

**Symbolic Representation of First Head Shave in Spiritual and Cultural
Context:
A Cognitive Anthropological Perspective**

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Abstract

This article deals with the symbolic representation of the shaving birth hair of the male child and ritual associate with it, in cultural context among the tribesmen of Koh-Sulman district Dera Gahzi Khan, Punjab. This article reveals certain behavior, cognitions and norms that are associated with particular ritual that is named as “jahand” that depict that how people attached with the symbol that is the first shaved hair of baby and associate different themes with this symbol. An attempt has been made in this article that show how people perform this ritual at the shrine and consider the saint as an intermediary between God and themselves and their perception about the ritual and the saint that how it secure the future of their male toddler and shower his blessing on the infant. This research study also shows people’s superstitions that if the ritual is not performed, then evil spirit will put their shadow on their baby and it will prove negative for the infant in the future. The ritual is associated with a male child in that particular area this is because that people of the present local relate their lineage system with male that mean in the future the baby had to deal with society that’s why he need the power and blessing of God through performing the ritual at the local Saint Shrine. The main objective of

this paper is that to know the importance of the ritual that how emotionally and socially people are connected with this birth haircut of the male baby and what is it for them that how they perceive it. The second objective of the study is that to describe what type of beliefs is associated with the shaved hair of the infant at the time of birth and the symbol hair depict to them. The data presented in this paper has been collected by using qualitative anthropological research technique.

Keywords *Head Shave, Symbolic Representation, Shrine, Superstitions, Infant, Rituals.*

Introduction

Hair is an object of intense elaboration and preoccupation in many societies; seemingly the most superficial part of the human body, its meanings are nevertheless deeply rooted in culture. Sometimes the meanings of hair are transcultural but more often they are culturally specific and even then depend on the range of variations that are permitted and expressed in that culture. Abstract or general theories about hair are therefore not sufficient to interpret particular hairstyles or practices relating to hair; one must know quite a lot about the culture in order to do so (Delaney, 1994).

In religion and culture hair of an individual often go through in a same way and considered an important factor. Hairstyles, rituals and practices that are obtained by one culture or individual make a sense about individual belief or commitment. When we see a particular hairstyle or a ritual associated with it, we make our inferences and judgments about individual persuasion, morality sexual orientation and religious sentiment. The first haircut is special in more culture throughout the world. It is often considered as a rite of passage. First hair cut or birth hair cut has various desirable and undesirable associations in different societies. Shaving of baby head is a tradition in different societies throughout the world and it has sociological and cultural importance. Shaving of baby head has different meaning according to culture and social context. Sociologically people follow this tradition because they believe that shaving of birth head hair of baby makes baby healthy

and strong also it is considered a good practice for the growth of the baby, people associate it the first haircut with its medical importance.

In religious perspective Ibn Al-Qayem refer that it is also seen as traditionally as in Islam the shaving of baby head or baby first haircut is required as Sunnah for parents to shave their newborn head after the seventh day of the birth. The hair of the newborn is weighed and equivalent amount of silver or gold is given to the poor (Al-Sharh Al-Mumtiaa' 7/540).

The benefit of shaving of newborn hair is that it removes harm from him and it removes the weak hair and makes it stronger in addition it comforts the newborn and opens the head skin openings. In Pakistan the shaving of baby head is considered auspicious because Pakistan is an Islamic country. The Pakistani culture vivacious and many cultures and traditions are being practiced here because of the influence of region, religion and even village from where they originate.

Shaving rites are a component in quite a number of biblical rituals. Surprisingly, however, they have not yet received a comprehensive treatment by scholars in the biblical field. When shaving rites are treated-in commentaries on specific biblical passages, in dictionary and encyclopedia articles-they are usually associated in a perfunctory manner with specific contexts such as mourning, or specific functions such as achieving purification, causing humiliation, or bringing about the surrender of an individual's power or personality (Olyan, 1998).

Typically, no attempt is made to chart the specific functions of ritual shaving in rites of transition to see whether any patterns emerge, or to ask whether shaving has a large function in the biblical ritual that goes beyond its particular function in any specific ritual setting. There is a relationship between the shavings of the mourner on the one hand, who departs from quotidian life and enters a state of polluted separation and the shaving of the Nazirit as he or she completes the ritual requirements of the Nazirit vow and moves a step closer to reentering the day-to-day life of the community. Yet biblical materials also suggest that generalization is possible on another level (at least within Israelite culture as biblical texts represent it): Shaving effects and marks ritual transition, a change of status of the one shaved (Olyan, 1998).

Bilu argues that in contemporary Jewish ultra orthodox communities, most three-year-old male children undergo a ritual sequence in which the first haircut is associated with entering the world of study. Focusing on the paramount value of holy Torah study and its prerequisites, and decode the psycho cultural meanings of the hair cutting and school initiation ceremonies and their ceremonial antecedent. During the first three years of life, the hair of male toddlers of all ultra orthodox groups and sects is left untrimmed. The first hair cutting is a ceremonial event usually conducted on the child's third birthday (Bilu, 2003).

Following it, the child is expected to cover his head, wear the four-cornered undergarment, recite the Jewish statement of faith (Shema Yisrae and basic blessings, and accompany his father to the synagogue. In line with the rabbinical statement, "Age three for the letters," this is also the time for entering the religious preschool, which constitutes the first step in the world of study. The first haircut is inextricably linked with entering the Torah and the world of study and commandments, as clearly indicated by the flags, decorated with the letters of the alphabet, that some children hold in their hands during the hair cutting ritual. Many parents are anxious to perform the school initiation ceremony immediately following the haircut, even though the festival of Lag Ba'Omer does not coincide with the beginning of the study (Bilu, 2003).

Mageo studied changing hairdos in Samoa to construct a history of female sex roles and gender politics from contact to the present. The diachronic view that body symbols provide casts light on the nature of Samoan sexual relations. Samoan girl's mostly shaved head is something of an enigma as it should indicate sexual restraint, just as surely as her reddened locks suggest an absence of restraint. Shaving a Samoan girl's hair is, therefore, likely to decrease others' sexual interest in her. One might say that shaving deprives her of the symbolic wherewithal to enter into a sexual relationship. The girl's hairdo in old Samoa signified such a balance: her reddened locks represented the degree of license she enjoyed in flaunting; her shaved head represented the degree of restraint she was expected to exercise in marrying and conclude that hair, as a symbol, is part of a social communication about gender roles and moral rules, but these messages bear upon the inner individual, particularly when they become tangled and confused (Mageo, 1994).

Bogin argues in his study that the traditional Buddhist triad of body, speech, and mind is understood in ascending order of importance. He noted, attempts to interpret the religious body (and hair, in particular) have sometimes further suffered from the fact that “as with most condensed and central symbols of society, indigenous exegesis of hair is neither extensive nor frequent. Tibetan Buddhist *ngakpa* (these allow their hair too remain long and uncut) offers an opportunity to reexamine our understanding of hair symbolism through a rare example of “indigenous exegesis” of the subject. The rest of the article connects examples from ancient Greece to the cultures of Burma and the Omaha tribe in order to illustrate this principle the hair of the head is sacred because it is believed to be the abode of spirits or divinities. Tendzin Norbu Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangrol and Nyida Heruka share a focus on the material in their discussions of a *ngakpa* identity. Their writings challenge our tendency to read physical symbols as secondary representatives of a primary meaning that is immaterial by foregrounding the superficial (Bogin 2008).

Bartlett argues that hair is a particularly fertile and powerful bearer of meaning for three basic reasons. First, hair is an exceptionally malleable body part. It has almost the same range of possibilities of treatment as clothing- it can be shaped, dyed, removed-but it emerges from the body and is thus organic in a way that clothes are not. Second, head and facial hair surrounds the face, the part of the body with the most concentrated and diverse communicative functions. Here are grouped the organs of sight, smell, taste and hearing; here speech originates and eye contact focuses. The treatment of hair is thus a pre-eminently socially visible act. Indeed, those theorists who see hair treatment as primarily sexually expressive would argue that the social visibility of head and facial hair is a prerequisite for its effective role as an open bearer of otherwise hidden messages.' Third, hair gives a few pieces of biological information, but only a few. Thus it starts with some inherent associations, but is not tightly structured into a whole system of meaning (Bartlett, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

The most persistent and widespread theory around the Women’s Movement today is that of Patriarchy by Lendsey German. It takes many different forms, but the ideas behind it – that male domination or sexism is something which exists not just as a product of capitalism, but as something quite separate from the capitalist

mode of production and which will endure beyond capitalism – are accepted so widely that a wholesale rejection of the theory is greeted with complete and genuine amazement. The theories contain a little understanding of how women's oppression and the nature of the family have changed historically. Nor is there much notion of how widely differing that oppression is from class to class. Instead, we are presented with the "eternal truth" that "patriarchy" in one form or another is the cause of women's oppression.

Above theory is most effectively linked with research study because research study also reveals a patriarchal system that even rituals also connected with male members of society. Because they think that such ritual, shaving of baby birth hair is some sort of blessing for them in future but ignores female in specific ritual.

Methodology

The present research is a small ethnographic research study conducted in the village Bahratii situated in the tribal area of Koh-Sulman where first shaving of male baby hair has associated some ritual that is performed in a specific way. The qualitative anthropological techniques were used for this study concentrating on three semantic dimensional approaches given by (Turner, 1973) wherein he argues that symbol have three significant dimensions that are important for understanding of the symbolic representation. These dimensions are Exegetic dimensioned, Operational dimension and Positional dimension. For a complete understanding of the symbol hair that is associated with shaving of male baby hair the above three dimensions were applied in research while collecting the data. The data were collected through conducting in-depth interviews, interview guide was used as tool for collecting the data and five interviews were conducted through purposive sampling technique:

Results and Discussion

In Pakistan the shaving of baby head is also practiced in religious as well as in cultural context. People shave their baby's first haircut in religious perspective and also there prevail different culture and according to cultural context different ritual are associated with the birth haircut of the infant. In some region of Pakistan as like in tribal area of Koh-Sulman some rituals are associated with the first haircut of the baby, especially with a male child. This haircut is named locally as *jahand*, which has a symbolic importance in this region.

Baloch community is living in the village Bahratii. They have a strong belief in religion and the spiritual beings. They pay homage to the *peer* (saints) and *darbar* (shrines). They visit them and associate different ritual with them. The natives believe in the supernatural power of the saints and consider them as an *intermediately* person between them and God. They also believe that the hair of an individual have very significant importance because in some context they are considered as the power of spiritual gaining.

Leach in his article “Magical Hair” argues that hair rituals may have sexual associations has been apparent to anthropologists from the beginning, but mostly they have not regarded this as a matter of crucial significance and classed ritual hair-cutting as one 'of an extensive series of practices, due to various and often obscure motives, which come under the general heading of ceremonial mutilations. In the anthropologist's view, ritually powerful human hair is full of magical potency not because it is hair, but because of the ritual context of its source, e.g. murder, incest, mourning, etc.. It is the ritual situation which makes the hair powerful, not the hair, which makes the ritual powerful (Leach, 1958).

Jahand is celebrated ceremonially in a family gathering. The shaven hair is put in an embroidered fabric. All family members go to the local *darbar* (shrine) and perform a ceremony. These relatives include the parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, other relatives and neighbors who are invited. They seek permission of the *matwali* (sitting peer or saint) to start the ceremony. The head of the family slaughter a goat as *sadka* (charity) and hang the fabric containing baby's hair with a tree in the shrine area. Performing this ritual of *jahand* shows that the first hair of the infant are very significant and if these are thrown away these could be used for black magic and the evil spirit could harm the child. Visiting the shrine means seeking spiritual power and blessing of the saint to protect the child. Usually the ritual is performed for a male child. The idea behind this is that the male should have the power as in the future they work and run families.

Some of the natives link this jahand ritual with Aqeeqah ceremony, an Islamic tradition where two goats are slaughtered for a male child. This way they could save an extra goat to be slaughtered as *sadka* (charity). The Aqeeqah ceremony essentially consists of two acts: the shaving of the hair from the head of a newborn baby, and the sacrifice of an animal (these were also characteristic features of Millat-u-Ibrahim, the religion of the Prophet Ibrahim).

It was reported by Buraydah (RA) "During the age of ignorance, when a child was born to anyone of us, we used to slaughter a goat and smear the child with its blood. Later, after the dawn of Islam, our practice became (on the advice of the Prophet) that we sacrifice a goat of Aqeeqah on the seventh day after the birth of the child, shave the head of the infant and apply saffron on it" (Sunan Abu Dawood 2:2137).

The natives had different opinions regarding the ritual of first haircut of the baby, some villagers reported that it is like the ceremony of Aqeeqah but others said that it was the symbolic representation associated with a male child. They believed that by performing this ritual the baby would remain healthy and spiritually blessed. The spiritual power of the saint would protect him from all the evil spirits or evil-eyes. It was sort of a commitment to the peer or saint as they believed that God had given him the power to the saint that he could extend the blessings to the child. This head shaving ceremony was performed preferably on the seventh day if not on the seventh day than within the forty days of birth. In case if the parents are poor and cannot afford to buy animals for sacrifice, this ceremony could be delayed for three years. They shaved the head on the seventh day, saved the hair in a an embroidered fabric till the ceremony is performed. This ceremony is performed with the consent of the *moatwali* or guardian of the shrine. The delay is only possible with his permission.

Connection with God

Hallipke says in his article "Social Hair" that two different hypotheses suggest themselves. The first is that the meanings ascribed to symbols are related to the workings of the subconscious, which are assumed to be similar in members of every culture and, more specifically, to the mechanisms of the repression and sublimation of the sexual impulses. The second is that, given the common concern of all societies with survival, the nature of the physical environment, procreation, the social role of the sexes, youth and age, order and disorder, and similar basic concepts, there are certain symbols and symbolic acts which are inherently appropriate in expressing these concepts (Hallipke,1969).

The symbolic representation of a haircut was associated with different concepts in tribal area of Koh-Sulman. It revealed the natives' emotional attachment with that particular shrine and their association with the animal sacrifice and hair cutting

ritual. Respondents reported that basically this ritual was a form of connection with God. By doing this actually they believe that they were connecting themselves with God indirectly and seeking His blessings through the saint whom they consider holy. One of my respondents reported that “saints are not God, but they are not aloof from God. They are very close to Him. When we perform this ritual we seek blessings and protection for the child of God through the saint. We are actually securing the future of the child. We also believe that the birth of a male child is because of the blessing of the saint.” When their females got pregnant, they went to the shrine, prayed and made a commitment if the son would be born, they would perform the ritual of *Jahand* and slaughter goats at the shrine. This commitment includes the generations to come. This ritual ensured the safety and progress of the family. By performing this ritual at the shrine they tried to please the God by starting a new life in a holy place so that the God may bless them with respect in the society and a prosperous future for their son.

From the above discussion, it is analyzed that the ritual symbols are associated with different behavior that built a different structural context:

- Different meanings of the first haircut of the infant associated with different context
- Different thoughts are interconnected with a single ritual or the event.
- Different ideas like the securing future of the child, getting the blessing of the saint, communicating indirectly with God and different interactions are represented by one action
- Two types action associate with it that in one way it is social and cultural order and on the other way it has a symbolic meaning that mean by cutting birth hair, giving respect and gaining of blessing for the beginning of the new life of the infant.

While talking about “the semantic structure of the symbol” Turner argues that the ritual symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior and the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context. And this semantic structure deals with sign and symbol and has the following attributes:

- Multiple meanings, actions or objects perceived by the senses in ritual context
- Unification of apparently disparate action
- Condensation/many ideas relation between things actions and interactions are represented simultaneously by the symbol.
- Polarization of significata/the referents assigned by the custom to a major ritual symbol tend frequently to be grouped at opposed semantic poles (Turner, 1973).

Superstitions Associated With the Ritual

There are various myths and superstition usually associated with a different ritual regarding the power and meanings of that ritual. During this study it was observed that people have associated different myth and superstitions with the first cut hair ritual of a child. I was reported that if someone's parents or grandparents had made a commitment that they would perform the ritual of birth haircut of their son at the shrine and afterwards they did not, something bad and unwanted would happen with that child in the future, like early death, serious illness, any physical disorder or disability, or effects of the evil eye and evil spirit.

There was a difference of opinion about the superstitions among the literates and illiterates. The social change and literacy had different impacts among the natives. The young literates perceived it as a ceremonial activity that connected family and friends. It brought a social order in the community. They felt the necessity to follow it as a tradition because their elders had been doing this since long. They were following it just to keep the tradition alive. While the illiterates and old natives had an orthodox view about this ritual. They had a strong conviction that in the past some of the children died very early and their parents could not reproduce any further to continue their generation just because they did not perform the ritual. The physical trauma among the children was also believed to be caused because of the same reason. This shows that how people's perceptions may differ from one another and how people perceive a ritual in different ways.

Natives performed this ritual or ceremony for their sons only, not for the daughters because of many reasons. Though they shaved their daughters' hair after seven days but did not perform any celebration or the ritual, only sweets

were distributed in the village on the occasion, because the females had to stay at home where they did not face any hardships. They just had to get married and run their houses. While the males had many responsibilities in their lives. They had to bear families, earn a livelihood, fulfill social responsibilities, and to deal with the hardships. As it was a patrilineal society they considered their sons as the blessing of the God and wished these blessings to continue throughout their lives. One of our female respondents reported that they associated shaving the head of a child with the practice of Islam at the time of Hajj where the male pilgrims shave their head promising the God to start a new and poise life. It is believed that the God blesses the pilgrims who shave their heads and start their new lives. So to have the same blessing at the beginning of a child's life they perform this ritual. It is analyzed that people had strong beliefs about their customs and they associated their cognition with reason, secondly, they traced their lineages through the male line so the birth of a son meant a lot to them as their generation would proceed through them. They celebrated the birth of a male child because they believed that the family got the new pillar for economic support and it would be a matter of prestige for the entire the family.

Case Study

Fifty year old native had a physical disability since his childhood. He was stammering while talking. Village people associated different myth with him. Some people of the view that his family did not care about the birth hair and throw them away as it is, that's why some evil eye had affected him. Others think that his parents did not perform the ritual properly. They only sacrificed the goats, but lost the heir that's why the saint did not bless him and he lost his speaking power. The victim himself reported that due to lack of resources his parents could not slaughter a goat at shrine immediately after his birth. They decided to perform the ritual a year later. They shaved his head and saved the hair, but unfortunately they lost them. When he grew up his parents felt that he had a problem while talking, then his parents went to the shrine, sacrificed a goat, apologized for their ignorance, and promised not to do it in future even in the generations to come, so that the saint may shower his blessing on him, his future may be secured and the same thing may not happen again.

Conclusion

Shaving the head of the children for the first time is associated with religious and cultural values. These hairs have a great symbolic representation in the tribal area of Koh-Sulman. A ritual is performed on the occasion which associated with different types of behaviors. The key symbol of the ritual is the hair and the people perceive this symbol in different ways. Young literates have a different opinion, whereas illiterates especially the older people think differently. For older people it is the matter of their basic belief that is associated with their religion and cultural pattern and considers it as important figure and the young people take the ritual as a normative pattern of tier customary practice for them it is also a source of gathering that bond the social integration.

The operational side of the symbolic representation based on people conception and non-verbal behavior, especially the facial expression while the related questions were asked. The responses concluded that the shaving of the male child's head actually is welcoming the new born in the world and securing him from evil spirits by performing the ritual in shrines to seek God's blessing through saints. The third important aspect is the positional dimension that concludes the relation of symbol hair with behavior of the people when used in ritual context that revealed that the ritual is associated with male because they had to run families in the future, secondly the association of the lineage system of family with male if they do not perform the ritual it means they are breaking the commitment that they made with the saint who in that case will not shower his blessing and any harmful situation for child may arise in future.

The study also concludes that the symbolic representation of birth haircut of the male toddler is not only about a culture, but about the basic structure of thought, modes and values, like the patrilineage system where they only perform rituals for the sons. The theme of the ritual depict that people consider that hair is used for magic and evil spirit.

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