

Death in Iranian Culture (A Case Study of Abarkouh, Yazd)

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Abstract

Death, in Abarkouh, as the last stage of the life in this world benefits from some exclusive ceremonies and customs. All the times the course of living from embryonic period to death has gone along with ceremonies and customs for the outstanding events that have been considered in this paper as death through Iranian culture and specifically among culture of people of Abarkouh town.

Keywords: Death, Culture, Abarkouh, Iran.

1. Introduction

A vitriolic and incontrovertible phenomenon –death— how difficult and how oppressive would be the separation of those who are dependents. Death in different cultures has become inextricably linked in the particular ceremonies and customs which are originated in inconsolable affections and feelings that have been performing in painful experiences.

“Death doesn’t revoke family ties between Iranian people. From a legal point of view or civil code, the union of a man and a woman, a father and his adopted child will be eternal as if it is a blood relationship and cannot be ended” (Mazaheri, 1373: 235).

2. Death Customs in Abarkouh

In the past, most people made an effort to arrange a will while there was not any difference between rich men and poor ones. Everyone tried to mention anything who could not perform during his/her own life particularly religions duties in order to children would execute paternal rights. When there was not any offspring to do that, people left money behind them so that somebody else would perform the duties on behalf of them. Thus, last will and testament were the primary steps towards death and

people had to arrange it by themselves when they were still alive. The next step was preparing of a shroud (a piece of cloth to put the corpse on that) which commonly was bought from Karbala or Mecca. It can be said that the most souvenir from Mecca included burial instruments and the last cloth —i.e. the corpse's had been covered by—which most of the time had been washed in ZamZam and Forat (holly rivers). Providing the soil of Imam Hossein's tomb and writing Joushan Kabir prayer on the shroud were the most important mental distress for living people who were to die one day.

After expiration, the news of death was announced through all mosques in different boroughs. Ceremonial washing and putting the corpse inside the shroud were done at home. Then the corpse was carried to the mosque and 4 readers read Koran above the head of corps with a lamp or a candle during the night. Next morning or afternoon, the body had been prepared for burial formalities, put in the wooden coffin and carried toward a cemetery that called */sare-mazar/* or */sare-khak/*. Hereabout the cemetery, people put the coffin on the ground 3 times and then they carried it to the tomb which was bought before. Afterwards, people preformed namaz or prayer for the deceased and put the body in the tomb by his/her son or son—in low or other close family members. Then a mulla promoted the dead person reciting the articles of Islamic faith and put some soil of Imam Hossein's tomb and a piece of prayer on the corpse.

After that people placed a mud-brick on the corpse and the grave had been covered by soil. In ancient times, gravestone was not common and most of grandees had a small gravestone on which the name and the date of death had been engraved.

One day after burial formalities, the funeral ceremony that called */porse/* was set, chiefly in houses. All family members used to dressing black cloths and a few standing people poured rose water on guests palm—out of respect—to utter a salvat (praise and greeting to God and Mohammad).

The people were hospitalized with tea and date. People said something like */ghame akhertoon bashé/* (it would be the last sadness) */Joye azizdun khali/* (your darling would be missed), and */khoda sabrodoun bedah/* (God gives you patience) to console the bereaved family and mourners responded by some expression such as */Ishallow poy shadi berek khoone/* that means God willing, you would go home happy.

If the dead person was a young people, mourners recited elegies and said */roudom,roudom/* (My child) endlessly.

The bereaved family and the relatives went to visit the dead person's grave on the third day while they carried some materials away such as terme (a kind of cloth with a traditional design) to cover the grave, Koran, flower, rose water, date, sugar loaf and fruits placed in small box that was named Yakhdan. Also, several dishes of halva were held on the hands. If the dead person had been rich or khan (Mister) then a horse had been covered by a black saddle that was named */kotal/* indicating of mourning. All mentioned materials had to be prepared in odd numbers such as 5 dishes of halva or 3 sugar loves. They had never been in even number however, the writer of the present paper could not figure out the reason. It may be said that it was derived from a belief knowing even numbers as signals for another death in the mourner's house.

In ancient times, funeral ceremony was only set on the third day, not the seventh or even fortieth day. Two weeks after burial formalities, the people came together to visit the grave again while */khoreshte Gheyme/* and */Ashe kashk/* were cooked to serve them.

2.1 Tips on Death Customs and Ceremonies

- If the dead person is a child, he/ she will intercede on behalf of his/ her parents.
- If the dead person is young, people will pour sugarplum on the corpse and women will jubilate.
- If the weather is rainy during the burial ceremony and 7 drops fall into the grave the dead person will be forgiven.
- Trees of the house—in which a person dies—will be infertile next year.
- Thursday nights */shabe Jome'/* the soul of the dead person will come to his/ her family as a bird.
- All of mother's milk that was sucked by the dead person would come out from the fingers because of the pressure of the grave.

- The dead person will be forgiven, if 40 pious would say ‘God forgives him/ her’.
- If the dead person played a drum on the Ashoora (day of martyrdom Imam Hossein) then drums would be beaten in his burial formalities.
- If anyone takes the thumb of a dead person in a dream, he/ she can say everything.
- People –talking about a dead person— say “his/ her ears would be deaf”, because they believed the dead persons are hearing.
- When a corpse is carried out of home his/ her family members put a prayer rug, Koran, date and sherbet in missing of him / her. Sherbet is a symbol of heaven and it indicates to happiness of the dead person’s soul.
- People cook a kind of sweet bread named Roqanjushi in Sha’ban month that is devoted to charities. Coriander as a bowl and fennel as a spoon of dead persons are included because of their shapes. Zoroastrians also, make this sweet bread (named *Surok*) for the souls of dead persons (Ramazankhani, 2009).

Conclusion

Death through Iranian culture has become inextricably linked in the specific ceremonies and customs which are originated in inconsolable affections and feelings that have been showing in painful experiences. Regarding to this idea that life is going to be continued after dying, the most of these customs and ceremonies are considerable and understandable. In Abarkouh, death –the latest step of the life in this world— benefits from specific ceremonies and customs.

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