



Article

Childbirth-Related Rituals in the Miyonkol Oasis

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Abstract: Purpose of the Article: This study examines childbirth-related rituals in the Miyonkol oasis and focuses on their transformations over time. Methodology: The research is based on a historical-analytical approach, with particular emphasis on the analysis of field research findings alongside written sources. Findings: The results of the study show that in Miyonkol, customs related to childbirth have survived to the present day, shaped by ancient beliefs such as animism, fetishism, and totemism, and later influenced and optimized by Zoroastrian religious traditions. Novelty of the Study: This research explores traditional ceremonial practices associated with pregnancy in the Miyonkol oasis, detailing customs observed during the prenatal period, the chilla (postnatal confinement period), protective rituals for women, and the beshik solish (cradle ceremony) following childbirth.

Keywords: Animism, Fetishism, Cradle, Umay, Mithra, Ahura Mazda, Evil Spirits, Belief Systems, Faith, Pregnant Women, Bow and Arrow, Mirror, Postnatal Confinement

1. Introduction

Each region and district possesses its own unique traditions, customs, and culture. The Miyonkol oasis is no exception, renowned for its rich and beautiful cultural heritage and traditions passed down through generations from our ancestors. Although today we are increasingly influenced by European culture and modern lifestyles, and our customs are also evolving with the times, I believe we are still striving to preserve our identity and national values. Family and domestic ceremonies serve as crucial transmitters and preservers of ethnocultural traditions. Customs associated with everyday human activities tend to be more conservative and resistant to change compared to socio-political traditions [1].

Ethnic Processes in the Miyonkol Oasis the ethnic processes in the Miyonkol oasis have developed in a distinctive manner, characterized by their ancient roots and unique religious features and beliefs.

2. Materials and Methods

The study of childbirth-related rituals in the Miyonkol oasis is based on two main approaches. First, a review of written literature and sources, and second, field research involving interviews with local residents.

Findings and Discussion In the Miyonkol oasis, there is a beautiful tradition: young families with children plant fruit trees at their homes. If the family has a son, a poplar or willow tree is planted, while a fruit tree is planted if a daughter is born. When the child

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grows up, these trees are used as primary building materials for constructing the family home, providing an economic benefit as well [2].

In many areas, the midwife or elder would wrap the newborn's umbilical cord in cloth and tie it to the foot of the cradle. This practice symbolized a magical wish for the child to grow and thrive without premature death. Additionally, hanging the umbilical cord on the cradle was believed to prevent the child from crying out for the missing part of their body [3].

In the Miyonkol oasis, after a child is born, their umbilical cord is wrapped in a white cloth and tied to the foot of the cradle. If the umbilical cord is placed in the cradle, it is believed the child will not cry excessively, will grow up healthy, and be protected from untimely death. The child will not stray onto a bad path or engage in harmful activities, and will remain harmonious with their siblings [4].

In the Ishtixon district, in the villages of O'tarchi, Qo'ng'iro't, and in the town of Loyish in Oqdaryo district, it is customary to place the newborn's umbilical cord inside a book. This practice is believed to ensure that the child will grow up to be educated and intellectual [5].

These traditions have existed since ancient times. Among the Turks, Umay, the goddess of fertility, was symbolically associated with items such as a bow, arrow, bronze buttons, and amulets, and the umbilical cord was also considered sacred. The umbilical cord is treated with great care, as there is a belief that if it is lost during the chilla period, the child may fall ill or suffer from various diseases [6].

The Belief of the Ancient Turks Regarding the Full Moon and Womanhood The ancient Turks believed that the full moon symbolized the maturity of women. They observed a connection between women and the moon, noting that both shared a mysterious and powerful energy. The duration of pregnancy was approximately nine months, and it was believed that women were more likely to give birth during the full moon [7]. Those born under the full moon were often given names that symbolized the moon's joy, such as Oysuluv, Oygul, Oytula, Oynur, Olnoy, Oynoz, and others [8]. The newborn's umbilical cord was traditionally cut by midwives with the hope that it would ensure a long life and abundant prosperity for the child [9].

Field Research in the Miyonkol Oasis Field studies and conversations with elderly individuals in the Miyonkol oasis confirmed that ancient customs are still practiced in the region. Here, after seven, nine, or eleven days following the cutting of the umbilical cord, a bathing and swaddling ceremony is held. Special preparations are made for the bathing, including the use of salty water, yogurt-infused water, clay water (sometimes gathered from the home's tandoor oven if clay water is unavailable), and boiled water. The water is cooled, and the baby is bathed starting from the head with salted water, followed by yogurt water and finally clay water, with the last rinse being from fresh water. The mouth and facial area are gently wiped with bandages soaked in salted water [10]. salted water is believed to prevent skin ailments and diseases, while also symbolizing prosperity and a rich future. Yogurt water softens the skin, and clay water is thought to prevent growths and hair development on the body. After the ritual bath, the child is dried with a clean towel or cotton cloth and placed in the cradle.

3. Results

The cradle ceremony is traditionally carried out by elderly individuals. The cradle is carefully prepared in advance. First, a cover made from coarse cloth or silk is sewn, and it is filled with sawdust, forming a mattress-like padding for the cradle. Then, a layer of cotton is added. For symbolic purposes, various objects are placed near the child, including a mirror (to ward off evil), a knife (to protect from harmful spirits), a stone (for strong growth), a comb, a small piece of bread, and a spoon—each believed to bring prosperity to the child. According to ancient Turkic traditions, Umay, the goddess of fertility, was

also symbolized through these items [12]. These objects were placed in the cradle to prevent evil forces or spirits from entering. When placing the child in the cradle, elders would repeat three times, "May they be righteous, may they be good boys", or "May they be good girls," if a girl was born. Afterward, the child was swaddled and the mother was given two whole loaves of bread to eat while breastfeeding.

The Chilla Period and Its Significance In popular belief, the safety of the newborn and its mother from harmful influences depended on their adherence to the rules of the chilla period (meaning "forty" in Persian). The chilla period is considered the most dangerous, difficult, and responsible time in a person's life. Typically, the term chilla is used to describe the forty days following childbirth, the wedding of a bride and groom, or the forty days after a deceased person's passing. During this period, specific rituals, magical practices, restrictions, and taboos are observed [13].

The taboos observed during the chilla period have two main meanings:

First, during this time, a woman is believed to be particularly vulnerable to the influence of evil spirits.

4. Discussion

During the chilla period, a woman who has recently given birth was considered ceremonially unclean, and it was believed that she could contaminate water, bread, fire, food, and even cow's milk. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, birth, illness, and even human birth were thought to corrupt the body, making it impure and causing a disruption in one's physical integrity [14]. In Zoroastrian ritual purification sources, women who menstruated, gave birth, or were ill were expected to follow certain taboos. Zoroastrian purification rituals lasted for 40 days, during which time women were prohibited from leaving their homes, seeing the moon and sun, working in the garden, or preparing food at the hearth [15].

The first "haircut" of a newborn also became a significant event. Our ancestors believed that "a person's soul, strength, and magical power are embodied in their hair." The cutting of a child's first hair was considered an act of great significance, and it was carried out by respected, older women, often followed by the hair being carefully buried under a fruit tree. Such traditions related to hair have persisted in many cultures worldwide. In ethnographic literature concerning the world's peoples, numerous references to hair magic can be found. According to the famous linguist I. Frezen, early humans viewed their hair as an inseparable part of their body, a living entity. It was believed that a person who had their hair cut would lose their magical powers. For this reason, people took great care in preserving their hair and avoided cutting it unnecessarily. Tribal leaders, priests, and shamans were sometimes forbidden from cutting their hair throughout their lives, and long-haired individuals were considered noble and blessed in the eyes of the gods. As noted by the prominent Uzbek folklorist M. Juraev, these mythological beliefs formed the basis for various magical rituals associated with hair, such as the "hair wedding," "Haider's gift," and "hair brushing" ceremonies [16].

5. Conclusion

We can conclude that these ritual practices are distinguished not only by their uniqueness and historical background but also by their richness in ethnonational and religious rituals. In particular, the customs and rituals within this group reflect a mixture of Islamic traditions with pre-existing religious beliefs, including totemism, animism, fetishism, sorcery, shamanism, and Zoroastrianism.

Main Results: Through the magic rituals in this group of ceremonies, it is primarily observed that the health of the newborn and the preservation of the future generations' well-being is a key focus.

Significance: Ethnographic observations in Miyonkol have shown that traces of magic, animism, and fetishism, as well as Zoroastrian customs, are still preserved.

Limitations: This research indicates that the process of Europeanization is leading to the gradual loss of national values. Additionally, the insufficient study of ethnographic fieldwork has contributed to the erosion of these traditions.

Future Research: Future studies, based on more extensive fieldwork, will be valuable for the development and preservation of our national customs and values.

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