

Contextual Representation of Mourning Rituals: A Case Study of Rural Punjab (Pakistan)

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Abstract

This study is conducted to explore the mourning rituals performed in the rural area of Punjab Pakistan. Specifically, the research focusses on the dynamics between culture and death rituals signified through different religio-cultural practices. The qualitative methods are used employing ethnographic research design. To analyze the data, the thematic analysis technique is used. The study found that the people in rural areas of Punjab perform different rituals on death to show their emotions and intensity of grief. The results show that people in this area practice rituals following their religious and cultural beliefs to please the soul of the deceased as well as to show their reaction towards grief. The findings of this study reveal that wailing, crying, cutting one's body and burning the stick of sage are a few of the mourning rituals that are commonly prevalent in rural Punjab to express grief. Moreover, different folklores are also sung to dialogue the departed soul with other community members and God, which is a great source of attention seeking for showing massive grief. Nature of death and economic disparity is also played a major role while expressing the grief. Generally, the bereaved families use such rituals to get an escape from the grief. To sum up the study found that the death rituals to express and share individuals' grief are decline in the culture of rural Punjab.

Keywords: Morning Rituals, Rural Culture, Death, Grief.

Introduction

Richard B. Lee has quoted “death is inevitable” but the meaning people attach to death, its causes and aftermath, is culturally given. Without meaning, without culture making sense of things, life would be impossible. Culture refers to the social behavior, set of ideas and customs of society. All cultures are incorporated by the different values, beliefs, objectives, languages, symbols, traditions and rituals in a particular group of people in a society. Culture modifies the behavior of the individuals to perform the rites on different occasions in a specific way. Customs and rituals produce a sense of normalcy and give assistance to the people how to approach death. After the demise of a loved one many people experience grief. The reaction of happiness and grief are not intentional actions but involuntary. Therefore, the practice to express the feelings of grief is different across cultures. Each culture has its own way to practice rituals that are influenced by grief (Payne, 2007).

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Understanding and respecting cultural variations in grief and grieving is crucial. Some civilizations hold the idea of an afterlife or spiritual world, which can give individuals who are grieving solace and hope. Grief may be more openly and publicly exhibited in some cultures while being more privately and reserved in others. During the grieving process, it is crucial to respect and support each person's cultural practices and beliefs since they can bring solace and meaning to a trying time (Dezutter et al., 2008).

The celebration of death is directly linked with different customs and beliefs. For many, death is not the end of journey which start with the birth but a transition from one phase to another phase. The practicing of rituals upon death have purpose and meaning. They are essential parts of the human experience that represent their views on life, death, and the hereafter (Rosaldo, 1988). Rituals are symbolic actions and activities that are frequently carried out to pay regard to dead, show respect, and offer consolation to bereaved. Funeral services, wakes, burials, cremations, and memorial services are a few examples of these rites. The frequently entail certain rituals are wearing attire or jewelry, making prayers or incense, and engaging in certain dances or music (Price, 2008).

Death is a major event in the life of humans. Every living being must experience death. Every culture in the globe has a unique style of bidding one's farewell. Everyone must deal with loss and grief at some point in their lives. Every person experience and manages grief in their own unique manner. It is crucial to remember that these customs and ceremonies don't have to be exact and can change based on the deceased person's and their family's particular culture, religion, and personal preferences. This ethnographic study has been organized to understand the anthropological analyses of mourning rituals in Punjabi society. By examining the contemporary mourning rituals, the study addresses the social, cultural, and historical factors that influence the mourning rituals in rural Punjab Pakistan. Through a comprehensive ethnographic exploration, this study provides a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics of mourning rituals in rural Punjab.

Methodology

Research methodology is describing as to solving a social problem in a systematic way. Primarily it is a science which describes how to conduct research scientifically (Kothari, 2004). The significant purpose of an ethnographic study is to benefit with rich detailed data obtained from the fieldwork through personal engagement (Denzin, 1997). The motive of ethnographic study is to draw the reader's intention to gain the inside perspective through the everyday activities of the people. Ethnography explains the social world of the little faction of people including their interests, rules and activities along with style of engagement (Holt & Sparkes, 2001). The researcher describes the social world one's sees overtly or covertly through becoming a member of himself. This study is qualitative in nature and based on grounded theory. An ethnographic technique is used in this study to investigate minor realities of social setting and come to know the real dynamics of the cultural phenomenon. The fieldwork for this study was organized for the duration of few months which was the obligation of the MPhil study. It involves the use of various techniques and tools to collect and analyze data. Participant observation was the primary tool for data collection, whereas focus group discussion (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were also conducted with the research participant to know about the normative beliefs.

It was asked to the respondents to share their opinion and appropriate experiences with respect to the rituals of death, the social collaboration between bereaved period, the context of death and the traditional practices perform right after the death. A comprehensive discussion was also arranged

to portray the clear picture of the data collected through field work in the local culture. In this study cultural relativist perspective has been used for getting information during the utilization of the data. Gate keepers are required during field research, specifically in ethnography to get access to the research site. However, in this research there was no need for gate keeper because the researcher belongs to indigenous community. The significant purpose of an ethnographic study is to benefit with rich detailed data obtained from the fieldwork through personal engagement (Denzin, 1997).

Findings

The study's findings are outlined in the following chapter.

Nature of Death

The nature of death has a significant impact on the mourning rituals that are practiced. It makes a suitable and unsuitable environment for the bereaved family for grief. If someone is ill for a long time, the family is mentally prepared to face the situation. They make advance arrangements in the home such as washing clothes, making space for guests, and cleaning up the home. One of the participants views about sudden death as, “the sudden news of someone’s death is like a bomb dropped over head. Although we all belong to Allah but always pray that sudden death should not happen. It is very painful”.

The study found that the sudden death of a loved one extremely hurt people’s emotion. A person who died after a long course of time spent with the illness is not affected as to hear the sudden demise of someone.

Few people die at a young age before getting married. Therefore, several significant death rituals are performed while unmarried person die. The family of the deceased wear him/her new clothes and garlanded (necklace around the neck). After death the outfit of the groom to put on the corpse is considered as perform the rituals of marriage along with the death.

The death while committing suicide is one of the major causes of death in the rural setting. If one of the members of the family committed suicide the family is considered a dig for them. Death by committing suicide is considered a stigmatized death in community. There is no funeral prayer allowed in Islam for those who are committed suicide. Even you cannot have buried them in the cemetery of the Muslims.

One of the respondents said that “following the Islamic point of view suicide and other ways for self-harm is considered as sin in the Islam. Committed suicide sends a negative vibe about the family in the community. They are considered as no belief on God.”

The age of the dead is also affected by the mourning rituals. In case of the elder person dies the grief is comparatively low while the death of the younger one. One of the participants said that:

We did not celebrate grief after the death of grandfather. We threw rupees on the corpse. He had a joyful life. He saw his offspring and his grandchildren. His belly remained full in his entire life and die peacefully. He spends joyful days on the earth, and we are happy.

Socio-religious Practices

Culture and religion are the most dominant elements which are used to set the guidelines for the disposal of the dead and determine the period of mourning in rural communities. Death rituals are the cultural blueprints that shapes the attitudes and behaviors of the individuals which are granted by forefathers. Individuals learn behaviors as members of society.

According to Rasheed:

Death is very important to us culturally and religiously as it is influenced by our beliefs and practices. Every human being has done many sins in his/her life intentionally and unintentionally. However, we make Dua for the soul and it is religiously important to commemorate death for a few days.

After the burial of the corpse, a series of mourning practices begins. According to Haider, “we sit at least three days to accept the condolences after the death of our beloved one. Few carries this sitting up to seven or eleven days. They recite the Quran and Darood to give reward to the dead.” It is rarely practiced there are some local customs that are observed during death rituals in rural Punjab. For example, it is common for mourners to wear white or black clothing as a symbol of mourning and distribute charity (sadaqah) in the name of deceased as well as gives money to the mosque. Death rituals in rural Punjab, are a combination of Islamic practices and local customs. These rituals provide a way for the community to come together and support the bereaved during a difficult time.

One of the respondents said that “we try our best to perform rituals within the context of religion.” According to Adeel:

Cultural and religious rituals are mandatory for us. If we do not perform religious rituals people consider that they have no grief about the loss of their loved ones. If one can deny performing the rituals their relatives celebrate the rituals as sympathy to the corpse.

In rural communities, religion is a central part of daily life, and the community may turn to religious leaders for guidance and support during times of grief and loss. Religious practices and rituals also play a significant role in how death is perceived and dealt with, with funeral rites and mourning customs being deeply influenced by religious traditions.

Expression of Grief

There are several ways to express grief. The intimacy and relationship played a massive role in the reaction of the grieved family. The study shows that women wailing is a traditional practice over the death to express their grief. One of the young boys in the community was murdered by the Punjab Police. His father started wailing loudly everywhere in the hospital, streets and in the village as well. Wailing is a gage to measure grief.

According to Anum, “wailing is traditionally practiced in our society whenever death happened in the community. Females practiced this as a traditional way to express grief. Few men are also started wailing unconsciously when their beloved one died”.

The study investigates mourners also express their bereavement in the shape of poetry. Some people sing lyrics while others have read them randomly. There is another modern technique to show the intensity of grief that is explained by Badar. He explained that if someone posted the news of someone's death on the social media it is considered as the deceased is very close to him. Additionally, few people build their narrative to judge the grief of others towards their deceased by posting a post on social media and those who did not post on social media.

Economic Disparity

The economic position of the family also played a major role in performing the morning rituals. After the death of loved ones there are some special activities are performed by the bereaved family inwardly and outwardly for example: *Katam parhana* (make a delicious food at home and take it to the religious person's home or in the mosque) and regularly visit the cemetery respectively.

The menu for lunch and dinner also makes disparity between the poor and rich. People from financially strong backgrounds serve chicken and beef to the visitors. While poor serve with *Dal* (lentils). One of the participants, Hanif shared his views that the families with strong financial positions mourn as many days as they want and serve the expensive food to the mourners to show their financial position.

In some cases, to get rid of this economic disparity the community collectively decides to fine those who served meat to the mourners. However, people show their wealth by first paying the fine and later cooked the expensive dishes to show their wealth.

Discussion

This study will help us to understand the anthropological analyses of mourning rituals in Punjabi community. Based on the analysis it will help to understand the cultural influence on bereavement practices. The researcher identified that it is a general perception that prevails in society that all happiness and pain is collectively celebrated. Disruptions in close relationships by these kinds of events such as bereavement needs support which they call belonging (Cohen, 1984). The most intimate relationships are more effective in that period. The data shows that this is common in this society that we all must go to each other's homes during this bereavement time to give them social support as they feel comfortable. Different social actions are very important to provide social support during life events like death (Shinn et al., 1984).

As per the findings of current study there are different traditional ways to celebrate death. The death of married and unmarried young man had created different kind of grief environment and people follows different rituals while buried them. While in case the dead are unmarried, they wear him new clothes and necklace to the corpse that at least once he must wear these this although he did not get married. The study found some other traditional practices for grief such as providing food to the mourners and relatives which are socially set in different villages in some areas. It is mandatory in the rural area to make an open announcement of the death so everyone in the community can participate in the mourning process (Mughal, 2014).

A look at the data indicates that Punjab's rural communities have complex mourning rituals that include a variety of customs. The community is extremely important in showing sympathy, offering support to the bereaved family, and helping with various funeral arrangements. The community is woven together through customs like elegy recital, shared meals, and visits to the homes of the deceased. The period of bereavement is also based on different roles of different genders and different age groups. Culture comprises in patterned way of feeling, thinking, and reacting and it is transfer by different symbols and including their embodiment in artifacts: the essential core of culture consists traditional (historically derived and selected ideas and specially attached values (Tylor, 1871).

Despite the strong relation between communities and religious activities few people try to show their wealth. The menu of the food provided to the mourners depends on showing the wealth of the bereaved family and the age of the dead. One of the major reasons behind the economic disparity is to spend the entire saving and livestock for the feast just to show generosity. The bereaved family must be announced the total spending over the feast to show the love and respect for the dead and a source of showing their spending which shows that they have a lot of money to spend (Ullah, 2014). This research shows that nature of the death is one of the factors which determined the intensity of the grief. The sudden death has more intense than the normal death of any person. In rural Punjab, religious and spiritual beliefs have a significant influence on how people express their grief. There are many ways to celebrate the grief according to the age, gender,

nature of death, position in the family and society, social relations and financial conditions in the specific cultural context (Mughal, 2014).

This study will help us to understand the anthropological analyses of mourning rituals in rural areas of Punjabi society. Furthermore, it will help to understand the cultural influence on following bereavement practices. Generally, ethnographic studies will help us to understand the social influence over society to practice their traditional activities by comparing the past and present. Certain events in individual lives help us to understand the cultural structure. By examining the culture of grief in rural Punjab, this study helps in preserving cultural heritage and provides a deeper understanding of how these practices contribute to the community's social fabric. Additionally, this documentation is crucial for cultural preservation and for providing a record of how grief is historically and culturally contextualized in popular culture of Pakistan. In nutshell, it provides a case study that can be compared with other cultures, contributing to a global understanding of how different societies cope with death and bereavement. This also helpful to refining existing theories on grief, mourning, and social practices related to death.

Conclusion

The study concludes that socio-cultural factors have great influence over bereaved people. However, all the social practices are followed to show their grief and celebrated the grief for a specific period of time. Culture is the medium which transforms the norms, values and beliefs for the next generation. Having all the population of this study is Muslim and people follow the social and cultural practices of bereavement along within the religious (Islamic) entity. The people of the rural areas of Punjabi society are much devoted to following the traditional practices to celebrate their grief. This ethnographic study ultimately leads us to understand the experiences of bereaved people who undergone this social experience. These mourning practices all depend on the social relation between the communities and living and dead. Nature of death, wealth, relation between dead and lived one are leads to strictly follows the practices. Culture enforces them to follow the practices as the community comes to know about your emotions of grief. After the death of loved one people are undergone the experience of trauma and anger. Culture enforces them to follow the practices as the community comes to know about your emotions of grief.

Recommendations

- Research needed to investigate the religions effects on each other believers.
- It must be studied all those similar customs which have been transformed from the Hindus to Muslims and Muslims are still follows them strictly.
- The research should explore the income inequality to performing the mourning rituals. Wealth disparity is highly affecting the people's perception to perform mourning rituals and make a difference between rich and poor.

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