

Institutionalized Reciprocity and Exchange on Punjabi Weddings

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Abstract

Marriage ceremonies in Punjab involve rich and elaborate ritual performance. This requires social participation and support. Reciprocity on rituals is widely pervasive, guided by unwritten often unsaid yet known and deeply internalized codes. These rules act as social facts in Durkheimian sense. Based on qualitative research and extracting data primarily from participant observation and indepth interviews, this paper highlights extensive and embedded systems of reciprocity and exchange typical of Punjabi weddings. Laag Vehar, a compound term, encompasses roles, expectations and appropriate reciprocal behavior on different occasions. Obligatory gifts and services are key features of laag vehar. Generalized, balanced and premium reciprocity are the major forms of reciprocity observed on weddings. They provide insight to the social system, solidarity networks, socio-economic bonds and relations and reflect on social status as well as social hierarchy.

Keywords: Laag Vehar, Gift-Giving, Reciprocity, Premium Reciprocity, Solidarity, Wedding Ceremony

Introduction

Marriage and associated rituals hold a central place within the South Asian context. Not only marriage as a social contract is significant, but, also the rituals are complex involving apart from intricate and elaborate performance, conspicuous expenditure. For these both, the individuals and their families require support from outside. From where and why the support is extended make important areas for anthropological enquiry. Subsequent to this are the terms and conditions guiding this support, often subtle and unsaid, but at the same time a regulatory code to appropriate behaviour. Whether it is exchange of money, material goods or services rendered; all get documented in detail for appropriate return when the time demands. Social and economic exchange and reciprocity as presumably one of the most important features of rites de passage is the subject matter of the present paper. *Laag Vehar*, is a term connoting ritualized exchange and reciprocity on different occasions in several villages of Punjab, including marriage ceremonies. In this paper we attempt at an anthropological understanding of *laag vehar* on weddings, as a predominant reciprocal system in village 23GB Anbalianwala, Punjab, Pakistan.

Key to this research is then an understanding of the term reciprocity for which we rely on Mauss groundbreaking work on gift exchange (1966). While to comprehend the complexity and intricacy of rites de passage, we use the framework presented by Van Gennep. His description of rites de passage involves ritual ceremonies (Van Gennep, 1960). Thus, it is established that the shift from one status to another is marked by performance of social rituals and ceremonies. And although Gennep does not discuss the reciprocal dimension, we argue some kind of reciprocation does exist and can easily be deduced on a closer examination of such ritual performances.

One way of understanding reciprocity is as obligatory gift- giving induced by a social relationship. The word prestation is frequently used to characterize such obligatory present (Dalton, 1982: 182). In his book “The Gift”, Mauss provides an insight to the processual nature of gift giving which entails three obligations: to give; to receive; and to reciprocate (1966). Social ties are created, sustained and strengthened by means of reciprocal gifts (Komter, 2007: 103). The three main types of reciprocity thus identified include: generalized, balanced and negative. We extend this theory on gifts exchange to include reciprocal favours and services rendered on weddings.

It is important to note here that gift giving is an activity imbued with intense symbolism. Gifts reflect a multi-purpose symbolic ‘utility’ that transcends both utilitarianism and anti-utilitarianism (Komter, 2007: 93). Levi-Strauss in his delineation of the intricated nature of goods exchange and

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gift-giving, posits that the objects act as ‘vehicles and instruments for realities of another order: influence, power, sympathy, status, emotion; and the skilful game of exchange consists of a complex totality of maneuvers, conscious or unconscious, in order to gain security and to fortify one’s self against risks incurred through alliances and rivalry’ (Lévi-Strauss in Schwartz, 1996: 72).

Gift giving principles are always guided by cultural norms and traditions. However, these do not remain static and undergo change over time (Caplow: 1984; Cheal 2015). Interesting to note is that the rules governing gift exchange are often unwritten and largely unrecognized yet regulatory and effectively enforced, argues Caplow (1984).

The Research Site

Village 23GB Anbalianwala is a Punjabi village located in Tehsil Jaranwala, district Faisalabad. Currently, the village comprises approximately 5000 inhabitants. Nuclear family is gaining popularity, however, the traditional extended family system is still to be found in the village. There are two main socio-economic classes: *Zamindar*, one who holds the land and *Kammi* who works for the Zamindar and tills his lands. Marriages are primarily endogamous, people are hesitant to marry outside their caste. Majority of the people rely on agriculture for livelihood. Labour is gender differentiated; women are primarily responsible for house work but also help their male family members in the fields. Education level is higher among the youth compared to older generations. Caste system has great influence on the lives of the villagers, it helps construct distinct identity vis-à-vis other castes and ensures intra-caste bonding.

Methodology

Qualitative approach was adopted owing to the descriptive nature of study. Participant observation along with case studies method was used for data collection. Participant observation provided an opportunity to get involved in the activities of people that helped to establish rapport and observe them closely. Whereas case study method assisted to look at the different aspects of a person’s life with reference to system of reciprocity. Additionally, 25 respondents were interviewed till the saturation point. Cessation of data collection was decided once it started repeating and no new information emerged. Four focus group discussions were carried out from people of both classes (the land-owning *zamindar* and the landless *kammi*). These discussions comprised two groups of women and two groups of men from both statuses. Interviews and FGDs were recorded after obtaining prior consent from the respondents. In case of an objection, hand written notes were taken instead of recording. Finally, to shape results, key concepts and themes were identified from the collected data and analyzed using thematic analysis. Verbatim are produced where necessary.

The Meaning and Nature of *Laag Vehar*

This section attempts at an understanding of *Laag Vehar* as construed by the respondents. In doing so it sheds light on the rules of giving, receiving and reciprocating. It also refers to the exchange in terms of service-payment liaison between the members of different ranks. *Laag vehar*, is a compound term connoting reciprocal relationship in Punjab. *Laag* means *muavaza* or *ujrat* which translates into English as “payment” and *vehar* means *vertava* or *vertana* or “dealing”. It is a broad and complex system of exchanges between symmetrical as well as asymmetrical relations.

As is evident from the meaning, *laag* is the payment given to a person(s) of *kammi* status in return of his/her services precisely during weddings. The services are offered to *zamindar*, but not exclusively and can also be extended to another *kami*. The services are often remunerated/compensated in monetary terms, however, occasionally a return in kind, primarily in the form of cattle may also be given. The possibility of giving an animal instead of money is only there when a *zamindar* is affluent and is exceptionally pleased with the work of *kami*, because the animal costs much higher than the amount of *laag*.

Varney and *mubaraki* are the extensions of *laag*. These two are given on any occasion of happiness by the relatives. *Varney* is the money either fleetingly placed on the head of a groom or bride or circulated a few times over the head, before it is given to *kami*¹. The latter receives it with gratitude and simultaneously congratulates the relatives and family. Weddings include several rituals and money as *varney* is given during its various stages and associated rituals.

While *Laag* includes services specific to marriage, these are not the only type of services

¹ This money is also called *sadqa* (charity) and is believed to prevent the person from evil eye, affliction or an untoward incident.

required and rendered. A *zamindar* may need and call for the services of a *kammi*(s) on several occasions, for instance, on a funeral, or birth or when there are guests at home. In addition to these there is an annual contract between a *kammi* and *zamindar* known as *seypi*. It is a kind of a barter system where services are exchanged for goods.

Vehar literally means dealing and refers to varied exchanges between two persons or parties. It includes the reciprocation of money as well as goods, fruit, sweets, clothes and even favors and services. This dealing generally takes place between people of the same status, that is, *zamindar* with *zamindar* and *kammi* with *kammi*. *Vehar* may be understood as contingent reciprocity subject to a need or a ceremonial occurrence marking rites of passage. These include, but are not limited to, birth of a child, marriage and death. Adding to this is the interesting event of a pilgrim's departure to the holy lands of Mecca and Madina as well as when sickness befalls.

Apart from dealings and services, favours or non-obligatory support, assistance and help forms an important dimension of this reciprocal system. The favours range in scale, from extraordinary to those related to matters of daily routine. Favours are not specific to any event. There is a general understanding that if a favour is extended it must be returned when due.

From the discussion above it is evident that *laag vehar* as a system of reciprocation includes exchange of goods and services, payment of services rendered and extension of favours. People's occupation, concern and commitment to *laag vehar* is evident from the following description by an older woman of the *kammi* biradari:

When people present salami² to the groom and we receive our mubarak³ before the departure of barat, this completes the ritual, it is said all is done. All laag (payment) vehar (dealing) is completed. And the same is said on the culmination of every customary ritual. That, laag vehar is done!

A person's reputation is greatly influenced by his allegiance towards *laag vehar* and he is defined through ways he practices it. Negative and positive evaluations based on *laag vehar* are common. For instance, when it is said that a person is good in *laag vehar* it simply means that he is fair, responsive, and responsible in his dealings, payments and returning favours. Or that he follows the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner: 1960) motivated by gratitude (Simmel: 1996). Miserliness and sluggishness lead to negative repute and are highly discouraged. A respondent informed about his grandfather being known as fair and just in the village based on his approach towards *laag vehar*: *It is said in the village that my maternal grandfather is a fair man because he is good in his laag vehar relations.*

The network of the *laag vehar* relationship can be expanded as well as reduced. If a person or family is good at making acquaintances with other people the social circumference of their *laag vehar* relations in the village, increases. For instance, a family extends its reciprocation relations beyond its own *biradari* to include other *biradaris*, symmetrically as well as asymmetrically. The network may also include people from outside the village. One of the common causes of shrinking is rural-urban migration. Reciprocation in this case entails more investment in terms of money, time and energy. If the family shifts to a city far from the village, frequent mobility back and forth is difficult. In the absence of appropriate and expected reciprocation, their social circumference starts shrinking to an extent that it only includes closest relatives. The relations of exchange terminate in cases where people never return after having settled in a city.

With this understanding of *laag vehar*, we now discuss patterns of exchange specific to weddings in the village under study.

Laag Vehar on Weddings

Wedding ceremonies in the village may take place at any time during the year except the months of Moharram and Safar of the Islamic calendar. It is seen as extremely disrespectful because of martyrdom of Imam Hussain and the hardships endured by Hazrat Zainab during these two months. Muharram and Safar are months of commemoration, grief and mourning. Of the seasons, fall is preferred for weddings as during this time people are free from harvesting of crops. Marriage is an occasion of felicity and is to be celebrated with great joy, zeal and enthusiasm. *Laag Vehar* performs

² Money given as gift to a bride or groom.

³ Literally means blessed or congratulations. Here it refers to gratulation money. This money is given as cash gift or is paid by the jubilant family member of bride/groom to people of lower or sub-ordinate status.

symbolic as well as functional purpose on weddings. The practicing of these reciprocal obligations work as a force to bind people as a single community.

Weddings in the village span over several days and entail varied discrete rituals. A rich step-wise discussion of the events and stages of wedding alongwith reciprocation rituals and practices is provided below:

Marriage Decision Making and Arrangement

The decision of marriage is a parental domain and only those marriages arranged by parents and elders are considered as respectful. A person cannot and must not marry out of his/her own choice. It is seen an act of parental disobedience and socially deviant behaviour. If a person opts to marry out of his/her own choice, he/she faces social boycott from other villagers. For a girl, the restrictions are even severer and reaction graver. In all such cases, the couple is forced to leave the village and settle in another village or a city. Their entry is banned and they are not permitted to maintain any contact with their family. As a result most of the people comply to the spousal selection and marriage decision made by parents, sometimes with the consent of the elders of the *biradari*.

Appropriate age for marriage varies from caste to caste. For instance, among Jutt, Gujjar, Ansari and Machi *biradari* marriage at a fairly young age is appreciated; 18 years is considered good age for marriage. While for all the other *biradaris*⁴ the right age for marriage ranges between 25 to 30 years, a little lesser for the girls. When a girl or a boy is of age, the parents start searching for a suitable match. Owing to a preference for endogamous marriages, the search begins from one's own *biradari* and within the village. In case there is no appropriate match, the family then looks for options outside the village, but the spouse must be of their own *biradari*. Upon finding a suitable family they ask for the *rishta* (literally means relation; here it refers to marriage proposal) for their son. A marriage proposal must always be initiated by boy's family. A girl's family never suggests a proposal, especially directly, as it is assumed to be a matter of shame to ask someone to marry one's daughter. Shabana, a girl from the village married at the age of 36 (a relatively late age for girls to get married) confided that her father would rather not had his daughter married her entire life than proposing someone to marry her. Despite the fact that he was really worried about his daughter's age passing beyond the ideal normative marriageable age, he waited. For him the greater worry was to not let down his honor, her father's viewpoint was:

My daughter is my honor so if I have asked someone to marry my daughter it would mean that I am presenting my honor to this person. It would also imply that I cannot bear her presence in my home and her expenses.

The social system is dominated by patriarchal ideology that privileges men over women rendering the latter to a sub-ordinate position. This impacts and influences all the different spheres of life. By virtue of this, a girl's parents are seen as having a status lower than a boy's parents. Suggesting a proposal is deemed as a male prerogative. Shabana's father's apprehension is also a based in this cultural understanding whereby a marriage proposal suggested by a daughter's parents is inferred as offering one's daughter and sacrificing one's honour. Consequently, sometimes a girl's marriage is delayed unnecessarily wasting many years of her life. Her parents out of cultural notions of shame would not initiate a marriage proposal and she herself would not do it, out of cultural restrictions on self-selection of spouse and free choice marriage.

If a proposal sent by a boy's parents gets accepted by the girl's family, it is celebrated on a small scale to officially mark *rishtadari*. This is called *rasam*. The time span for parents to select a suitable spouse and reach a decision varies; it may be short taking a few days or as long as a few months or even years. The marriage decision making includes primarily three stages: initiation, negotiation and decision making (McDougal, Jackson, McClendon, Belayneh, & Sinha, 2018). In all these stages boys are seldom and girls are never consulted. As the marriages take place between the people of same castes and for most people in the same village, parents often choose a spouse for their child on the recommendation of relatives or caste members. Usually parents ask for *rishta* through a person who is also close to the girl's. This person serves the role of mediator between both parties and remains present in all kinds of negotiations. The final decision about acceptance/rejection lies with girl parents who take a decision after consultation with their immediate family or elders of their own caste.

⁴ Indigenous terms are pluralized by adding the suffix "s".

Ensuring the Availability of *Kammis* for Wedding Services

One of the most interesting feature is people's concern regarding the availability of members of *kammi biradari* before fixing a date of wedding. Once it is ensured, the families call members of different *kammi biradaris* from their respective social networks. All services are then assigned in accordance with their specialization. The *naii* (barber) sends out invitations to the guests and cooks food on the wedding. Additionally, he is the one primarily involved in assisting the groom in getting ready on his wedding. Upon receiving invitation from the *naii*, it is a custom to give him token money and to not let him return empty handed. Usually people reciprocate an amount equivalent to what they have received when they sent out invitations of a wedding in their family. Generally the amount ranges in between 50-100 rupees. However, some people may pay only 20-30 rupees. Relatives from maternal and paternal side are expected to give more money than others, ranging between rupees 500 to 1000. This money is separate from the payment fixed for his services and is counted as a bonus. The higher the bonus, the greater is obligation to render services with professionalism and commitment.

Naii and his wife called *naiyan*, also accompany the groom's family on the day of *barat*, ceremony to be held at the bride's place. *Naii* is responsible for safe transportation of the *Barri* box (usually one or more suitcases according to the number and size of items). *Barri* consists of gifts presented to a bride by the groom's family on *barat*. *Naiyan* assists groom's sister(s) in displaying *barri* to the family of bride. In return, *nai* and his wife, *naiyan*, receive money from both the families. After exhibiting the gift items to relatives of the bride's family, these are brought back to the groom's place for bride's use. Patrilocal residence is the norm and on the day of *barat*, a groom's family comes to take the bride along to her new home after signing the marriage contract (*nikah*).

Services rendered by other castes include, *chapatti* (flat wheat bread) making by *Cheer*, cleaning and washing services by *Fakeer* and *Machi biradari*. Their services are hired not for a day or two but for the entire period the wedding lasts. This is about 10 to 15 days sometimes even more. *Mirasis* entertain by singing songs and receive money in the form of *mubaraki*. No member of the *mirasi biradari* lived in the village under study. *Mirasis* from the nearby village would come to entertain and receive *mubaraki* and *vayl*, from the groom's family when there is a wedding in the village.

Rasam

An engagement or betrothal ceremony of a boy and a girl is known as *rasam*. This marks the official announcement of the marriage decision and comprises of two days to complete. The days may be consecutive or with an interval of a few days. On the first of these two days, the boy's family visits the girl's house with two *mathai di tokari* (basket of sweets), make up kit, jewelry, two to four dresses for the girl and sometimes the suit to be worn at the time *rasam*, that is, when the boy's mother puts a ring on her finger. The ring is called *nishani* (literal: symbol, memento, keepsake) and represents symbolically that the girl is now associated with the boy. After *rasam*, the relatives from both the sides present *salami* to the girl. *Salami* is an amount of money given to a bride and groom on different stages and rituals of marriage by relatives and other guests. The closer the kin, the greater the amount of *salami* expected.

Thereafter, the family and close relatives from paternal and maternal side of the boy give *laag* in the form of *varney* to *naii*, *machhi*, *cheer* and *fakeer* of *kammi biradari* associated with the girl's family as a tip for their services.

Before leaving, the girl's family reciprocates by presenting suits (unstitched fabric) to the betrothed boy's family. These suits are for all the immediate kin relations of the boy and his parents. Thus, the suits are presented to a boy's siblings, his parents, maternal and paternal grandparents, uncles and aunts as well as to all the people who have come along with the boy's family. Of the two baskets of sweets brought, one is kept by the girl's family, the other is customarily returned to the boy's family to be distributed later among their neighbours, kith and kin to celebrate and share their happiness. This custom symbolically reflects the concern of one family to not overburden the other.

On the second day the family of the girl visits the boy's place for the same purpose. Among some families the visit takes place after an interval of a few days. Their visit follows exactly the same pattern and is marked with balanced reciprocity. The only difference is that this time the gifts are for the boy and his family. The girl's family brings along two basket of sweets, a shaving kit, clothes and sometimes the suit to be worn by the groom on engagement ceremony. The *nishani* left with the boy

is different from girl. While the betrothed girl receives a ring, the boy most often gets a watch. Post the ceremony the prospective groom receives *salami* from relatives and guests of both the families. Similarly the *laag*, previously paid by the boy's family is also reciprocated and given to members of *kammi* biradari working for the groom's family. The ceremony is concluded with boy's family returning a sweet basket to the girl's family, just as they did during the former's visit.

The most striking features of *rasam* include repetition, replication, record keeping and reciprocation of the entire event.

The Eid before Wedding

The first Eid⁵ after marriage or one falling in between the period of engagement and wedding is always special. For the engaged couple, the excitement is double-fold, as this is the time to receive several gifts, known as *eid*. *Eid* commonly refers to cash gift, but in this case includes in addition to money, dress to be worn by prospective groom or bride on Eid as well as miscellaneous presents. The boy's family is always the first one to initiate a visit. A girl's *eid* consists bangles alongwith dress, money and other articles as gift. The youngest of the bride's family also receives a cash gift as *eid*. Soon after the visit and before Eid, the girl's family reciprocates. The *eid* for boy comprises of clothes, money and other articles of personal use, like wallet, perfume, watch etc. The family of the girl usually gives an *eid* (the cash) double the amount received by their daughter. For example, if the boy's family gives an *eid* of 2000 rupees, the girl's family will reciprocate with 4000 rupees. Similarly, the youngest among the groom's family also receives *eid*.

During the period in between *rasam* and *shadi*, on every occasion be it of happiness or grief both families show immediate responsiveness. This is an expression of commitment to the new relationship being established. It is also a way of showing solidarity and affirming to be together through thick and thin. For instance, in one case where the younger brother of the bride secured good marks in examination, the prospective groom's family came to congratulate him and the family. They also presented gift to her brother. All occasions of joy and sorrow, irrespective of the scale and intensity, are acknowledged and shared.

The Wedding: Planning and Celebration

Fixing the wedding date is another occasion of significance and involves a formal visit by the prospective groom's family to bride's place. The purpose is to request or suggest a suitable date for the wedding. The boy's family is usually accompanied by close elder relatives. On the other side, the elders from girl's *biradari* are also present in her house. Customarily, the girl's family suggests a date for wedding and if it is found suitable the groom's family consent to it. In case, the suggested date is not deemed as suitable, both families decide mutually for another time for wedding ceremony.

Once the date is confirmed preparation for wedding begins at both sides of the family. The celebration starts 2-3 weeks prior to the wedding; the planning begins much earlier. However, the nature of celebrations is different on both sides. While the boy's side is solely celebrating to welcome a new member in the family; at girl's side wedding felicity is marked with a tinge of grief over losing a dear family member, owing to patrilocal residence.

Parat Vajana: the announcement

The wedding is announced through pre-wedding event of *parat vajana*. *Parat* is a round flat shallow container of metal, brass or aluminium used in the kitchen for kneading dough; *vajana* literally means beating. The term, *parat vajana*, refers to musical events organized at the groom's side around 20 days prior to the actual wedding. *Parat* is used as a musical instrument similar to drum, beaten to match the tune of the song. This also is a kind of announcement for the upcoming wedding celebration. It is organized in the evening when women are free from their daily chores and tasks. Amidst the hassle of wedding preparation, these occasions provide time to celebrate, relax and enjoy.

Evenings are full of music, singing and dancing. A *parat* is place in the center of the room. Girls of *mohallah* (neighbourhood) come and sit around it in a circle. They play *parat* and sing *mahiye*, *tappay*⁶ and popular film songs. *Parat vajana* is specific to women and gender segregation is

⁵Eid is an occasion of festivity for Muslims, celebrated twice a year.

⁶ Both are types of folksongs widely pervasive in Punjab. *māhīā* is a brief verse form of anonymous authorship (Schreffler, 2011: 79) The basic gloss of *tappā* is "line" or "verse." The line contains two phrases. Note with caution, however, that because in print the two phrases are often represented as one below the other, it may appear as though the *tappa* consists of two "lines." Verses of *tappa* appear non-musically as proverbs, and in

ensured. The room where girls' play *parat*, sing and dance is a women's only space. Men are strictly prohibited to enter or even to be found near this space. The function lasts till late night. When the girls are ready to return home, the groom's family presents sweets to every girl as a token of appreciation for sharing their happiness. Such tokens are common and are symbolic of courtesy and acknowledgement.

Customarily *parat vajana* is specific to groom's family. It is also practiced among some families of the village on a girl's wedding, albeit rarely. In this case, the event starts only two or three days prior to marriage and this stands in sharp contrast to celebrations at the boy's side initiating much earlier. Generally, singing and dancing on a daughter's wedding are not appreciated in this village.

Nanak Shak/Marra: Gifts from the Maternal Uncle

A few days before the wedding the bride and groom receive gifts from their respective maternal uncles. The gifts can also be given on the first day of wedding celebration known as *tael/mehndi*. Gifts presented to niece by uncles are called *nanak shak* and become part of her dowry. It consists of furniture items, mainly, a bed, 2 chairs and a dressing table. This furniture is to be placed in the room of the newlyweds. The bride and her family also receive fancy dresses from the maternal uncle. The most important article of *nanak shak* is the *tumb*. A *tumb* is a jewelry article of gold. The maternal uncle(s) also give dresses to the whole family of groom. In patriarchal societies such as one under study, where extensive dowry⁷ is common, the gifts from maternal uncle(s) hold particular significance. Dowry is generally perceived as a gift from parents to the departing daughter. Mothers spend years to accumulate enough dowry items to ensure a high status and respect of their daughter(s) in her affinal family. Dowry articles range from the smallest utilitarian item, for instance, towels to exorbitantly expensive ones, like furniture and gold jewelry. A higher dowry amount, especially in terms of furniture, electronics, and kitchenware, is positively associated with women's status in the marital household. The positive association of these illiquid items adds suggestive evidence that in rural Punjab, Pakistan, dowry serves as a trousseau that the bride's parents voluntarily offer to their daughter (Makino, 2019: 769). Hence, dowry entails huge finances, which a daughters parents might find difficult to arrange at a given point of time, hence, the value and reliance on gifts from maternal uncle(s). The gifts presented to groom by his maternal uncle are called *marra* and most commonly include a gold ring, watch and dress.

Both, *nanak shak* and *marra* are considered as central and obligatory gift-giving ritual. It is a matter of social prestige, respect and honour for the maternal side. Within the patriarchal system, such gifts by father or brother(s) of a married woman have symbolic and functional value and are reflective of the strong bond she has with her consanguinal family. These gifts also help strengthen her position and elevate her status in the eyes of her affinal relatives. They are presented ostentatiously and receive great attention. Sardaran a women of age 70, explains:

My granddaughter was being married to my grandson. I said to my son, although, it's your daughter's wedding but at the same time the bridegroom is your nephew. Therefore, you must give gifts to him, not just as his father in law but also as his maternal uncle. So he gave his sister 50,000 rupees and clothes for the whole family. I know it burdened him financially, but that's the tradition and we must save our respect in the eyes of our daughter's in laws".

Tael/Mehndi:

Weddings usually last for three days with each day having a significance of its own. *Tael/ mehndi* is the first of the three days celebration and is always organized in the evening. The event is colourful, festive and musical. Usually, both sides celebrate *tael/mehndi* in their respective houses. Compared to the next two days of wedding, this is a function smaller in scale with fewer guests. It is a private affair

musical contexts they typically appear during performances of women's giddha (an indigenous dance type)(ibid: 77)

⁷ Dowry is considered as a form of "marriage transaction" and "diverging devolution"; "as compensation for the acquisition of a so-called nonproductive woman." Harrell and Dickey define dowry as the transfer of significant amounts of goods from the bride's family (or, indirectly, from the groom's family through the bride's family) to a conjugal fund of the new couple. Dowry as "diverging devolution," implies it as a type of property inheritance in which both sons and daughters inherit some share of the parental estate. Dowry is simply that mode of diverging devolution in which daughters receive their shares upon marriage (Harrell & Dickey, 1985: 105)

and only close kith and kin are invited.

This event is primarily women centric and besides singing and dancing performances, involves application of *henna* and *tael* on the bride's and groom's hands and hair. Each married female guest applies *tael* and/or *mehndi*, and gives money in form of *varney*. The amount of money ranges from 100 to 500 rupees. Traditionally the closest of relatives are expected to give more than others. *Varney* is collected in a basket placed in front of the bride/groom. At the end it is calculated and distributed equally among all the *kammis* serving on wedding.

Women from neighbourhood and relatives also bring 8 kilograms of wheat and 2 of rice with them. It is called *maiyan rottian* (the meal on mehndi). In return the family gives them some sugar or a plate of cooked rice so they do not return empty handed. The guests are served dinner, chicken curry, *chapatti* (local form of bread), rice and *zarda* (sweet rice; an indigenous dessert); the being the typical menu.

Barat:

The next day is *barat*⁸. The groom, his family, close relatives and friends go to the bride's place for *nikah* (marital contract) and to bring her along. Once the groom is ready, *naii* asks his maternal uncle for token money, called *khara*. The amount of *khara* is the uncle's discretion and depends on his financial status. When everyone is ready for departure, an announcement is made through mosque speakers, post which, all the invitees come to join the *barat* procession and to present *salami* (money given to groom and bride on wedding). Money is also given to *shehbala* (similar to the groom's men), usually groom's nephew or younger male member from his family, who is also dressed up like a groom.

Two basic criteria govern *salami* 1) the proximity of the relation 2) the past exchange between the invitee and the groom's family, especially on a wedding. *Salami* from close maternal and paternal relatives is set at a minimum of 5000 rupees. This is given together with a floral *haar* (garland). For distant relatives and friends, 200 rupees or above is standard *salami*. Some, not all, guests also give token money as *varney* to *kammis* present there. It is usual for *naii* to ask for *mubarak* (gratulation money) from close maternal and paternal relatives. When asked, the relative must give some amount of money and must never refuse. Refusal leads to loss of respect. Apart from *khara* and *mubarak*, *veyl* is also given to *naiis* and *mirasis*. *Veyl* is the money kept on the head of the bridegroom and *mirasis* and *naii* come to take it. Mostly *veyl* is given by the groom's friends, maternal and paternal cousins and/or uncles.

Barat procession is warmly received by the bride's relatives. *Barri* is displayed by sister(s) of the groom with help of *naiyan* and includes sweets, dry fruit, gold jewelry, dresses, shoes and makeup, presented as gifts from groom's family to the bride. These gifts are then brought back along with the bride for her use. It is interesting to note that although these are presented as gifts, customarily they are perceived as groom's property in case the marriage dissolves.

After *nikkah* ceremony and lunch, guests at men's side⁹ give *nenda* to the bride's family. The amount of *nenda* again is decided by the past exchanges. In the meantime a member from the bride's family brings the groom to the women's side where the bride is sitting on a wedding podium or an elaborately decorated couch. The relatives then present gifts and *salami* to the newlyweds. During this time the conventional ritual of *doodh pilai* is performed. The groom is offered a glass of milk by his sister-in-law(s) and he reciprocates this by giving them money. This ritual is one that involves open and public negotiation. It is a kind of negative reciprocity, in the sense that, each side tries to maximize their interest. The groom is supported by his family to negotiate for the minimum amount; his sisters in laws by their cousins and friends to maximize the amount to be received. Of the various gift and other exchanges on wedding, this ritual is one that is considered a fun and exciting activity with least involvement of elders. The reciprocal exchange between the groom and his sister(s) in law can be seen as a form of generalized reciprocity, where direct and immediate return is not expected.

Dhiyan Dhyanian (like daughters), is another ritual marked with generalized reciprocity. In one instance, the wedding procession went to a nearby village 33 GB where the bride and her family lived. The parents of the groom took along two plates of rice with money placed on top. Upon reaching the village, the accompanying *naii* delivered the plates to two different houses. On probe, it

⁸ *Barat* refers to both, the wedding day and the groom's wedding procession; the participants of the procession are called *barati*.

⁹ Gender segregation is the norm and is ensured with clearly demarcated spaces for men and women.

was learnt that the rice and money are tokens of gift for the girls of village 23 GB who after marriage shifted to village 33 GB. These girls, although belonging to a different *biradari*, are considered as daughters of the village. As mentioned earlier, for a woman receiving gifts from her consanguinal family is a matter of prestige. Thus, gifts are presented to express the unrelenting love and support to the girls from their natal village. This gift is reciprocated in the form of *salami* by the married girl, which is not accepted. Patriarchal custom stipulates men to financially support women and not to take money from female relatives, wives, daughters and sisters. Hence, whether the initial token gift is reciprocated or not is insignificant for the groom's family.

Laag: Payment to the *kammi biradari*

On *barat* the bride's family approaches the groom's family for *laag* which then is divided among *kammis* who provided different services on the wedding. This custom is common across all *biradaris* except the Awans, who pay *laag* themselves. The distribution, however, is not equal, rather it is in accordance with the services rendered. Of the *kammis*, *naii* receives the maximum amount. Javed a *naii* himself, who believes that a *naii* is captain of the ship explained;

Naii gives more services than any other kammi. He sends out invitations to the guests, helps the groom get ready for barat and most importantly he cooks on the wedding; for these and miscellaneous tasks, he is paid more than others.

Similarly, the groom's family call all *kammis* from their side to their house and distribute the *laag* money. The only difference is that the groom's family pays the *laag* themselves.

Laag payments are fixed and are called *vajay laag*, where the prefix *vajay* means fixed. The elders of the *biradari* decide for every family invited to the wedding, a certain amount of money to be contributed for *laag* payment.

Walima: The Concluding Ceremony

Walima ceremony concludes the wedding and is organized by the groom's side. Family and close relatives of the bride's side join the celebration. Gifts and *salami* are presented to bride and bridegroom by the guests who could not give it on *barat*. The guests from the groom's side give *nenda* to his family. The amount of *nenda* on *walima* again is decided according to the past exchanges.

While *nenda* and *salami* share some characteristics; they differ in other respects. *Salami* is given only by close relatives, family members, friends, neighbors and members of *biradari*, with whom the exchange relation of *salami* is well-established. It is given directly to the bride and groom. On the other hand, *nenda* is compulsory for every guest invited to the wedding. It is usually given to one of the members of the family, mostly parents of the couple. Both are forms reciprocity where the estimation of giving is reckoned by keeping past exchange in mind. The return should be higher in amount or quantity. We call it premium reciprocity¹⁰, since value is added to the original amount received previously. The amount of premium depends upon the status and affordability of the giver. However, premium in itself is mandatory and even if someone is not able to afford, he must follow the custom by borrowing money. The purpose for adding amount is to ensure continued reciprocity and exchange. The things exchanged should not be precisely balanced. If someone gives the same amount as he has received, than it is considered as a desire to terminate the relation. Exact amounts clear all the accountancy¹¹.

For instance, on Majid's daughter's wedding, Anwar gave 1000 rupees as *salami* and 2000 rupees as *nenda*. Later on Anwar's son's marriage, Majid doubled the amount and gave 2000 as *salami* and 4000 as *nenda*. The rule is not limited to monetary gift but also for gifts in kind, for example, if A presented B 2kg of rice, 3Kg of wheat and 2 dresses on B's child's wedding, B will reciprocate this with 4kg of rice, 6kg of wheat and 4 dresses when there's a wedding in A's family. Doubling the amount is preferred but not obligatory while adding a premium is mandatory.

Vehi: a register to record exchanges

Vehi is a register in which entries of all exchanges during a wedding are documented. Although

¹⁰ Reciprocating with a higher value gift has been found in other areas too and written about. For instance among Polynesians the tendency to reciprocate with a gift of higher value than that which was received, is found to be a general rule (Rolett, 2019: 203). However, no specific term has been used to refer to this kind of reciprocity. We propose to call it premium reciprocity.

¹¹ Gregory's conceptual understanding of reciprocity as a dyadic relationship involving indebtedness is particularly relevant here. For further reading refer to Gregory: 1982.

rarely, but *vehi* is also called *behi* and “*behi khata*” in Urdu, meaning a register to keep record of money exchange. Record keeping is specific to weddings and only a few people use *vehi* to document land related matters. The exchange on other events like death, birth etc. are not recorded. Almost every family has *vehi* for reference. To the question why the exchange on other events do not get documented, two reasons were provided; firstly, because death is not an occasion of celebration and it is deemed inappropriate to keep a record of exchange; secondly other occasions of celebration are smaller in scale, hence, greater possibility of retaining the “dealings” through memory. *Vehi* documents the name of the bride, groom and the guests invited alongwith details of gifts presented to the couple (the amount of money given as *salami*, *nenda* or *laag*, goods and other articles presented). The time and event on which gift was given (*mehndi*, *sehra bandi*, *barat*, *walima* etc.) is also written down. Apart from individual exchange, *vehi* keeps a sum of all exchanges (*mubarki*, *varney*, *salami*, *nenda*, *laag*) by each family. This documentation is important to reciprocate fairly as set by traditional norms. The amount equal to the amount previously received is called *purana*, the premium added is called *wadda*. For instance, on the wedding of her son, Salma received *nenda* of 1000 rupees from Zara. She reciprocated by giving Azra 1300 rupees on the latter’s son’s wedding. In the *vehi* register this amount got written as; *purana* = Rs. 1000, *wadda* = Rs. 300.

Anyone in the house can keep the register. It is not specified to any family member. In most cases the one who can read and write manages the register. In some families, however, the male head keeps the record. As one of my female respondent Basheeran bibi informed:

Although I make the decisions related to all kinds of exchanges, but the register is maintained by my son, who is the head of the family¹².

This statement also informs that it is not necessary that the person who makes exchange decisions, keeps the record.

Vehi is considered as an asset because it holds all the entries of past exchanges and is referred to whenever there is a wedding within one’s social network. Before going to an event people refer to this register to assess how much they need to give. It also serve to check who attended their function. The importance of keeping *vehi* has been emphasized by all of our respondents.

Rashid, a respondent in his early forties, explained:

Whenever I see the vehi of my marriage, I feel delighted to see my friends mentioned there. It is a reminder that my friends shared my happiness and fully participated on my wedding.

Furthermore, when people estimate the wedding expenses, they again refer to *vehi*. The amount received in the form of *vehar* is subtracted from the total expenses; it is anticipated to receive this amount from family, kith and kin. The remaining amount is then arranged by the family. Safia, a woman of *kammi biradari* explained;

“I belong to a poor family and did not have sufficient money to bear the expenses required for my son’s wedding. I knew I would need to borrow money. So I calculated what I would receive from the guests and borrowed only the remaining amount.

The value of *vehi* is evident from the fact that it is kept in lock in a *paiti*¹³, lest one might lose it. In case the record is misplaced; there is a possibility that *vehar* relations get affected and in a negative way. Sardaran an aged woman of the village recalled an incident where Aslam, her relative misplaced his *vehi* at the time of her daughter’s wedding

“On the wedding of my daughter, Aslam my relative, approached me in the morning and informed that he had lost his vehi. He seemed quite upset. I checked mine, and told him what he owed, two thousand and one hundred rupees. He trusted my words and gave this amount. Later, he found his register. He had the same amount written there. It got verified. It was a fair dealing!

Conclusion

The social imperative to reciprocate appropriately on various rites de passage has always intrigued anthropologists. The article contends that elaborate ritualistic activities and performances on weddings in rural Punjab require participation and contribution of family members, friends and fellow

¹² In patriarchal system head of the household is based on gender and not age. In the absence of father the eldest son assumes his position.

¹³ An iron trunk used to keep valuable and precious things.

villagers. This involves reciprocal exchange on several levels. The expectations and subsequent support both are stipulated by traditions and customs. Elaborate documentation of all exchanges further endorse institutionalization of reciprocity. The unwritten, unsaid but regulatory and effective rules are internalized by the members of the community. The term premium reciprocity is suggested to all forms of reciprocal exchange where value addition to the actual amount is mandatory. Of the various types of reciprocity, premium and balanced reciprocity take precedence. Subsequent to which is generalized reciprocity. Negative reciprocity ranges from the least to nil.

The reciprocal exchange that takes place on weddings and various associated rituals and functions, carry within themselves several layers of meanings. The type and proximity of social relation, affordability, gender and age are important factors determining the nature of *laag vehar*. Understanding *laag vehar* helps in better comprehension of social structure, organization and hierarchy in rural Punjab.

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