

MORTUARY RITUALS: RITES DE PASSAGE IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *From the very beginning of the discipline, there is noted a special interest in rituals regarding funerary contexts-funerary inventory, body of the deceased and the treatment applied to it. Though it holds an equal significance in archaeology as well as cultural anthropology, the aim of this study was to explore only the cultural factors affecting burial rituals in Chakwal. Rituals are typically formal social ceremonies that take place in a prescribed way, often in a sacred context. The natural fact of life which cannot be disputed is that everyone who is born has to die. Death of an individual is marked by the announcement of death and performance of his funerary rites. The study was conducting in Dhudial village of Chakwal selecting a sample of 53 respondents through questionnaire convenient sampling. The data was collected qualitatively, which was then analyzed and presented through percentage analysis. The research reveals variances in those rites performed within a culture on the basis of ethnic and sectarian differences mainly. Also the customs varied according to the status, age, sex/ gender, but was also be an idiosyncratic choice of the mourners. It was found that economic and material resources have mainly influenced the diversity of funerary practices than anything else.*

Key Words: Local Culture, Rituals, Death, Mortuary, Burial Rituals

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of death and the funerary behavior are some of the most fascinating and productive areas of investigation within the scope of anthropology [1]. Death is a universal phenomenon with an incredible variety of responses to it. "Corpses are burned or buried with or without human sacrifices; they are preserved by smoking, embalming or picking; they are eaten –raw, cooked or rotten; they are ritually exposed as carrion or simply abandoned or they are dismembered and treated in a variety of ways" [2]. Ever since the publication of Les Rites de passage in 1909, the phrase "Rites de passage" has become the part and parcel of anthropological literature. Human rituals have been mainly characterized in three successive yet distinct stages by Van Gennep; separation, margin and aggregation. He defines rites de passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" [3].

A ritual is a specific action that gives symbolic axons of certain feelings of groups and individuals. Rituals represent a symbolic assertion of values by means of culturally consistent exclamations and actions. From this perception, rituals seem to perform precise roles in a given society or culture [4]. Rites of passage mark evolution points in the lives of individuals from birth to death. In every culture different kinds of death are understood differently and deal with differently. Rituals perform accordingly to the kind of death whether the death was suicidal, accidentally under age under maternal mortality or a drowning, if the deceased is child, a woman who has died in childbirth or a violent death. The structure of death rituals vary from region to region. Events likely birth and death are treated as special every culture has its own distinctive way to depart its loved ones by utilizing conventional, collective sites like crematorium grounds, cemetery, in regard to their religious beliefs [5]. These rituals may have enormous religious, communal and personal importance for deceased's family reflecting the values and social structure of their culture.

Rituals important to the culture may leave the people at loss to realize and accept death or to find a sense of closure. Death is an important event in an individual's life although it is the

culmination of a journey of the individual which started with the birth and through different stages and struggles ended in the death. Here according to Van Gennep's stages, we can say that death results in an individual's separation from the world as its first stage, he when treated like a dead body is kind of a marginalized from the living in the second phase and then in its last stage it gets aggregated with the other souls who passed away previously in another world. Mortuary rituals serve as the rites de passage of an individual which if unserved leaves the deceased in the liminal space.

For many it is not the end but the beginning of a new one phase of life to another, a moment when an individual moves from fathomable universe in to unfathomable universe. People celebrate these events with rituals which are special to each ethnic group from the development of these societies. Death like birth and destiny is not based on personal efforts [6]. Every journey into an unknown path, a spiritual transition from the death ritual contains very strong patriarchal features, women playing significant role in grief declaration, suggesting a more matriarchal oriented ritual association. The impact of sudden death is more intense than death after prolonged illness [7]. On the other hand; Death is "the act of dying; the end of life; the total and permanent ending of all the dynamic purposes of Human being" [8]. Death is not felt as sudden obliteration of a person's life. Death is rather to be seen as a social event, the starting point of a rituals started when the dead person become an ancestor. Death is like the begging of social afterlife, making it a kind of rebirth [9]. Mourning the dead is a Common exercise that practice religiously and culturally in different society's. This usually included certain values, norm, spiritual practices, and certain predictable actions that will be the symbol of mourning the death of a loved one.

METHDOLOGY

This study was proposed to investigate the local culture context of death rituals. The data was collected in the area of Dhudial village of Chakwal. The sample of the study was 53 using the tool of semi structured questionnaire through purposive sampling. The data is represented in the form of table and analyzed by using percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Custom acts as a claim on the past that is intended to enlighten present issues. It represents a return to the values and morals of the older times. It is an affirmation of cultural and political identity. When it comes to customary performances at the occurrence of a death; the emotion provoked by death varies in intensity according to the social status of the deceased [10].

When somebody dies, our sorrow and tears, our weeping and mourning soon cease. The funeral rites, the ceremonies performed at the locale by the mourners, generally are comprised of *qul*, *daswan*, *beeswan*, *teeswan*, *chehlum* ceremonies which are performed and then all is forgotten. Though these ceremonies are not followed by all the families of the area. Longer the funeral arrangements, higher the impact on social consciousness [1]. There may be annual death anniversary or *barsi* ceremonies arranged by the mourners in some families.

Table No 1: Death Rituals

Questions	Response set	%
Existence of sectarian/cultural differences	Yes	84.9%
	No	15.1%
Catharsis & Condolences	Yes	60.4%
	No	39.6%
Color & Action symbolism	Yes	18.9%
	No	81.1%
Difference in grave style	Yes	54.7%
	No	54.3%
Transformation in grave style	Yes	71.7%
	No	28.3%
Funeral artifacts buried with the deceased	Yes	17.0%
	No	83.0%
Gender based difference in bathing the dead	Yes	64.4%
	No	35.8%
	No	43.4%
Offering the deceased's prayers	Yes	77.4%
	No	22.6%

The above mentioned table shows the results of the data. 84.9% respondents said that there is an existence of sectarian difference in the funerary rites, since funerary rituals and religion itself have the specific purpose to reintegrate the shattered group solidarity and reestablish its morale [11]. Whereas 15.1% respondents said that the societal traditions

determine the death rituals not the sects. One such example is cementing the grave and its décor that is unanimously accepted by all sects is generally prohibited in religion yet people do it as a matter of tradition and to show concern for the deceased. More briefly, the variability of funerary practice of a culture is a function of social differentiation which determines the treatment of the deceased [12].

60.4% respondents said that though death rituals differ in every sect yet have a cathartic element associated to it. While 39.6% said that the length and type of death rituals do not do any good to the mourners. People said that they perform their rituals according to their faith, yet culture shapes up the prevailing customs where condolences act as the best therapeutic measure that brings about the in-group members closer. Multiple functions and the content complexity of funerary practices focus in particular on the cathartic purposes and those of strengthening the group solidarity [13]. When a death has ensued, there are prescribed activities and rituals done such as what is worn, how the grieving are addressed, how emotional state should be dealt with and what will be done to indicate the separation of the dead from the people who are left behind and rituals exist in every community defining for everyone the suitable actions [14]. Though the findings suggest that only 18.9% people believed that there is an existence of color symbolism for the mourners that is followed and a prescribed way for everyone in the deceased family depending upon the relation with the deceased. While 81.1% respondent said no color difference at the time of death. It is sudden and nobody thinks about changing the dress yet it may be followed by the mourners as they get over by the burial ceremony. Rituals can be used both as reversing or masking the social relations and as the presentation of idealized situation of relations between the social actors [1].

71.7% people thought that there is a major transformation in grave style where 28.3% people believe that there is no alteration in grave style. Previously at first, hole sized a grave was dug up, after that one side of grave wall was dug for another hole that could only fit the dead body, that was called as *Lehad* formation. But now simple graves are dug to bury the deceased. Graves were supposed to be dug up by the closest relatives or close group members where it must have been an expression of social solidarity of the deceased's group member but it is no more a common practice, rather *Gor kan* are hired for dug up that may have lacked the social cohesion established otherwise [1.] There is a direct link between the material culture associated with funerary practices and the form and complexity of social organization [15-19]. 17.0% people agreed that funeral artifacts are buried with the deceased whereas 83.0% people said that no artifacts are buried with deceased. The findings suggested that they were mainly related in accordance with the sectarian difference e.g. *Wahhabis* did not bury anything with deceased because they thought when somebody died their relationship with the world and worldly objects come to an end. "The person faces the future all alone, hidden away in the domain of the earthworms, buried under the earth in a desolate grave. He was in the light and now he is in darkness. He was surrounded by beauty and spaciousness and now he is

enclosed in narrowness and gloom. He was in bliss and he now is in torment” [20]. Sunni and Shia buried artifacts with deceased like Quran and shia used *Khaake-e- shafa* and *aqeeq* often in the deceased’s mouth. The very clay and stone are representative of the shia *Imam* who are then supposed to take care of the deceased.

In the past the closest family members would bathe the cadaver to protect the dead and the relatives from the death pollution [21]. 64.0% Respondents said that there exists a bathing difference according to the sex of the deceased where 35.8% respondents said there is no such difference. They said that the body of the deceased should be washed with clean water and, if available, lotus leaves, or camphor. The steps of the washing should be done at least thrice or any further in odd number if necessary to cleanse appropriately. Bathing is usually done by same sex. Bathing the women can be done by their daughters or by incorporating the group members. With the death of an individual, the social relationships established by him also come to an end. This system of relations must be recreated and renegotiated by the interventions of the survivors and the descendants of the dead [1].

Burials take different forms depending on local customs and tradition, as well as the religious background of the dead person and his or her family [22,23]. 77.4% respondents said that funeral prayer differ in every sect where 22.6% said there is no difference. Major difference as narrated was that of steps in prayers. It was said that Shias attended the sunni funeral but sunnis did not pray the shia funeral.

Gender, Age and Status wise difference of Graves

56.6% respondents said that gender wise difference in grave style i.e. according to the height and structure of the deceased whereas 43.4% respondent said there is no difference in gender grave. The literature finds not much evidence of gender wise difference of graves from pre-historic and ancient order either.

People from all sects believe that a premature, incomplete, aborted fetus bears no funerary rites and are buried at max in a corner of the graveyard. A baby who has breathed after birth and they have listened to *Azan* is buried in graveyard. Funeral rituals are then offered by the religious clerics or the scholars. If the deceased was an infant then it could be carried by a single person, but in the case of adult it must be carried by 4-6 persons atleast. After death the body must not be left alone till buried. It is considered essential for females to get buried by their *Mahram*. From this point of view, for Parker Pearson the analysis should focus on the following aspects: “spatial positioning of the deposition places for the dead in relation to the world of the living (the existence of boundary elements between these two), differentiation between buried individuals (what roles are expressed and idealized within the funerary practices and why), what objects are associated exclusively with the deceased, the relationship between the context of deposition and other forms of expressions related to death (ancestor shrines, cenotaphs etc)” [24]. The social status of the deceased if elevated, either ascribed or achieved; based on his genealogy or spiritual followings determines its disposition.

CONCLUSION

Quite simply, death is unavoidable and an unescapable feature of human existence. To sum up in functionalist perspective accepting ritual actions in funerary contexts may have multiple explanations; burial as a collective representation of the group (Hertz); where the study reflected it in terms of sects, as a means to create an obligation’ where it serves as a mechanism for inter group alliances or renegotiations of contacts, as a forum to exchange of gifts (Maus) where mortuary inventory is bought up by in-group members or exchange goods bought up by out-group members, as a mechanism for maintaining social stability (Malinowski); in terms of bringing equilibrium through death, and as an opportunity to strengthen family relationships (Radcliffe Brown); when all the grievances and conflicts are set apart forming a cohesive group. Mortuary rituals are hence found calming the shock of death and reintegration of the shattered group.

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