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# DISAPPEARING WEDDING RITES OF PASSAGE IN UZBEKISTAN: MODERNIZATION AND FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES

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## ABSTRACT

Weddings serve as ceremonial practices that mark significant life transitions and hold profound cultural significance across societies. Encompassing elements such as attire, rituals, games, and symbolic acts, weddings are a central subject within folklore studies. Amid ongoing social change, certain wedding traditions are abbreviated, transformed, or abandoned. This study identifies traditional Uzbek wedding customs that are gradually vanishing, examines the underlying causes of their decline, and documents these practices in their original forms. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 participants from across Uzbekistan. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including extensive knowledge of local wedding traditions and active participation in wedding ceremonies. Their diverse backgrounds and the regional spread ensured varied insights. The study evaluates wedding customs across pre-wedding, wedding, and post-wedding phases, identifying 16 traditional wedding (toy) rituals that were once widespread but are now increasingly obsolete. The findings indicate that the gradual disappearance of these customs reflects processes of adaptation to new social realities, including cultural transformation, reinterpretation, and reproduction, rather than representing an absolute loss.

**KEYWORDS:** Uzbek Weddings, Wedding Folklore, Transition Rituals, Collective Memory, Wedding Traditions on the Verge of Being Forgotten.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE SEMANTIC, SOCIAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL MEANINGS OF THE WEDDING

At its core, a wedding is a celebration. In Turkic culture, this celebration primarily marks the decision of two young individuals to unite their lives through marriage and the ceremonial acknowledgment of that union. In Turkish, the word *düğün* (wedding) is synonymous with *toy* (wedding). While Kipchak Turkic groups predominantly use the term *toy*, Anatolian Oghuz Turks more commonly employ *düğün*. Etymologically, the modern Turkish word *düğün* derives from the Old Turkic *tügün*, which in turn derives from *tügin* and is rooted in the verb *tüg*, meaning “to bind” or “to tie.” This same root survives in contemporary Turkish in words such as *düğme* (button) and *düğüm* (knot), both of which convey the idea of fastening or connecting (Gündoğdu, 2023; [sozluk.gov.tr](http://sozluk.gov.tr); [nisanyansozluk.com](http://nisanyansozluk.com)). Thus, the term inherently signifies the act of binding, fastening, and uniting two individuals through marriage.

Although the term *düğün* functionally denotes the celebration marking the union and marriage of a woman and a man, its significance extends well beyond this definition. Both *düğün* and *toy* encompass a spectrum of social, economic, sociological, folkloric, anthropological, and philosophical meanings. While a comprehensive, multi-layered analysis of the wedding phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to briefly outline these dimensions.

From a social perspective, the wedding represents unification, reproduction, and institutionalization. Sociologically, it signifies the construction of the smallest yet most stable unit of society. From a folkloric standpoint, the wedding constitutes a system of clothing, performances, symbols, representations, attitudes, and behaviors that have become standardized and stabilized in accordance with the requirements of collective culture. Anthropologically, the wedding goes beyond the everyday, offering a vivid display of a society's cultural richness and internal structure. Philosophically, it refers to a ritualized process through which two distinct separations are transformed into a new form of unity, oppositions are rendered harmonious, and what is otherwise forbidden or taboo is legitimized through elevation and sanctification within a ceremonial framework.

This study examines wedding customs in Uzbekistan that are gradually disappearing from everyday practice. These traditions are presented in accordance with their original forms and ritual logic.

As weddings are fundamentally folkloric rituals, understanding their meanings and significance remains a central concern within folklore studies.

### 1.1. *Modernization And the Modernization of National Folklore in Uzbekistan*

The most fundamental concepts and processes underlying modernization are individualization, rationalization, and secularization. Secondary processes, which are essentially the embodied forms of these core dynamics, include the transition from communal life to societal organization, the advancement of science, urbanization, the separation of religion and state affairs, women's participation in public life, the expansion of literacy, rising educational levels, and technological development (Alptekin, 2023). Through these interconnected processes, societies and cultures worldwide have gradually undergone change, transformation, and modernization.

These dynamics have also influenced Uzbekistan, which has experienced rapid modernization in the periods following two significant historical developments. The first was the establishment of the Soviet regime in Russia and its subsequent expansion throughout Central Asia; the second was the collapse of this regime and the gradual replacement of its system with a capitalist economic order (Erkem Gülboy, 2024; Egamberdiyev & Turgunbayev, 2023; Kongar, 1995).

As Uzbekistan has modernized as both a state and a society, its culture and folklore have also been shaped by this process. Developments such as secular thought, individualization, urbanization, and technological advancement have produced significant changes in both general culture and folklore, resulting in their modernization. As a result, *toy* (wedding) customs that were practiced for centuries within traditional culture have been revised, transformed, or, in some cases, entirely abandoned and forgotten (Atf Dede, 2024; Baş, 2021; Ortakçı & Yiğit, 2024).

### 1.2. *Malinowski's Functionalist Theory and the Abandonment of Traditions That Lose Their Function*

Malinowski's functionalist theory seeks to understand the roles and continuity of social and cultural traditions within the social system by analyzing the functions they perform. According to this perspective, a tradition or ritual can be sustained only insofar as it fulfills a specific social function. Traditions are not maintained solely for aesthetic reasons; rather, aesthetic elements may serve

primarily as motivational factors. The fundamental reason for the persistence of traditions lies in their capacity to respond to concrete needs in everyday life. Consequently, traditions continue to exist and be practiced as long as they meet such real-life needs. Conversely, when a tradition loses its function, it is gradually neglected, no longer practiced, and eventually forgotten altogether (Malinowski, 2000; 2016; Lévi-Strauss, 2012).

### ***1.3. The Theory of Rites of Passage***

Social life constitutes a dynamic structure in which individuals are positioned within specific norms, roles, and statuses. Throughout the life course, an individual's transition from one status to another is not merely a biological or personal transformation; it is also a process that requires social recognition, legitimization, and reinforcement through collective meanings. In this context, rituals function as fundamental symbolic and cultural mechanisms that align individual change with the broader social order.

Theoretical discussions on the concept of ritual have intensified within anthropological and sociological literature, particularly since the early twentieth century. One of the most systematic and influential approaches in this field is the theory of Rites of Passage developed by Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep (1960) argues that critical life thresholds such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death are not incorporated into social life through random or purely individual choices, but rather through structured ritual arrangements. According to him, rites of passage constitute a holistic process that enables the individual to separate from a former status, pass through a transitional phase marked by uncertainty, and ultimately be socially accepted into a new status.

Van Gennep conceptualizes rites of passage as consisting of three fundamental stages: separation (*séparation*), the liminal or threshold phase (*liminality*), and reintegration or aggregation (*agrégation*). The phase of separation refers to the symbolic detachment of the individual from a previous social status, during which markers of former roles and identities are removed. The liminal phase represents a period of ambiguity and transience in which the individual exists between two statuses, belonging fully to neither the old nor the new social position. The final phase, reintegration, signifies the individual's acceptance of their current status and the community's public recognition of it.

In this theoretical framework, the metaphors of

the door and the threshold occupy a central position. According to Van Gennep (1960), the door symbolizes the boundary between two distinct social or symbolic worlds, while the threshold represents the critical point at which this boundary is crossed. Ritual practices such as sprinkling blood or purifying water at the threshold, hanging amulets, or offering sacrifices serve to ensure that the individual crosses this boundary safely and legitimately. These practices reveal that the transition is not merely personal but also sacred and socially sanctioned.

Rites of passage also function to legitimize changes in an individual's social status and to prevent potential social tensions that may arise from such transformations. Marriage rituals, in particular, constitute one of the most prominent domains in which this theory is applied. Marriage symbolizes a multidimensional process of transformation involving transitions from singlehood to marital life, from youth to adulthood, and from one family structure to another. Through weddings and the rituals that accompany them, this transformation becomes visible, comprehensible, and socially acceptable to both the individual and the community (Turner, 1987; Karaman, 2010).

Van Gennep's theory of rites of passage conceptualizes rituals not merely as traditional or religious practices, but as fundamental processes that ensure the continuity of social order by integrating individual transformations with collective meanings. In this respect, the theory provides a robust and comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the social functions of life-cycle rituals such as marriage, birth, and death.

### ***1.4. Weddings As Folklore and Rites of Passage***

From a folkloric perspective, weddings are social rituals endowed with rich, multilayered meanings. Since folklore encompasses folk culture, traditions, beliefs, customs, and narratives, wedding ceremonies are among its most significant components. Weddings can thus be regarded as folkloric practices that reflect a society's social structure, value systems, mythological beliefs, and normative frameworks. These ceremonies serve as living examples of traditions, rituals, and symbolic forms transmitted from generation to generation.

Wedding ceremonies are an integral part of ritual culture, which represents one of the most potent expressions of folk culture. Through weddings, valuable insights can be gained into a community's past beliefs, social roles and responsibilities, class structures, and broader understandings of life.

Traditional weddings, in particular, incorporate a

wide range of folkloric elements. These include oral culture (songs, folk tunes, rhymes, and lullabies performed during weddings), visual culture (bridal attire, jewelry, and decorative arrangements), and performance based or applied culture (traditional foods, dances, and games). For instance, wedding songs commonly found in Turkish folk culture carry profound symbolic meanings, often representing the bride's departure from her parental home and her transition into a new phase of life. Similarly, specific movements performed during the bride-taking ceremony, as well as folk dances accompanied by drums and wind instruments, symbolically convey communal values and social structures.

From a folkloric standpoint, weddings have also been interpreted as rites of passage. Arnold van Gennep's (2019) theory of rites of passage demonstrates that weddings symbolize a significant transition at both the individual and social levels. Human life is marked by critical thresholds, and crossing these thresholds without ritual is generally inconceivable. A transition without ritual may even be perceived as deviant or socially inappropriate. It is through ritual that such transitions are normalized, legitimized, and shared with the community, thereby acquiring collective meaning. As one of the most significant thresholds in human life, marriage is ritually represented through the wedding ceremony. Through wedding rituals, individuals, families, and couples can symbolically connect the stages before and after marriage, rendering this transformation visible and intelligible to society. According to the rites of passage theory, the individual simultaneously experiences multiple transitions through marriage: from singlehood to married life, from youth to adulthood, from solitude to partnership, from one family to another, and often from an extended family structure to a nuclear family model (Gedikli, 2023; Topçu, 2023).

Traditional practices (Zorlu, 2005; Tatar, 2011) embedded in weddings also function to reproduce social order, gender roles, and social hierarchies. Rituals such as the bride-taking and groom-receiving ceremonies symbolize the formation of social and cultural bonds through the union of two families. Acts such as the bride's family "sending her off" and the groom's family "welcoming her" encapsulate and vividly represent the social statuses of the families involved and the nature of their relationship.

In many respects, weddings symbolize a form of "rebirth." The symbolism present in wedding rituals frequently overlaps with mythological themes. Since ancient times, marriage has been associated with natural cycles and fertility symbolism. In many

cultures, wedding ceremonies are seen as rituals that invoke new life and abundance within the community. The bride and groom are often symbolically linked to natural elements such as the sun, earth, and water. At a subsequent level, they may also be associated with wheat-bearing ears of grain and ultimately with bread, a symbol that is entirely embedded in fertility and abundance themes (Yalçın & Arık, 2017). This illustrates that societies do not view the union of a couple merely as an individual event, but rather as a cosmic and universal act of renewal, balance, and harmony.

### **1.5. The Disappearance of Wedding Customs**

The fading or abandonment of specific customs and traditions (Tatar, 2011) in wedding ceremonies is closely linked to processes of social transformation, cultural change, and evolving individual preferences. These changes illuminate the evolution of social structures, values, norms, and cultural perceptions over time. Fundamentally, such processes arise from economic, technological, social, and cultural factors. For example, the global expansion of capitalist economic systems, the shift from in-kind to monetary economies, and rising costs have diminished or eliminated certain wedding customs.

From a social perspective, the decline of communal solidarity, collective cooperation, mutual aid, shared labor (*imece*), and informal lending, replaced by occupational differentiation and increasing individualization, has made it difficult to sustain many traditional wedding customs. Culturally, the modernizing influences of urbanization and globalization have rendered the continuation of certain older wedding traditions impractical or unfeasible under contemporary conditions.

The disappearance of traditions and customs can be interpreted as part of the evolutionary process of collective memory (Halbwachs, 2018; Assmann, 2011). Societies adapt to changing circumstances, shifting social needs, and evolving individual preferences, leading some traditions to be replaced by new norms. In this context, weddings transform as cultural expressions reflecting collective memory. Forgotten or abandoned traditions serve as indicators of a society's cultural dynamics and broader social transformations.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Turkish, only two texts directly address Uzbek weddings. The first is the study by Muratoğlu *et al.* (1996), which examines weddings alongside birth

and death in a non-academic style. Moreover, this text, written 28 years ago, does not aim to distinguish between wedding customs still practiced and those that have been abandoned.

The second Turkish-language text is by Yüce and Khamrabaeva (2020), which focuses on Uzbek national culture and, within this framework, briefly addresses wedding ceremonies alongside rituals related to birth, age transitions, circumcision, and death. Similarly, this short text does not discuss which wedding customs have been forgotten or discontinued.

Other Turkish-language studies address Uzbek weddings only indirectly. For instance, some focus on folk beliefs related to marriage in Uzbek culture (Işık, 2022), others on Uzbek pilaf in general (Cengiz, 2019) or specifically on Tashkent wedding pilaf (Yurt & Achilova, 2024). One article examines the wedding customs of Kazakhs living in Turkey and Uzbekistan (Beiseğluova, 2023), while another analyzes the folklore of Uzbek circumcision weddings (Hudaykulova, 2010).

More broadly, numerous studies conducted in Turkey examine wedding ceremonies across the Turkic world (Deveci, 2023) and among various Turkic peoples. These include comprehensive studies on weddings among Kazakhs in Kazakhstan (Kartaeva & Kalniyaz, 2017; Çetin, 2024), Kyrgyz communities (Cumaliyeva & Kasiyeva, 2019; Keleş, 2017), Tuvan Turks (Türker & Koçoğlu Gündoğdu, 2016), Azerbaijan (Albaliyev, 2011), South Azerbaijan (Eren Soysal & Vahid, 2023), Nogai Turks (Kaya & Orhan, 2018; Alpargu, 2019), Cypriot Turks (Üstün Aksoy et al., 2022), Ahıska Turks (Dursun, 2019), Dagestani Turks (Askenderova, 2014), Crimean Turks (Er, 2022), and Balkan Turks (Eroğlu, 2008; Turan, 2014; İsmil, 2020).

However, none of these studies address wedding customs that are in the process of being forgotten. Notably, no existing Turkish-language study specifically examines Uzbek weddings, particularly those traditions that have been forgotten or abandoned. This gap in the literature serves as a primary motivation for the present research.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretive social science perspective. The primary data collection methods include ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews. Fourteen individuals with extensive knowledge of Uzbek culture and active participation in wedding ceremonies were interviewed.

Participants were selected from 12 provinces of

Uzbekistan, the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, and the capital city of Tashkent, which has a distinct administrative status. Their familiarity with both their own regions and other parts of Uzbekistan enabled them to provide comparative insights and facilitate critical discussion. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Interviewees are anonymized and coded as “Participant 1” (P1), “Participant 2” (P2), and so forth. The study was reviewed and approved for compliance with scientific ethical principles by the Scientific Ethics Committee of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (decision dated 25.11.2025, no. 04/3192).

#### 3.1. *Wedding Customs in Uzbekistan: Before, During, And After the Ceremony*

Uzbek weddings (toy) are among the most significant rituals at the center of social life and possess profound historical continuity. In Uzbek society, a wedding symbolizes not only the marriage of two individuals but also inter-family and inter-communal solidarity, social prestige, and cultural continuity. (Roots of Uzbek weddings: traditions and their significance, 2025) Proverbs such as “Topganing to‘ylarga buyursin” and “Qarz uzilar, xotin yonga qolar” (P1, P2, P6) clearly demonstrate the social value attributed to weddings. Indeed, it is widely known that wedding-related debts in Uzbekistan are often repaid over many years. (Yuksalish: 65% of Uzbek Families Spend More Than a Year’s Income on Weddings, 2025) In this ancient geography, where pre-Islamic beliefs and Islamic influences intertwine, wedding traditions carry historical depth through rituals such as circling fire and touching the threshold with the forehead (P1 et al.). (Matkarimova & Xayrullayeva, 2023)

Uzbek wedding traditions generally unfold in three stages: pre-wedding, wedding ceremony, and post-wedding. In the pre-wedding phase, the tradition of matchmaking (savchi) plays a decisive role. Matchmakers visit the bride’s family carrying trays (toghora) wrapped in white tablecloths; during this visit, the bride’s tea service, manners, and family structure are carefully observed. Consent is not explicitly stated during the first visit, and the trays are opened only in subsequent visits. This is followed by the bread breaking (non-sindirish) and tying a white headscarf (oq o‘rar) ceremonies, through which the engagement is formally completed, and wedding preparations begin (P1 et al.).

At this stage, financial matters are negotiated through male representatives. Practices such as bride

price (*kalin puli*), mother's milk compensation (*sut puli*), *mahr*, and wedding expenses vary by region. In particular, the amount of bride price is closely linked to the province's socio-economic structure (Kariev ve Kalmurza Uulu, 2025). Due to high financial demands, practices such as reciprocal marriage arrangements (*berdel*) have been employed at times (Jabbarov, 1994). Although the practice of offering live animals (*canlik*) once existed, it has largely disappeared today. Similarly, the tradition of sending dowry items prepared by the bride's family to the groom's house has transformed with modernization, as ready-made products have increasingly replaced handmade goods (P1 et al.). (Mamadaliyeva, 2024)

Before the wedding, solidarity-based rituals such as wood chopping (*odun maydalash*), carrot chopping (*sabzi to'g'rar*), and negotiation feast (*maslahat oshi*) are also performed at the groom's house. These practices strengthen neighborhood relations and constitute essential cultural elements that rely on collective labor for wedding organization. Another pre-wedding tradition, *nine dishes* (*to'qqiz tovoq*), involves a symbolic feast offered to the groom and his friends at the bride's house; however, this custom has disappeared mainly in contemporary practice (cf. Gulcixhan, 2024; Milliy Ansiklopediya, 2006). (Nikoh (Wedding Ceremony) - Intangible Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan, n.d.)



Picture-1: Holding Mirror  
(Gazeta.Uz).



Picture-2: Bride Greeting (Youtu.Be).

#### 4. Some Uzbek Wedding (Toy) Customs That Are Gradually Being Forgotten

##### 1. Girls' Party or Henna Night (*Qiz Bazmi*)

*Qiz bazmi* was formerly a small pre-wedding celebration held at the bride-to-be's home. Only women – such as the bride's friends, female relatives, and peers – were invited to this gathering. Wearing traditional national clothing, the participants would sing *lappar* (Uzbek folk songs), dance, and celebrate together. During the event, the bride would display the clothes she had sewn for her friends as well as the gifts sent by the groom's family.

In recent times, this custom has ceased to be

practiced in private homes. In some provinces (Jizzakh, Samarkand, Khorezm), it is rarely held in wedding halls; however, in its contemporary form, the groom, his friends, and many guests from both families attend, and the event is organized more like a whole wedding ceremony rather than a woman-only gathering (P5, P9, P13).

This tradition, known as "Henna Night" among Anatolian Turks and "*Kiz Bazmi*" in Uzbek society, was a widespread ritual in the past. It aimed to facilitate and legitimize the transition of young women from single life to marriage. It also served as a rite of passage, allowing the bride to meet and say goodbye to her female friends and close circle one

last time. At that time, unlike today's society where young people frequently met in cafes and communicated via cell phones, this tradition's practical function in real life was one of the most important reasons for its decline. Perhaps these socio-technological changes led to the gradual abandonment and forgetting of the "Kız Bazmı" tradition.

## **2. Ko'Pkari (Kök Börü, Picture-3), Kurash (Wrestling), Qo'Chqor Urushi (Ram Fighting), And Xo'Roz Urushtirish (Cockfighting)**

In the past, weddings in Uzbekistan were not held throughout the entire year as they are today, but rather during warmer seasons when fruits ripened. Weddings were also made more exciting and festive through various traditional games and competitions. These included ko'pkari (equestrian game), kurash (traditional wrestling) (cf. Doğan et al., 2021; Çeviker & Ünlü, 2023), qo'chqor urushtirish (ram fighting), and xo'roz urushtirish (cockfighting).

Today, these activities are performed primarily as symbolic displays during Nowruz celebrations (P1 et al.). Due to its high cost, ko'pkari is now rarely organized and only by wealthy individuals, typically during circumcision ceremonies rather than weddings.

If we compare modern life with entertainment activities, the horse racing, wrestling, and ram or cockfighting traditions of nomadic and agricultural societies reflected their mode of production and productive capacity. These traditions were also closely associated with physical strength. The transition of societies to new forms of production and entertainment has led to the functional loss and eventual forgetting of these old traditions. With urbanization and modernization, automobiles, electricity, electronic devices, and games played on mobile phones, such as checkers, backgammon, and chess, have become widespread as domesticated forms of entertainment.

## **3. Wood Chopping (Otun Maydalash)**

In the past, the bride's family would test the prospective groom by asking him to chop wood. The primary purpose of this practice was to assess whether the groom was physically strong and capable. By observing how he handled the task – whether he could split or break the wood – the elders evaluated his practical skills and work ethic. This was seen as an indicator of whether he could support a household and manage the economic responsibilities of marriage. If the groom failed to perform this task adequately, the marriage could be rejected, as it was

believed that a man incapable of chopping wood would also be unable to overcome the material challenges of married life (P1 et al.).

Similarly, the bride-to-be was asked to brew tea. Through this ritual, her appearance, posture, and demeanor within the household were carefully observed. Matchmaking women would also inspect the house's surroundings, including doorways and other visible areas, paying close attention to cleanliness and even checking for spider webs. Families with marriageable daughters, therefore, made great efforts to keep both the house and its surroundings clean at all times (P1 et al.).

Similarly, wood chopping in groom selection and tea brewing in bride selection were traditions associated with and symbolizing specific socio-economic needs in pre-modern societies. In pre-modern societies, the necessity of physical labor for providing for the family made it necessary to test the physical strength and endurance of prospective grooms. The fact that these traditions no longer have a functional role or social significance in contemporary societies is due to the fact that income-generating activities no longer require the same physical strength as before. This is because income-generating activities are now largely carried out indoors, relying on manual dexterity or even cognitive skills at a desk. Similarly, the role of socialization in brides passing the "tea brewing" test was significant; in pre-modern societies, socialization among neighbors, relatives, and acquaintances primarily occurred through home visits. Today, the increasing popularity of outdoor spaces such as cafes and restaurants as socialization areas has reduced home visits. This has led to the postponement, neglect, abandonment, and now near oblivion of this tradition of brides' "tea brewing" skills.

## **4. Nine Dishes (To'Qqiz Tovoq)**

In the to'qqiz tovoq (nine dishes) or kuyov navkar (welcoming the groom) tradition, the groom and his friends visit the bride's family to take her from her home. Initially, this custom emerged as a way to feed the groom and his companions while the bride completed her preparations. Over time, the practice became formalized, and eventually nine different dishes were served. Today, however, the to'qqiz tovoq tradition has nearly disappeared (P1 et al.). Therefore, in the modern age where brides are picked up from their family homes in luxury vehicles, the tradition of hosting guests has also lost its social function.

## **5. Face/Veil Uncovering (Yuzochar)**

The yuzochar (face unveiling) tradition is usually performed after the bride arrives at the groom's house. In this ritual, a young boy is given a rolling pin (or, in some regions, a ladle) and asked to lift the white veil covering the bride's face. A handkerchief is tied to the end of the rolling pin. The child then removes the veil with the rolling pin, and the bride presents the child with a handkerchief. The child also keeps the handkerchief attached to the rolling pin (cf. Köse, 2003; Eroğlu & Özkanat, 2014; Aydemir, 2013). This tradition has now been almost entirely abandoned (P1 et al.).

The ritual of unveiling the bride's face and revealing her face is a common practice in pre-modern, traditional societies where the social meeting of women and men were isolated (Tatar, 2011; Zorlu, 2005). In such societies, young women were expected not to show their faces and bodies to men, only revealing them to their husbands on their wedding night. Similar to some more conservative communities today, purity, morality, and chastity were sought in the isolation of the female body. However, in modern societies, both these mentalities and the related practices based on physical isolation have largely lost their importance.

### 6. Pouring Oil into the Hearth and Sifting Flour

On the day following the wedding, particularly in rural areas, the bride is introduced to the hearth and

its surroundings. Symbolically, oil is poured onto the burning hearth; then a supra (a traditional kitchen utensil used for sifting flour) is opened, and flour is sifted (Picture-4). In regions such as Khorezm, Samarkand, Jizzakh, and Surkhandarya, tail fat and money are hidden inside the flour. The bride is asked to sift the flour, during which she finds the money and the fat. She keeps the money and cuts the tail fat (P5, P9, P13).

The purpose of pouring oil into the hearth and cutting the tail fat is to ensure that the bride's "hand is oily," meaning that she will cook well and abundantly. Sifting the flour symbolizes fertility and prosperity, implying that the household will always be filled with flour. In other words, this ritual represents the bride's first lesson in her new home, introducing her to domestic responsibilities and household chores. Today, this custom is rarely practiced (P1 et al.).

Similarly, these customs corresponded to the basic needs of the traditional era (Zorlu, 2005). During this period, women had to prepare many foods and drinks themselves. In the modern age, where many women work outside the home, most of these products have become ready-made goods purchased from outside. As a result, the variety and quantity of homemade foods relying on women's labor have significantly decreased. Such customs began to gradually disappear in modern society, first in urban areas and increasingly in rural areas as well.



Picture-3: Ko 'Pkari Play  
(Gazeta.Uz).



Picture-4: Flour Sifting Ritual  
(Arxiv.Uz).

### 7. Invitations For Introducing the Bride to Neighbors

In the past, across almost all regions of Uzbekistan, the newlywed bride would be invited to the homes of neighbors and relatives after the wedding. Each invitation was attended, and the mother-in-law would accompany the bride from door to door throughout the neighborhood (or village) to introduce her to the local community. Similarly, visits were paid to relatives' homes, allowing the bride to become closely acquainted with extended family members. Today, this custom has largely been abandoned (P1 et al.). With

urbanization, modernization, and the replacement of Community-Based (communal) ties with society-based (associational) relations, this practice has gradually fallen into disuse. It is on the verge of being forgotten.

Pre-modern solidarity was largely based on neighborhood and kinship ties. This type of solidarity was often referred to as mechanical solidarity, and in valued community-type social structures, it was important for introductions and familiarization practices (Tönnies & Findikoğlu, 2011; Gezgin, 1998). However, with urbanization and modernization, communal ties have been replaced

by societal ties, and organic solidarity is experienced more than mechanical solidarity.

### 8. *Circling Fire*

In the past, this custom was a widely practiced custom in nearly all regions of Uzbekistan (Picture-6). The ritual of circling the fire was performed in different ways. In some provinces (Jizzakh, Samarkand, Fergana), the bride and groom would circle the fire together, while in others (Kashkadarya), the groom would carry the bride in his arms while walking around the fire (P4, P5, P8, P9). In some practices, the groom would even place the bride on his shoulders (P12).

The purpose of circling the fire was to purify the newly married couple from evil spirits. Religious figures (imams, *damlalar*) have frequently emphasized that this custom originates from pre-Islamic fire-worship traditions.

The tradition of the bride and groom walking around a fire may have been practiced for both faith-based and practical reasons; for example, the disinfectant and healing properties of fire (believed to kill germs) could have been a health-related practice. The comfort, peace, and sense of security that walking around the fire was thought to provide to the human spirit could have been a faith-related practice. However, in modern society, with the widespread availability of healthcare services, such needs-based practices have become the domain of medical doctors and psychologists. Furthermore, with the spread of Islam, this practice was labeled as shirk (polytheism); this tradition was rapidly abandoned and forgotten.

### 9. *"The Old Woman Died" (Kampir O'ldi) Custom*

This custom was practiced in Syrdarya Province and in the Farish district of Jizzakh. It was performed when the groom and his friends arrived to take the bride from her home. An elderly woman would step in front of the groom and lie down, while the bride's relatives and neighbors would shout, "*kampir o'ldi*" ("the old woman has died"). The groom would then symbolically "bring her back to life" by giving her money (P5, P10).

The symbolic "death" of the elderly woman in front of the young couple was intended to express a wish that the newlyweds would live as long as she had. However, this custom is no longer practiced anywhere today.

Modernization, urbanization, and individualization processes (Alptekin, 2025) have led to significant compromises in the rituals necessary

for transitioning from one social status to another, such as aging. As social life and individualization have become more widespread, the rigid rules governing social life have largely been replaced by more flexible ones. The role of the elderly within these rituals, and the importance of symbolic approval and transition rituals, have diminished. The expectation that individuals should now make their own decisions and assume responsibility for their own actions has become widespread.

### 10. *Preparing Hand-Embroidered Pillowcases, Suzane, Belts, And Handkerchiefs*

In the past, when girls reached the age of 15-16, they would begin preparing their dowries by embroidering various textile items, such as pillowcases, *suzane* (embroidered textiles hung on walls), small handkerchiefs to be given as gifts to children at weddings, and belts for the groom. Typically, girls would decorate the edges of white fabric with intricate embroidery when making belts and handkerchiefs.

Using pillow dimensions as templates, they would also prepare two types of pillowcases – short and long – embroidered with floral and bird motifs (P1 et al.). Today, however, very few people remember or practice this tradition. Due to industrialization, mass production, advertising, and capitalism, such needs are now met mainly through ready-made products purchased from markets and stores.

With increased accessibility and the preference for more affordable mass-produced goods, the authenticity, personal character, and aesthetic value of handmade products have been largely abandoned. This transformation is a prime example of how traditions are being gradually eroded, starting with the most labor-intensive and challenging crafts.

### 11. *The Buttered Milk Ritual*

In some parts of Khorezm (Urgench), after the groom brings the bride to his home, the marriage contract (*nikah*) ceremony is performed. During the ceremony, the bride and groom dip their fingers into a bowl of milk mixed with butter. Milk symbolizes purity and whiteness, while butter represents abundance and prosperity. At the same time, female relatives (*yengeler*) cut pieces of paper, wishing that the young couple's lives would blend together as the paper does.

The young participants attending the ceremony also drink from the bowl, expressing wishes such as "May our lives also be pure and prosperous; may it soon be our turn" (P13). Today, however, this ritual

is no longer practiced.

In traditional agricultural societies, foods like bread, salt, milk, and butter were revered and held symbolic importance. This was because agricultural products were associated with productivity, abundance, and prosperity, leading to the search for symbolic meanings associated with them (Kutlar, 2013; Samsakçı, 2012). However, with the transition to modern mass production of these products and their much lower costs, the concept of abundance associated with them has largely disappeared. In our time, prosperity and abundance are associated with educational certificates, internships, job opportunities, and ultimately, the economic income of newly married couples. These values have replaced the old symbols of abundance, leading to the gradual abandonment of related traditions.

### 12. The Chimildiq Drawing Ritual

The ritual of drawing the *chimildiq* (a curtain or partition made of hand-embroidered fabric) at the bride's home, accompanied by a symbolic rooster crow and the awakening of elderly women, was once practiced in the rural areas of Samarkand and Jizzakh (Picture-5). On the wedding day—when the groom arrived to take the bride—certain customs were performed at the bride's home that are no longer observed today.



Picture-5: Chimildiq Ritual  
(Arxiv.Uz).



Picture-6: Fire-Circling Ritual  
(Yoshlarovozi.Uz).

### 13. Carrying The Groom on the Shoulders of His Friends to the Chandelier

In Khorezm, when the wedding ceremony ends and the groom is about to be alone with the bride in the bridal chamber, his friends dance and carry him on their shoulders all the way to the *chimildiq*. This act represents their “final gesture” toward him. It symbolizes the value they attribute to their friendship in the presence of the bride (P.13). It can be interpreted as a symbolic message directed at the bride, implying: “Our friend is very precious to us; do not hurt him, and do not distance him from us after marriage.”

One such custom involved setting up a *chimildiq* (a symbolic screen or curtain). While in many regions the *chandelier* was prepared only at the groom's home, in these areas it was also erected at the bride's home. A mattress was placed behind the curtain, where elderly women would lie down, covered with a quilt, pretending to sleep. Someone present would imitate a rooster's crow, prompting the women behind the *chimildiq* to awaken. They would then poetically recount their dreams, describing visions of twin boys and twin girls. By narrating these dreams, they expressed their wish that the dreams would come true and that the young couple would be blessed with twin children, offering prayers to that effect (P5, P9).

This tradition was experienced in agrarian societies where male-female relationships were shaped by strong taboos and rules. It aimed to symbolically reenact the union of bride and groom in the parents' home, reducing stress and anxiety and facilitating harmony between the newlyweds. However, in modern society, since rigid boundaries have largely disappeared, young couples no longer need such symbolic forms of union. Couples planning to marry can, by their own decision, experience intimacy in public and private spaces during their engagement period or even during earlier acquaintance periods.

In contrast to the excessive and exaggerated displays of friendship in traditional societies, modern societies are characterized by more measured and formal relationships (Tatar, 2011). The ostentatious expressions of intense friendship and enmity, which were a necessity of social life in agricultural societies (Tönnies & Fındıkoğlu, 2011; Gezgin, 1998), have lost their function in modern social societies.

### 14. Carrying The Bride in the Arms of Her Brothers Until She Reaches the Groom

In the Angren district of Tashkent Province, in the past, when the groom came to take the bride, her brothers would carry her in their arms and bring her

before the groom. This act conveyed the message: "We value our sister greatly; you should not hurt her and should treat her with the same respect and care" (P.1, P.12).

In contemporary social life, the idea that individuals must bear the consequences of their own choices has become dominant (Rasulova, 2021). In contrast, in traditional societies, women generally did not make marriage decisions of their own free will, but left this decision to their elders, especially their parents. Therefore, the bride's family may have aimed to convey to the groom, through such rituals, how valuable their daughter or sister was and to symbolically warn him not to upset her. However, in modern societies, individualism and personal autonomy prevail; young women largely make their own decisions regarding marriage, and there is no need for such exaggerated, message-laden, and collectively responsible behaviors.

#### **15. *Stitching A White Thread onto the Groom's Right Shoulder When He Comes to Take the Bride***

In the Kuva district of Fergana Province, when the groom comes to take the bride, he is dressed in traditional attire such as a ton or chapan (a long conventional coat), a practice also observed in Jizzakh, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya. While the groom is wearing this garment, a white thread is lightly stitched onto his right shoulder, then pulled out, leaving the thread on his clothing. This ritual symbolizes the wish for the couple's life path to be long and "white," that is, pure and open. Today, this practice survives only rarely in some rural areas. Another interpretation is that just as the thread remains on the groom's shoulder, the bride is also expected to stay with him throughout life, sharing his burdens. In Surkhandarya, the ritual involves stitching a single thread connecting the bride's and the groom's shoulders, symbolizing their lifelong unity and inseparability (P.4, P.5, P.8, P.9, P.11).

There is little doubt that such customs are fundamentally grounded in the irrationality of traditional societies, which attributed excessive meaning to symbols, traces, and signs (Tatar, 2011; Zorlu, 2005). Nevertheless, this same irrationality could be socially effective insofar as people believed in and internalized these meanings. In the modern era, however, superstition and belief-based practices (Wiseman & Watt, 2015) have largely been replaced by reason, science, and rationality. As a result, such customs have ceased to be practiced or reproduced.

#### **16. *The Bride Touches Her Forehead to the Threshold Before Entering the Groom's House***

This custom is observed in Khorezm. When the bride is brought to the groom's home, before stepping inside, she kneels, bends forward on her hands and knees, and touches her forehead to the doorstep. This gesture signifies: "From now on, this house is sacred to me, and I will remain loyal to this home and everything associated with it" (P.13).

This practice reflects the rigid boundaries characteristic of traditional societies (Zorlu, 2005; Tatar, 2011). The threshold of the outer door required a ritualistic act because it symbolized the boundary of the house and could be an exaggerated symbolic expression of loyalty, commitment, and devotion demanded by traditional social structures. However, in modern society, the abandonment of such rigid symbolic rituals is related to the acceptance of individual agreements based on mutual understanding and intention.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The forgetting or abandonment of wedding traditions can be understood as a natural consequence of social transformation and cultural change. Factors such as individual freedoms, gender equality, economic conditions, capitalism, urbanization, modernization, and globalization contribute to the loss or abandonment of certain traditions (Ergashov, 2024). This process does not erase a society's cultural memory; rather, it reshapes and reconfigures it into new forms. Forgotten traditions serve as indicators of evolving social structures and shifting cultural values, reflecting societies' efforts to redefine themselves and adapt their cultural heritage to contemporary conditions.

From the perspective of collective memory, weddings serve as a significant medium through which societies reflect on past cultural values, social structures, and transformations in identity. Weddings function as rituals that preserve cultural heritage, symbolism, and historical continuity. Both traditional and modern weddings facilitate the transmission of social memory, the reproduction and reinforcement of cultural values, and the maintenance of social structure. Thus, weddings play a crucial role as carriers of collective memory in shaping and sustaining social identity. Even as certain traditions are abandoned, societies continue to create new ones (Nikoh (Wedding Ceremony), n.d.).

Modernization, urbanization, the replacement of communal structures with social structures, the shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, the

widespread influence of science and technology, and increasing individualism have all played significant roles in the varying degrees of obsolescence of traditional customs across cultures worldwide (Tönnies & Fındıkoğlu, 2011; Gezgin, 1988). Such traditional customs, particularly those related to weddings, have become obsolete and gradually abandoned. Instead, new practices, rites of passage, and rituals compatible with the values and changes of the modern world have emerged. Thus, the socio-cultural and folkloric life of societies has not weakened; on the contrary, it has maintained its productivity and vitality in various forms. Rituals and rites of passage have been renewed, reinterpreted, and reproduced to be compatible with

contemporary socio-economic conditions.

As with other forms of folk culture, the abandoned or forgotten elements of Uzbek weddings should be understood within this framework. The Uzbek people can replace discarded wedding customs and rites of passage with practices adapted to new conditions or with entirely new forms, thereby enriching folk culture. Cultural authenticity resides not only in original origins but also in acts of creative adaptation. Every society, despite changing circumstances, possesses the capacity to preserve and reproduce the diverse components of its culture and folklore to the extent permitted by its internal dynamism, thus sustaining its cultural richness across generations.

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