Dinner or tea is served at the end of the ceremony.

## 2. *Butna/heldi*

The wedding ritual cycle starts with *butna* ritual which is one of the series of transformative phases from which bride and groom pass through. Nevertheless *butna* and the forthcoming *henna* rituals are exceptionally important for the bride. The most important function of these two rituals is purification and seclusion of the bride that ultimately leads to transformation from one phase to another phase (from unmarried status to married). Besides these two functions, the hidden purpose is to train a woman how to be obedient and submissive. Both of the rituals emphasize the passive and submissive role of women in her coming life which emphasis on her traditional role as a wife and mother.

*Butna* ceremony occurs two days before wedding. In past, this event used to take many days before actual wedding day's commencement. However, due to time constraints and economic engagements, *butna* event has shrunk to only one or two days. The *butna/heldi* is performed in the bride's and groom's homes separately but same day on a fixed date by elders of the family.

Women from family and friends are invited for the ritual. It is a women only ceremony and in a way it is expected from women as a social group that they will come and join the "gender community" to show their support for the bride who may goes through in new phase of life.

*Butna* ritual has two functions to perform. As stated earlier it enhances girl's seclusion and secondly symbolic purification of her whole body by applying a paste called *ubtan* or *butna*. Through seclusion a girl is made invisible in her own house that helps her in transformation from a girl to a woman and becoming a wife. In a way, she becomes invisible in her own home. In this "liminal condition" the bride is not allowed to bathe and work in the house. Van Gennep (1960) calls this condition the first phase in a rite of passage, the phase of separation. This "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions" (Turner, 1969:94).

Her seclusion is expected to change her behavior. Her new role as future wife ascertains some expectations from her. Hochchild (1983) proposes that a social role, such as the role of bride, carries with it expectations regarding proper emotions. She is expected not to meet everybody who comes to visit her natal home. Only a couple of her female friends or relatives are allowed to see her. These friends also take care of her and her food till wedding day. As her wedding days are near, her mobility within her own home is restricted and controlled by elders. The purpose is to train her about a new life in controlled environment with her affine. Ritual makes her to realize that her movement within her own house is restricted as she is no more a free girl. Now she is going to be the wife of some body and family member of other than her family. Therefore she learns to obey and comply with the norms of the family.

It is expected from her that she may not see her male relatives (brothers, father, male cousins etc.) and try to avoid them as much as possible. This expectation from her is due to the respect and *sharam* for her males' relatives as she is going to have intimate relations with a man. Sex is considered to be a shameful activity even it is legitimized by the elders. Therefore as she is going to have the intimate relationship

she avoids her male relatives out of respect.

The purification of her body through rubbing of a paste prepares her for her physical intimacy with her husband. The songs and rituals performed make her to learn and accept her new role.

During the ceremony she does whatever she is asked for and this ritual teaches her how to conform others. She gives her body to other women who apply paste on her body and oil her on hair. *Butna* ceremony involves applying of the paste made from turmeric powder and mustard oil all over the girl's body by her female friends or relatives. This is done to make the girl look more beautiful on wedding day. *Butna* (mixture of turmeric and sesame oil with other fragrances) is supposed to bring glow on the bride's body especially her face which is supposed to look clean, attractive and shining. *Butnais* made in a big plate in a shape of a cake, lit with candles and decorated with rose flowers along with other shining decorations. During *butna* ceremony women crack subtle sexual jokes to each other while applying *butna* to bride's body and face. These jokes convey understated messages to bride for her marital life ahead.

In *butna* ceremony the bride is expected to sit quietly and do whatever is told by the elderly women. Every woman who puts *butna* mixture on her face or hand along with some oil on her hair also stuffs her mouth with *laddu* (ball-shaped sweet meats). In old times, the girl used to sit on *choki* (a wooden small bench without arms) but now she sits on the decorated chair in the centre of the room with her women relatives and friends and she remains confined in her room or the place allotted to her in her natal home. She has to be silent and shy. She hides her face with her *dupatta*.<sup>2</sup> It was advised to her that she should not show her face to all people around so that she may look more beautiful on the wedding day. There is no compulsion on bride to wear a certain type of dress but it is advised that she should not wear new dress at this occasion. She should not look happy (even if she feels happy) or joyful on this time. This ritual demands the bride to stay at home in her old clothes for a couple of days before her wedding.

In groom house his women relatives and neighbors are invited. However, this ceremony is brief and less festive as compared to that at the bride's house. Generally he wears flower garland in his neck and a decorated red color *dupatta* is also wrapped around his shoulder as a good omen for married life. The red *dupatta* and flower garland makes him noticeable among other men of the family as a groom. The groom sits on the decorated chair (he never sits on floor which signifies his status) and women relatives (sisters, maternal and paternal aunts) apply small amount of *butna* on his palm which is more symbolic than for cleaning his skin. He doesn't apply *butna* paste on his body. Women apply fragrant oil on his hair and sometimes *surma* (*kohal*) to his eyes. His mother and other women relatives give him sweets to eat. His sisters and cousins demand some money after giving him sweets for eating. Usually he gives them money happily after negotiations about the amount of money.

Groom and his mother also receive money as a token of love and tradition from his relatives. This money is also given as an exchange which is paid by groom's mother on various other wedding ceremonies in the relatives. His sisters and other female cousins sing songs (mostly *sehra* songs) for him during the ceremony. Dinner or tea is served after the ceremony ends. *Gurr*<sup>3</sup> in large quantity and *batashe*<sup>4</sup> are served to the relatives and also sent to neighbors and relatives as a good will gesture

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<sup>2</sup> A long shawl that is used to cover face and drops at shoulder.

<sup>3</sup> Molasses.

<sup>4</sup> A dried sugar solution shaped in round cookies distributed on happy occasion specially weddings.

from the groom's family. Sweets are distributed among family members. After the ceremony ends, the male relatives of the groom, especially his friends, may hold a small function in which they crack jokes to tease him and dance. However, this is not very usual function as it depends upon family to family. In *butna*, a thread *gaana* (a golden decorated thread) is tied to groom and bride 'arms in reciprocate exchange. Besides, it is taken as omen for protection and savior of bad eye.

Unlike the bride, the groom is not expected to be invisible in his own home. Generally, he helps in wedding arrangements and spends time in other routine activities. However, he is not allowed to go far from house and is asked to spend time at home and with his male relatives.

### 3. *Henna ceremony*

Henna ritual like *butna* is also related to beautifying of bride in seclusion. The bride not only still secluded from people within the house but she has to be kept away from the evil eyes. It was believed that the red patches on the skin, as well as the original green color of the *henna* leaves and powder, protects the couple from dangers of evil eye. The *henna* changes its color (identity) from green (powder) to red (wet henna), and in this way prevents the evil eye from recognizing the bride. The red color of henna, after washing with water, on the skin of the bride symbolizes the color of happy wedded life. This is perceived as a dangerous period in which bride and groom are vulnerable to physical and mental injuries. Commonly, people think that if they are left alone, some evil spirit can harm them. Therefore, the future bride is not left alone and usually one of her friends or sisters accompanies her especially at night. The bride also wears very ordinary clothes so that any evil eye cannot spot her and hence harm her.

Henna is applied on her hands and feet in order to hide or change her identity as a she was before. It changes its color as power dry to wet paste. Similarly, covering the bride is also an expression of invisibility, one of the liminal characteristics endorsed by Turner to the persons undergoing rites of passage. Though the bride is physically visible, she is "invisible" in terms of her social status. She loses her former status; she is exposed to her symbolic expressions of appearance and behavior. Thus, during the wedding rituals, gradually the former status of being unmarried is erased (dies). In the liminal stage, as defined by Turner (1969), she does not have the previous status and not yet in the new one. She is the person who is undergoing the rite in a confused state and must learn the appropriate rules and behaviors intensively from authoritative people. The bride's *henna* ceremony is usually more magnificent than that of the groom. For the bride, this is a more significant rite of passage and a more intensive emotional experience. This is the process by which she turns from a girl into a wife and then prepares herself for leaving her parent's home for the sake of her husband. Disassociating her from the rest of her natal home, her kin and environment is part of the gradual process in which she is prepared to get ready for new home, kin and environment (Upadhyaya, 1957).

In pre-wedding ceremonies in different parts of the Asia turmeric and *henna* are especially used to drive away evil spirits (Hutchings, 2006). Henna is a perfumed shrub that, originating in India, now has spread from there to the countries of Asia and North Africa. Now the trend is changed and girls use another kind of *henna* which is more watery in nature and has different chemical composition than the old *henna* recipe. By using this *henna* mixture, delicate designs are made on the palm of the bride.

Henna ritual generally starts in the evenings and celebrated till late night. *Henna*

rituals are held for the bride and groom separately next to the *butna* ceremony on the same wedding days. *Henna* paste is prepared in big plates, and often the plate is decorated with flowers, *gota* (golden or silver lace) and candle lights. The lighting of candles on the *henna* ceremony also symbolizes light in the bride's life. The *henna* ritual begins; elderly and married women put some *henna* on the bride's palm that is covered under red veil i.e. *dupatta*. Bride supposes to dress up in green clothes. If she does not have all green dress, she may wear at least a green *dupatta* at the time of the ritual. The green color stands for fertility and also represents Mother Nature. Her green dress or *dupatta* is provided by her mother's side.

One of the women explained the significance of henna as;

*Putting henna on girl's palm serves as a good wish for her married life. Green color stand for complete happy and fertile life for the bride. If she gets a dark color in her palm after henna dries up, she will have a very happy married life and her husband would love her very much. It is symbolic in that sense.*

Another woman of the view;

*It is just our wishful thinking's that henna or any other color would bring happiness in any body's life. These ceremonies are just for fun or social gatherings. If these colors and symbols have some effect on any body's life, everybody would have been happy after marriage! Isn't?*

When the ceremony starts, the bride is seated on a decorated chair or sometimes on the mat. Older women gather around her and start putting henna mixture on her palm over a betel leave that is placed before *henna* paste is applied on the bride's palm. Then married women come one by one and apply *henna* on the palm of the bride. These married women symbolize the significance of marriage as well as indicate the higher social status of married women as compared to unmarried girls.

After putting *henna* on her palm, sweets are given to the bride for eating as a good omen for her happy married life. The women come turn by turn for putting *henna* paste on the bride's palm and their sequence of coming reflects and supports the social hierarchy. This social hierarchy within women is preserved through performance of ritual. The bride's hand and feet are decorated with intricate patterns of henna. The women and girls present on the ceremony also decorate their hands with henna. The henna decoration continues into the early hours of the morning allowing the henna to get darker and redden. When the henna is dried then it is washed away by water. Her decorated hands are smeared with oil in order to get darker and durable color of henna.

*Henna* ceremony for groom is not as elaborated as it is for the bride. The groom is brought to a room or veranda, sits on decorated chair and his aunts and female cousins gather to perform the ceremony. Groom wears ordinary clothes and symbolically wears a red *dupatta*. The red color of the *dupatta* signifies a wish for happy married life. He sits on a decorated chair and a beetle leave is placed on his hand. His aunts and married sisters/cousins put *henna* on his palm. They give him sweets to eat as an omen of happy married life. Besides, money is also given to the groom from the relatives. The ceremony starts in the evening and continues late at night. Relatives and friends are served with tea and dinner.

The biggest show of their wealth and respect among other people is how they take the *barat* to bride house. Therefore the grandeur of *barat* reflects their honor and social networking on girl's family and among their won relatives.

In short *butna* and *henna* rituals are the part of the symbolic process of transformation for both girl and boy. However, it is more focus on girl and that is one



of the reasons that many rituals along with the songs are focused on the bride and performed in her home. She has to go through more changes therefore she needs to be taught more than the boy. The role, the status of the girl and her physical removal from her parent's house to in laws changes, therefore the rituals in the girl's family becomes more important and significant

#### 4. Wedding day/*barat*<sup>5</sup>

*Butna* and *henna* ceremonies lead to the wedding day. Wedding day (locally called *barat* day) includes many events and rituals that place in the same day both in bride and groom houses. It is the ultimate event among the all wedding day rituals.

Usually, the wedding ceremony takes place in the village of the bride, where all expenses during the ceremonial day are met by the girl's parents. Because the social standing of the bride's family is risky as the *Izzat* (respect and honor) of the groom's family depends on how well they were treated on this auspicious day. Although hospitality given and received by both sides reflects their present social positions, it also demarcates the closeness of their future interaction, and ultimately, the happiness of the bride (Gill, 1998).

In bride's home, the bride's maternal uncle (*mammon*) plays an important role by initiating the ceremony of the wedding day. After taking money from her maternal uncle (*mamu*) she takes bath and gets ready for bridal dress. This ritual is called *patrautarna*. A similar ritual is found in ancient Greek where girls used to take bath for the wedding day ceremonies. Similarly, this ritual symbolizes the purification of body and preparation for her future life. If the bride does not have a real maternal uncle, then any other of her mother's male cousin gives money to her. The money she gets from her uncle serves as a *shagoon*<sup>6</sup> for her future life. Money symbolizes for wealth.

After the bride is dressed up, brought on the stage or centre of the room and sits on chair or sofa. Her face is covered with her *dupatta*. Traditionally, Rajput bridal dress is *shalwarqameez* of red color. However, with other color combinations, more colors are added in order to make it more beautiful. Beautiful designs of silver and golden threads and pearls are made on the *shalwarqameez* and *dupatta* for the bridal dress. The bride is given very heavy dowry that sometimes seems to be beyond the economic status of her parents. The wedding dress and all the jewelry is given to the bride by her parents and bride does not wear anything from her in-laws as she is still the daughter of her parents. This signifies her last day in her natal home, her relationship and ownership of her parents.

Usually, dowry consists of clothes for bride, groom and her in-laws, jewelry, furniture, utensils, electronic gadgets and other daily items that a girl may use in her new home for next coming year or so. Generally, 50-60 dresses are given to the bride, which she wears on many family functions and invitations. Even for the departure ceremony when the bride leaves her parental home, the *shawl* (wrap or *burqa*) to cover her is also provided by her parents. Women gather around her to see her and her friends and cousins sing many songs for her. It is usually women- only event and men are not allowed to join them.

##### a) Preparation of *barat*

In the groom's home, groom takes bath and wears new clothes (usually an off white

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<sup>5</sup> Groom party procession to bride' home.

<sup>6</sup> Omen for happiness and prosperity.

color *gameez* and white *shalwar*) and then ceremony of *sehra*<sup>7</sup>*bandi*<sup>8</sup> takes place. In this ceremony, groom's sister's husband (brother-in-law) is asked to put *sehra* on groom's head. In this way, the brother-in-law is given importance in the ceremony that helps in easing out the tensions within the family and his sister if there are any. The status of brother in law (sister's husband) is considered superior among his in laws. So he is given importance by accepting his supremacy within his affine. If the groom does not have any brother-in-law then his brother or father takes part in *sehrabandi* ceremony.

The *sehra* is usually made up of fresh flowers and some decorations. The flowers are individually lined up in a thread making it a long bead. *Motia* (white jasmine) and red rose flowers are used in making *sehra*. The long beads of flowers hanged from head to knees of the groom. To keep *sehra* intact groom also wears an embellished turban. Besides white dress a red embellished *dupatta* which is draped on his shoulders and flower garlands also hang down around his neck. The foot gear may also be some times traditional one. Otherwise groom wears black shoes. He sits with his friends before getting ready for departure of *Barat*. When he gets ready for *Barat* departure to bride house, he is asked to pay respects to his mother, father and other paternal and maternal uncles.

This is the most important event in groom's wedding ceremony. Most of the songs for the groom are for this particular occasion *sehrabandi* is an emotional event for parents, sisters and brothers of the groom. Many emotional and dramatic scenes are witness during *sehrabandi* event and gets more dramatic if the father or mother of the groom is not alive. Mother of the groom usually cries with happiness as she thinks that she is blessed and witness of this ultimate happy day. She dreams whole life for this day that her son will get married and will wear *sehra*. Groom's sisters and brothers feel proud of him. They all become emotional on the moments when *sehrabandi* ritual is performed. The *sehrabandi* songs also add emotions to the event. The lyrics of the songs make everybody poignant.

After *sehrabandi*, the groom's father invites people for lunch or dinner and they take food while getting ready for *barat*. Traditionally in Rajputs, women are never allowed to go along with *barat* procession. It is very old tradition of Rajputs which is still practiced. One of the respondents told me the interesting explanation for this. She says that

*Wedding procession is like going for war for Rajputs. They are going to conquer somebody most precious thing like in war they used to do. In old times, Rajputs never take their women along with them while going for a war but they neither leave them alive too. They used to kill their women when they prepared themselves for the war. They used to feel dishonored if their women were captured or married to non-Rajput. So in the same way for barat they avoid women to take along. Only men accompany groom for the barat procession if bride home is on walking distance then barat procession goes on foot. If it is far from groom house then barat is taken in cars, and buses. However in old times groom travels on decorated horse in barat procession. People who wants traditional wedding, the groom still rides on decorated horse.*

## **b) Arrival of barat (in bride house)**

This is the most important day of wedding events. In bride family, bride relatives receive *barat* with happiness and anxiety. They are nervous about the arrangements of

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<sup>7</sup> A decorated turban wrapped around groom's head on wedding day.

<sup>8</sup> The ceremony is called *sehrabandi*.

food and reception till the departure of the bride. It is assumed that any misunderstanding or mismanagement can cause trouble in their daughter life. Mostly, the parents of the bride make every effort to manage everything from reception of *Barat*, food serving and till the departure of their daughter. The arrival of *Barat* creates lot of panic among bride relatives. Everyone gets alert and anxious to receive them with respect and excitement. The men of the bride family rush to the *Barat* and receive them well before their home. They present them garlands, shake hands and hug them. Then the whole procession is taken to the place which is reserved for them. *Barat* is served with cold drink like *sharbat/lussi*<sup>9</sup> in summer and tea in winter. The lunch is served after drinks. The *barati* (people who come with *Barat*) are repeatedly asked for food. This is customarily required from the bride relatives to ask many times for food or other arrangements from *baratis* as a gesture of hospitality.

Brides' parents arrange for *nikahkhawaan* (officially authorized person who register marriage contract) and other formalities for *nikah*. *Nikah* is the real marriage contract between bride and groom and after signing to the agreement, they become husband and wife. Sweets especially *chowaras* (dried dates) are distributed among all relatives and people greet each other and offer prayers for bride and groom' future life. After *nikah*, food is served to the guests.

After taking food, the groom is invited to sit with bride. Bride and groom usually see each other after *nikah*. Not all men are allowed to enter into the women place where bride is sitting. Only a couple of groom's friend or close relatives accompany him when he comes to sit with his wife. Mother-in-law of the groom gives him wrist watch and gold ring as a gift. If mother in law is not present then bride's maternal or paternal aunt performs the ritual. On this occasion women crack jokes and make comments on the groom. Both parties make fun of each other in comic way. Not much time is spent on this rite. Sometimes *doodhpilae* (milk drinking) ritual also takes place in bride home. It is the same ritual but the sequence of the milk drinking changes when it takes place at bride home. It is the bride who drinks milk first. So her relatives wish to have power over the groom in coming life. Many relatives of the bride give money and gifts to the groom on this occasion.

### c) *Vidai* (departure of bride from natal home)

After the gifts are taken, the groom's father asks from bride's father for the departure of *Barat* and the next event *vidai* (departure of bride from her father home for husband house) takes place. Relatives of the bride get emotional on this occasion. All her relatives hug her and give her their blessings. Most emotional scenes are seen when she meets her father and brothers. *Mirasaan* sings emotional songs on this occasion making people more emotional and lots of crying is done by bride parents and relatives.

After some time, the *barat* procession along with the bride leaves the bride's house. Only one of the bride's brothers accompanies her to her new home. When *barat* reaches near the groom's home, his friends dance on the drumbeats and popular songs. Sometimes, display of fireworks also takes place. In this way, people get to know that *Barat* is back with bride.

There are certain rituals which are performed when bride reaches at her affine house. Women relatives receive bride at the door. The mother of the groom, who remains at home along with other women relatives, receives the bride. Before the bride enters into the house sesame oil is poured on the doorsteps of the house. This is an omen which signifies the good luck and happy wealthy days for the new couple

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<sup>9</sup> A drink in which yoghurt is mixed with water and milk.

and especially for the bride who is becoming a new family member of the house. It also symbolizes that she will bring wealth and good fortune for the family members. When she steps in and crosses the door step of the house, many women congratulate mother of the groom on the marriage of her son and pray for the good fortune the bride bring along with her. In old times and some of the Rajput families still practice this ritual, when the bride used to arrive in her affine home, she was asked to sit on a mat on the floor in her room. This ritual was performed to realize the bride that she has less status as compared to her in-laws and she should not think herself higher in status to her in-laws. She was expected to remain humble and self-effacing to others. One of my respondents told me that she was made to sit on the mat at though it was very cold at her wedding day and she sat there for many hours.

The other ritual is *doodhpilai* (milk drinking). A glass is decorated with golden laces and other shining decorations. The decorated glass of milk is offered to the bride and the groom to drink together. The groom is asked to drink milk first and then bride takes it. The sequence of drinking milk is important and groom takes it first so that the bride will remain under his control and authority. Bride is not allowed to drink milk first. The sisters of groom also demand money from their brother after drinking milk. The girls start their demand of large amount of money. However after time taking negotiations and interventions of some elders groom and his sister in law agree on a certain amount of money. The groom then pays the money to his sister in law(s). While this ritual is performed everybody present in the room take part in money bargaining activity. Lots of shouting and noise takes place as everybody suggest groom to pay suggested amount of money. Some people suggest girls too to take as much money as possible from groom. This ritual ends with lot of entertainment and funfair.

The room is decorated with lots of shining and colorful buntings. The walls of the room are decorated with multi-colored buntings and the roof of the room is decorated with paper chandeliers. The bed of the bride and groom is decorated with flower garlands. Usually rose flowers are used for decorations. Some shining embellishment is also added in the flower garlands. The door of the room is also decorated making it distinguishable from rest of the rooms in the house.

After spending several hours sitting in front of people who come to see the newly married bride, she is allowed to go the room which is decorated for them. The bride along with groom sisters and other women relatives goes to her decorated room. When the time comes for the groom to go into their room, groom's sisters and cousins stop him at the door of the room. This ritual is called *baarhrukwae*. They demand some amount of money from him. They asked him to pay them money otherwise he will not be allowed to enter into the room. Lots of jokes are cracked by people around him and on his behalf negotiations takes place. After sometime and negotiations, the groom agrees to pay money to his sisters and cousins. The sisters and cousins of the groom then let him go into the bride's room.

When the groom enters into his room another ritual takes place that is called *godaabithai*. The groom youngest brother (*devar*) sits with bride on groom's seat. If he is an adult, then he sits on the chair near to bride and if he is a child then he sits in bride's lap. He does not allow his elder brother to sit with his wife. He demands some money from his elder brother to vacate his seat near to bride's seat and sits with the bride (his sister in law) until the groom offers him some money to vacate the chair. When the groom pays the mutually accepted amount of money, his youngest brother vacates the seat next to his wife.

## 5. After the wedding day

The bride is allowed to visit her natal home after two or three weeks of the wedding day. After spending two to three weeks in her affine house she is allowed to visit her natal home for the first time after her wedding. Traditionally the younger brother of the bride (or her cousin if the brother is not there) comes to her in-laws house and asks their permission and then takes his sister for one or two days to her natal home. If her brother (or cousin) does not come for her, she is not allowed to visit her natal home. No body from her in laws will take her or she is not allowed to visit her alone for the first time after getting married. This is to realize her that she is now dependent on her in-laws family and she is not a free bird as she used to be in her father home.

Labeling her with honor of the family limits her movement and independence within outside home. She has to accompany any relative (man or woman of the family) while going outside home. Especially, for her first visit to her natal home she has to wait for somebody from her parents' home to take her. Usually it is the responsibility of the brother comes and takes her to her natal home. Her brother visits her sister and brings some gifts (clothes or jewelry) for her in laws. He stays with her sister' in-laws home for one or two days. After staying he takes her sister to her parent's home for her visit after her wedding. After staying for one or two days with her parents, her husband visits his in-laws for the first time and takes her back to her conjugal home. At his first visit to his in-laws, the son-in-law is offered many gifts that may include gold ring, money, motor cycle or car. Bride also collects many gifts from her parents for her in-laws that may include clothes for the groom, his father, mother, sisters and their husbands, brothers and their wives, their children, and the groom's uncles and aunties. This again shows the flow of gifts items from bride side to groom's family.

## 6. Conclusion

This article looks at ethnographic detail of wedding rituals of Rajput community living in Wahndo in Pakistan. The wedding ceremony comprise of many days which help the new couple to understand the duties of the life which they are going to spend in coming years. These rituals prepare the new couple their responsibilities and expectations from each other and from members of their families (both bride and groom).

The rituals like *butna* and *henna* prepares bride for her new traditional status as a wife taking care of the gender stereotypical roles. Going through seclusion and purification process she learns to obey and comply with her new relatives. The rituals like *doodhpilae*, *baarhrukwae* and *godabithai* exhibit the male domination and supremacy within the household. These rituals ensure men's economic independence and women dependence on them. Through the continuity and transfer of these rituals the social order of female subordination and male domination is transmitted from one generation to other generations. These rituals maintain the male supremacy as a normalcy in daily lives of the women. In ritual like *doodhpilae* shows that groom is supposed to drink it first so that he can assert his control over his wife. Dowry the huge financial burden for bride's parents may become one of the causes as the birth of the baby girl is not celebrated in the families.

Further rituals such as *doodhpilai*, *baarhrukwai* reveal that women are ecumenically and socially dependent on men. In the same way bride family is inferior to groom family. The flow of gifts items from bride family to groom family is symbolic as the status of the bride family is considered inferior to the groom's. Stay of bride' brother in her in-laws house is to make him to realize that her sister is now property of her in-

laws and without their permission she cannot go anywhere including her natal home. Starting from the *due-khairtill* the bride goes to her in laws house, they remain tense and nervous as any mistake in the honor of the groom family may put their daughter life at risk. On the other hand, bride goes through rituals that favor groom (male) and ascertain her about her status in her affine. The songs through ridiculing groom party by bride party release the tension which dominates bride party throughout the wedding days. Therefore, this study shows that both songs and rituals during wedding reinforce male dominance and supremacy in Rajput community. There have been some contradictory views about symbolic roles of these of these ceremonies but still they are being practiced due to their social demand on the people who are living in the community.

Wedding ceremonies serve many purposes. Firstly they are symbolic in nature as a couple is transformed from being unmarried to being married, passing through rituals by which their role changes from one to another. In this way, they become aware of their new obligations and rights and obtain approval for their new identity as husband and wife. Secondly, they forces and reinforce ideologies and roles within the community from one generation to another. In this way they maintain the social order in the community who practice it and acknowledge it.

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