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Changes in the Institution of Marriage in Uzbekistan
from Pre-Soviet to Post Independent Era

Abstract

Culture is one of the most important concepts in social sciences. It is considered as a design for living or a roadmap that guides the behaviour of the members of a society. However, culture does not remain static and adopts changes in material as well as non material aspects. The Central Asian societies and their cultures flourished because of the great silk route which benefits the people of Central Asia both materially and culturally. Some new customs are assimilated in the culture at the cost of old ones but without force. In Central Asian societies, whether sedentary or tribal, marriage was considered one of the most important institutions of culture and performed according to customs and traditions of the land. In pre-Soviet era marriages were performed with lavishness, customs and traditions. As the Soviets under the banner of communism were averse to these things, they introduced changes in the marriages and other institutions of culture of Central Asia. The Soviets were successful in introducing change in the institution of marriage either by force or persuasion and the indigenous people resisted against this cultural change one way or other. After the fall of USSR a process of cultural revivalism started in Uzbekistan but the revivalism is not of such intensity and magnitude that it would be a blue print of pre-Soviet Uzbekistan. It is with the aim to create the atmosphere that would guarantee the state control affairs at all levels of life.

Key words: kalym, souch kahtin, parandzha, chachvan, gaytarma, fathe toy, karnah, mullah, Kujven, yuzotchi, nikah.

Marriages carried a special significance for every Central Asian family in pre-Soviet times. Once the children grew up, the parents seriously started the preparations for their marriage. These were typically arranged by the parents of the children before their maturity and sometimes were set up in infancy and even prenatally and no consideration was given to the sentiments of prospective couple as Centre Asian society lived in joint families which were patriarchal in order¹ and women were totally subjugated by their men folk and treated as semi slaves. Girls were generally considered marriageable between the age of 11-15, where as a boy was married at the age of 15 to 16, although sometimes they remained bachelor even up to the age of thirty years,² since, some poor families could not afford to raise the *kalym*³ or the

¹ Lawrence Krader, *Peoples of Central Asia*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1963), 142.

² Elizabeth E. Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian rule, A Study in culture change*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1966), 70.

dowry to be paid by the groom to his bride, which was a must for marriage in Central Asia. Paid both in kind and cash, it determined the status of the family as well as respect for the bride and was obligatory for the groom's family. This (*Kalym*) bride price was also a key factor for marriages within the tribe or a clan⁴ although in tribal areas marriages also took place outside the tribe or clan which was simply motivated by political or economic reasons.⁵

It was in custom of the Uzbek society that the initiative for marriage was taken on behalf of the family of the groom, who deputed two women, *soutch kahtin* to ask the girl's family formally to have their daughter. The parents of the girl, mostly pre-informed, received the women with honour. After this the groom was allowed to see his future wife without veil.⁶ In urban societies like Uzbekistan there were separate courts for girls and women to live segregated life from men and their contact with males was restricted. In the extended or joint families they could, thus hardly meet freely with their close relatives like cousins etc. When they went out, they wore a cloak like over garment (*parandzha*) and a waist length horsehair veil (*chachvan*) which covered their faces.

Once approved, the two families started to bargain *Kalym*, and then that was to be paid in kind, including in the form of domesticated animals and ornaments. Although it was not necessary to pay the *kalym* before the marriage actually took place yet it was obligatory for the groom to pay it and the wife had every right to refuse consummation of marriage with her husband till *kalym* was not paid.⁷ In case of deficient payment the bride used to be called back by her parents and retained for a period called *gaytarma* till the payment was made. It was also a custom in Uzbekistan that during the period of *gaytarma*, the couple could not meet each other. After finalizing an agreement on the amount of *kalym* and dowry all neighbours and relatives were invited to *fathe toy* (feast of promise) which was celebrated in the home of the bride for two days and for the next two days in husbands home.⁸ This shows that the institution of marriage in Uzbekistan was full of customs and tradition which were followed strictly and any one whether poor or rich had to keep the cultural heritage intact. It was a custom that the marriage had to be announced by the father of groom when in the morning of the day of wedding he arrived at the residence of the bride and blowing loudly a long brass horn/*karnah* in order to inform the bride of her acceptance by their family.⁹ After several hours a *mullah* used to conduct the marriage ceremony in presence of the witnesses from both the sides. In traditional marriages, the bride and groom were not

³ It was generally believed that the *kalym* was bride price given by the husband to the father of the bride and it was in nature of the purchase money. However, Schuyler has clearly pointed out that *kalym* was absolutely the property of the bride and remained with her as a sort of financial support in case of divorce, *kalym* was paid in the form of cash or kind (like live stock goods)etc; Eugene, Schuyler, *Notes of a journey of Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1885), 78.

⁴ It is believed that sedentary people disliked misalliance and emphasized that marriages must be settled on the rules of descent and exogamy; Schuyler, 78.

⁵ Rafiz Abzov, *The Culture and Customs of Central Asian Republics*, (U.K: Green Wood Publishing Group, 2007), 217.

⁶ According to Fred Burnbay this practice was common only among Kyrgyz where as among sedentary people a boy was not permitted to meet his future wife till marriage; Fred Burnaby, *A ride to Khiva, travels and adventures in Central Asia*, (New York: Cassell Peter & Galpin, 1876), 179; Yet E Schuyler pointed out that in Tashkent a young man was permitted to see his future partner before marriage; Schuyler, 78.

⁷ Schuyler, 78.

⁸ *Sketchs of Central Asian among the Turkomans* by Arimnius wembrey. [http:// www.Tcole.tribal.rugs/art](http://www.Tcole.tribal.rugs/art)

⁹ Abzov, 217.

present at the actual ceremony, so they were represented by their male relatives. The witness on the part of women was generally her father or uncle or some elder one, having a special power of attorney. The marriage contract was then handed over to the bride or her witness. On this day a grand feast was held at the residence of bride in which all friends and relatives of both parties were invited. The marriages were as lavish as the families have to give a *fathe toy* (feast of promise) to neighbours and relatives for which poor families used to take money on high interest rate. The wedding guests were entertained in their respective courts by singing, dancing¹⁰ and other diversions like wrestling, horse jumping etc. The society during the pre-Soviet period was so conservative that men and women could not mix with each other even at the time of marriage ceremonies.

Against this generalized pattern the marriage ceremonies among nomads, semi nomads and sedentary people differed in formalities and rituals like married couple jumping or circling around a bonfire.¹¹ In tribal and rural areas the bride was taken to the grooms' house in *Kujven* (kind of pannier arranged on pair of camel or mules), and 30 horsemen riding along each side with a piece of cloth 1.5 metres long, which indicated the strength of their tribe. Once a bride mounted *kujven* her mother sprinkled white flour as a sign of good luck in her married life.¹² Soon after the bride reached the grooms' house the bride was introduced to the members of the family in a ritualistic way in the ceremony called *yuzotchi* "show her face".¹³ Thereafter a party was thrown in the groom's house to celebrate the marriage, often requiring guests to bring gifts. An Uzbek girl thereafter started her new life with her husband, often reconciling with the situation that arose in her new life and the married couple took full charge of their family in a course of time. Divorce was rare, if there was any kind of dispute on account of lack of facilities, the wife could raise complaint with a *Qazi* (judge) who allowed her to borrow money on account of her husband if he was not in the town or even ordered the sale of some proportion of the husband's property in order to provide her money. It is argued by many scholars that in sedentary areas of Uzbekistan the role of religion was stronger than tribal and other tribal areas like Kyrgyzstan. It may be partially true, however, people did not give up the previous customs and traditions which were seen in their institutions, and the same is the case with institution of marriage.

The custom of levirate was traditionally followed by the nomadic people. Widows often had to agree to leviratic marriages for the sake of their children and to avoid being ostracized. These customs of levirate and surrogate were present in the society because of the *Kalym*. A marriage under levirate resulted in great difference in ages between the spouses, for example thirty year old women could become the wife of a seven year old boy, if he was the brother of her dead husband¹⁴. Even if the Uzbeks were not accustomed to the practice of levirate and surrogate, other people like the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Karakalpaks were not averse to it.¹⁵

¹⁰ Bacon, 70.

¹¹ Bacon, 69.

¹² Iran Daily-Irania, May 23, 2008, *Attractive customs*

¹³ Bacon, 70.

¹⁴ Eds. S Moosvi, and A Tabashalieya, Society, Eds. Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, *History of Civilization of Central Asia*, (Vol. V, UNESCO, 2003), 358_359.

¹⁵ Adle and Habib, 358.

The establishment of Soviet rule in 1917 resulted in the formation of the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) and establishment of Bukhara and Khawarizm peoples Soviet Socialist Republics. Consequently in 1924 the Uzbek SSR along with other four republics came into existence on October 27, 1924. Although the first priority of the Soviet government was to revive the economy of the U.S.S.R, yet it was also the policy of the central government to wipe out the traditional rituals and customs of Central Asian societies, since they were detrimental to the new ideology. In the institutional changes that took place in these five republics, the Uzbek SSR was the first to adopt Russification quickly. A number of legislative changes like separation of religion from state, collectivization, industrialization, liquidation of literacy and emancipation of women were adopted and implemented to achieve actual success in this direction. Under the influence of communist ideology, many changes were introduced in the traditional institute of marriage.

Once the Soviets gained fuller control of the things, the religious rites were thereafter transferred to secular civil administration and *nikah* was deprived of legal recognition and as such marriages which were registered in the marriage bureaus had legal effect and those according to religious rites (*nikah*) were considered illegal.¹⁶ People were forced to register their marriages as per the civil law, and only then they could get the benefits of life, like to get apartment for which one was required to show the marriage registration certificate before the authorities.¹⁷ These economic benefits like the facilities of apartments could not produce desired changes in the institution of marriage, as people were resistant to the forced change of the Soviet government. On the one hand, they conducted *nikah* secretly at their homes as a past practice and thereafter went for the legal registration or else did vice versa.¹⁸ This practice continued even though not all could do it for one reason or the other. However, after the 70s and 80s the system relaxed somewhat as the Soviets were in search of allies for the socialistic bloc in other Muslim countries. There was an overwhelming response from people of Uzbekistan to perform the religious ceremony (*nikah*) either before the civil registration or thereafter, and out of 3180 marriages registered in Tashkent in 1980, over 90% of the couples including students, academicians and people in government offices underwent to perform religious marriage.¹⁹

Islamic law allows women to seek divorce from their husbands on certain grounds but traditionally it was hard for them to get it in Central Asia. Therefore what the Soviets did was to introduce in the civil law a provision to get a divorce easily in the court once she moved an application for it,²⁰ which usually sided with women.²¹ Accordingly, women were released of the pressure they were subjected by the traditionalism of the Uzbek society, and were found to be free to live a life of their choice. Added to it they were given economic freedom that also led them to seek divorce in the courts once the living together was not happy.

¹⁶ W. K. Medlin, W. M. Cave, F. Carpenter, Education and Development in Central Asia: A Case Study of Social Change in Uzbekistan, (Netherlands: Lieden, 1971), 64.

¹⁷ Alexander Andreyev, Housing in U.S.S.R. Today and Tomorrow, (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1979), 2-16.

¹⁸ "Women In Uzbekistan", Central Asian Review, Vol. VXi, No. 2, 1968, 48.

¹⁹ Yaccovi Roi, Islam in Soviet Union, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2000), 534.

²⁰ Medlin, Cave and Carpenter, 64.

²¹ Abazov, 222.

Many more civil laws were framed to bring in change in the marriage; polygamy, marriages of girls under 18, *kalym* and *gaytarma* were forbidden by law,²² and were considered criminal offences liable to severe punishment.²³ The result was that in the late 30s *kalym* practically disappeared, especially in urban areas. Instead, people started to pay gifts in lieu of what was earlier *kalym* either in kind or cash so that a kind of security was provided to the newly married to live an independent living. Therefore what has been found was that it never disappeared from the actual life of the people and by the 1980s marriages were rarely performed without the payment of *kalym*. What the Soviets believed a “feudal custom was defended by girls themselves, who would feel themselves dishonoured, suspected of sexual misbehaviour or of some shameful illness if their parents were not offered a substantial amount of *kalym*”.²⁴ A significantly higher expenditure on *kalym* was obtained in rural areas for the girl who had not completed her education as is indicated in the following table.²⁵

Social Group	1950s	1970s	1980-1994
Rich	500 Robles	700	1000
Middle	300	500-600	700-800
Poor	100	200	300

Source: Z. Arifkhana, “Post Soviet Transformation In Ritual Life”, *The Journal Of Central Asian Studies*, Vol. XVI, 2006, 7.

Nevertheless, the Soviets were successful in changing the centuries old custom of match makers who disappeared and marriages were fixed by the parties themselves in a formal way. The *khajuven* was replaced with modern transport facilities²⁶ and many superstitious rituals came to an end.²⁷ Similarly the traditional Uzbek wedding ceremonies underwent many changes, new rituals and customs formed the continent of old rituals changed and many of them disappeared entirely.²⁸

Endogamy was not actually made illegal but was made the subject of vigorous propaganda campaigns.²⁹ With the success of nationalist policy³⁰, marriages between different ethnic groups showed

²² Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, (London: Praeger Press, 1964), 183.

²³ Abazov, 218.

²⁴ Alexander Benningsen, “Islam in Retrospect”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.8, No.1, p. 95.

²⁵ Tamara Dragadza, *Kinship Marriages in Soviet Union*, (New York: Rutledge, 1986), 90.

²⁶ Now bride and dowry was taken to husband’s house in a car; Dragadza, p.70.

²⁷ Once a bride mounted *kujven* her mother sprinkled white floor as a sign of good luck in her married life; Iran Daily, *Attractive customs*.

²⁸ Dragadza, 70.

²⁹ Wheeler, 183.

a tendency to increase in the pre-war period; the statistics for Arabs living in Uzbekistan who had been strictly endogamous in the past, show that out of 487 families investigated in the 1936-38, 82 marriages were mixed.³¹ In 1939 it was noted that Uzbeks were very eager to marry to Tartar girls as they were considered more cultured. There are many cases that show Uzbeks married Arab girls and even non-Muslim during the war³² because of the large immigration of non-Muslims to Uzbekistan. A Soviet census of 1959 shows that the percentage of inter-faith, which Soviets called "mixed marriages" was quite high.³³ By the 1970s and 80s communal and ethnic ties influenced the choice of partner to a lesser degree, and inter-ethnic marriages remained relatively low and did not exceed 12-18%. The mixed marriages were common between locals e.g. between Uzbeks and Tajiks, Uzbeks and Kazakhs and less frequent between the locals and newcomers, like Germans, Russians, etc.,³⁴ as the religious and interethnic ties still remain strong in Uzbek society. The other factor responsible was the strong family control over the girl's choice, despite the many soft corners and freedom given to women by Soviet authorities.³⁵ However, the Uzbek men used to marry Russian women as they were working in other parts of the former USSR as against the rare cases of Uzbek women marrying Russian men.³⁶

Due to the efforts of the Soviets, the marriage age in Uzbekistan changed as compared to previous. The table below gives information.

Age Group	1937		1946		1957	
	Men %	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %	Women %
18 yrs & under	2.2	35.5	4.0	16.8	2.5	12.8
19-22	19.0	27.7	16.4	37.7	19.4	36.3
23-26	31.1	17.1	19.0	19.0	28.5	15.3
27 and above	48.1	20.1	60.6	26.5	50.0	35.6

Source: A G Kharchev, "On some results of a study of motives for marriages", *Soviet Review*, Vol.5, No. 2, (1964), 9.

³⁰ The altered social and economic conditions affected the attitude towards marriage between members of different ethnic groups and such marriages received the support of the Soviets; S. M. Abramzon, "Marriages in Central Asia and Kazakhstan", *Central Asian Review*, Vol. Xi, No.1, 1959, p, 7.

³¹ Abramzon, "Marriages in Central Asia and Kazakhstan", 7.

³² Abramzon, "Marriages in Central Asia and Kazakhstan", 7-8.

³³ Paul Froese, *The Plot To Kill God*, (California press, 2008) 99.

³⁴ Abazov, 224.

³⁵ M. A. Tolmacheva, "The Muslim Women in Soviet Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1993), 545.

³⁶ "The People of Central Asia: Social Customs", *Central Asian Review*, Vol. II, No.1, (1959): 216- 217.

The change in the age of marriage was because of the introduction of modern education, feminist movements started by the Soviets and other avenues provided to women of Uzbekistan. The other factor responsible for this was the medical facilities by which people became aware about the harmful effects of early marriages. Although the age of marriage was changed by Soviet efforts and endogamy disappeared, arranged marriages did not wither away; parental consent was necessary for both, although boys were free, to some extent, as compared to girls.³⁷ However, during the Soviet period there was freedom to both boys and girls to meet one another before the parental consent. Soviet surveys of the 1970s and 80s show that 88% of urban Uzbeks and 92% of people living in rural areas were insisting on parental consent for marriages.³⁸ The table below shows the preference of different peoples for parental consent/authority in 1980.

Nationality	City dwellers	Rural Areas
Estonian	22.0	24.9
Russian	34.7	34.4
Maldivian	40.7	52.4
Georgian	61.2	71.1
Uzbeks	87.6	92.0

Source: Ellen Jones, Fred W Gupp, *Modernisation Value, change and fertility in Soviet union*, (London: Cambridge university press, 1989), 169.

The post Soviet period registered the revivalist trend not only in religion but emphasis was also given on the old customs, traditions and rituals, too. The revival of the Uzbek ethno-national traditions was one of the state's main priorities in independent Uzbekistan. Since then the country revived the age-old customs and traditions as it has remained the central seat of empires from ancient times. In other words, the earlier customs and traditions, which were undermined by the Soviet authorities were used in order to fully comprehend a national self-identity, to restore the broken links between generations by applying to the past and the history of the soil in order to facilitate solidarity, play a positive role in state-making and form a base for the participation of the people in politics, economy and other social institutions of the state. In the post-independent era the institution of marriage has witnessed the extrication of Soviet policy and the revival of the pre-Soviet era system. The first thing to disappear was the mandatory registration of marriages in the civil courts. Since *nikah* was still performed by the people, either before or after the registration in Soviet era, it now is performed freely, openly and even in certain places the

³⁷ The power to influence on sons and daughters was very strong, as it relied not only on customs and traditions but also on economic and social initiatives as the parents have to pay for wedding, honeymoon and also help young couple to make new house; Abazov, 224.

³⁸ Mark Dickens, *The Uzbeks*, (1990), 36.

young couple performs it in a mosque. *Nikah* is now a legalized act performed with the approval of the government.³⁹ With the legalization of *nikah*, the institute of *mehar* was also restored.⁴⁰ Another tradition that has reappeared is *kalym*, and people believe that it lessens the expenses of the bride's family on arranging wedding feasts. This is in spite of the fact that the practice of *Kalym* has been criticised by some women as they protest against being "sold" in marriage for this age-old custom.⁴¹ The practice reappeared during the latter years of the Soviet period but since independence it has assumed new heights. In fact the amount of *Kalym* has increased after independence due to the inflation and hikes in the prices of clothes and introduction of new clothes. The following table shows the gradual increase in the amount spent on *Kalym*.

Social group	1980-1994	1995-1998	1999-2003
Rich	1000 roubles	20,000-50,000	500,000 or above
Middle	700-1800	15,000-20,000	300,000-400,000
Poor	300	5000-10,000	100,000 or above

Source: Arif khanova, 7

The *Kalym* had also created many new problems like new social classes in the Uzbek society as indicated in the table given above. To counter the payments of *Kalym*, some grooms also revived the earlier tradition of abducting brides in Karakalpakstan.⁴² It has also been noticed that even though the Soviets had abandoned and banned the act of polygamy, yet it was visible at places during the Soviet period, in particular after World War II and thus not altogether forgotten this has restarted at places when the husband is not required to pay any or little *Kalym* to the parents of a subsequent wife.⁴³ Since

³⁹ M Tokhtakhodjaeva, *Between the Slogans of Communism and the Laws of Islam; The Women in Uzbekistan*, (Pakistan, Lahore: 1995), 96.

⁴⁰ Property allotted by the groom to a bride is considered to be her own property, constitutes a house or apartment or some gold ornaments'; Arifa khanova, 6.

⁴¹ In Uzbekistan 270 women had burnt themselves in the republic over a two year period (1986-1987) to protest against being "sold" in marriage in exchange for bride price, a practice which is not Islamic, is considered by many to be part of the traditional Muslim culture; Angus Rexburg, "Soviet scandal that must go away" *The Sunday Times*, Feb. 1989, p. 6. Such cases also exist after independence in rural areas; Human rights watch, (May 2000), Tashkent.

⁴² Report on the Status of Women in Uzbekistan, 1999, p. 14.

⁴³ The family code also made polygamy illegal and to curb the polygamy all the marriages were to be registered, yet it is not easy to eliminate the age old custom. The men went for polygamy by not registering the other marriage; it happens mostly in rural areas; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 96.

the wedding in the post-Soviet period is sermonized with traditional rituals there have crept in certain pre-Islamic beliefs like purifying the newly wedded couple by burning the fire.⁴⁴

Marriages are still arranged by parents, but it is also true the dating is becoming fashionable and young girls are encouraged to meet with young men to indicate their likes and dislikes, and are not blindly led into marriage.⁴⁵ Parents support early marriage because it relieves moral societal pressure on them and it follows the logic of traditional society, ensuring greater acceptability to the traditional norms. Although as per the Family Code (1998) the minimum age for marriage is set at 17, and in some cases at 16,⁴⁶ a traditional logic is applied to the marriage of women for their early marriage. For instance in 1991 only 42.7% of girls were reported to have got married at around 19 years of age and by 1994 it constituted 49.7% although there is a difference in rural and urban areas. While in 1991 and 1994, 85% of marriages in rural areas involved men in the age group of 18-24. The proportion of the same age group in urban areas is 65%.⁴⁷ The factors responsible for the emergence of early marriages in the Uzbek society were the economic factors like unemployment during the transitional phase from socialist economy to market economy after independence, as factories were closed and tea clubs were stopped since there was scarcity of funds in the newly formed independent Uzbekistan.

Wedding *toys* are held either on the street in front of the host's house or in open-air restaurants and in rural areas it is held in the courtyard of the host.⁴⁸ The tables are prepared in advance and filled with food and drinks. The bride and groom sit at a table placed centrally without much talking or eating and definitely without any dancing throughout the whole evening. According to the old customs women together with other participants of the wedding procession accompany the bride to her new home. They stay there until next day to conduct the rite of *yuzotchi* "show her face", a custom that has come again in vogue after 1989.⁴⁹ After the wedding rites, elder women accompany the newlywed couple to visit the shrines, to perform the rites in a proper way.⁵⁰ As most of the young couples do not know how to perform these rites they are accompanied by elderly women to help them in such practices.⁵¹ Most of the newlywed couples settle to live with the groom's family. Newlywed young women wear a special costume, or at least its head gear, for a period between one to three months after their wedding,⁵² which according to some scholars it is the revival of the veil.

⁴⁴ Elif kale lostuval, "Summer in Samarkand", *Newsletter of Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian studies*, Berkeley, Vol. 24, No.1, 2007, 8.

⁴⁵ Jeff Sahadeo and Russel Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia, Past and Present*, (U S A ,Bloomington, 2007) 121.

⁴⁶ Wendy Mee, Wendy Mee, *Women in Republic of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan in Transition*, Asian Development Bank, February, (2001), 16.

⁴⁷ Timur Dadabaev, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 156.

⁴⁸ Elif kale lostuval, "Summer in Samarkand", 8.

⁴⁹ Feride Acar and Ayse Gunes- Ayata, *Gender and Identity Construction, Women in Central Asia, The Caucasus and Turkey*, Brill Netherlands, 2000, p. 300.

⁵⁰ How to perform prayers at the shrines; Acar and Ayata, 301.

⁵¹ Acar and Ayata, 236.

⁵² Elif kale lostuval, "Summer in Samarkand", 8.

The wedding ceremonies have become more lavish because of new dishes served at these parties and the goods given that are costly to new couple.⁵³ There is a difference in expenditure on the weddings among different strata of society. Rich perform all rituals on large scale and sometimes transform simple ritual into a mini wedding; this had made the custom of marriage more cumbersome.

Since medieval times both husband and wife can apply for divorce, and can be legally concluded by mutual consent,⁵⁴ in divorce, property is split jointly between the husband and wife and those who are pregnant or caring for common children have the right to receive alimony.⁵⁵ Whatever is provided in law Uzbeks nevertheless stick to the first marriage as not too many divorces can be found. The old customs, traditions and factors like economic hardship, rise in the expenditure of *Kalym*, and the lavishness in the ceremonies of marriages ensure that the divorce rate was 13% in 1991 and in 1995 it even fell to 11.4%⁵⁶ and still dipping down and reached 8.8% according to national statistics in 2001.⁵⁷ In ethnic terms the divorce rate among Uzbeks remains at the lowest level with 7.8% against Kazakhs 16.7%, Russians 19.7%, Tatars 15.7% and Tajiks 11.1%.⁵⁸

Central Asia has been a susceptible and sensitive area since, for diversified changes took place in its area. The region proved to be a melting pot due to various cultural changes sponsored either deliberately by regimes or gained ground by the forces governed by the societal environment. Changes in culture are involuntary phenomena and cannot be arrested, as society is always swinging between two poles. In Central Asia, and particularly people in oasis areas (Uzbekistan) put up stout resistance not to allow the Soviet changes to trickle down to their native social layers. They were seen with main and might to counter or negotiate the changes that were due to mitigate or dilute the originality or purity of their own culture. However, the Soviets, in order to make this lot quite in line with their needs, grounded new social institutions at such a locus in the region that the people succumbed in one way or the other to the Soviet innovations with great ease. This without an iota of doubt was not a conscious move, rather society soaked with newly adopted social pillars which culminated into a new 'Soviet Man' which guaranteed Soviet Cultural expansion in the social ladder of Central Asia.

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⁵³ In 2000 a rich family spent 12.5 to 13.5 million on a wedding; Z Arifkhanova, 9.

⁵⁴ During the Soviet period divorce was done in civil courts after independence it may be done in civil courts as well by *Qazi*; Mee, 10.

⁵⁵ Mee,10.

⁵⁶ Acar and Ayata, 297.

⁵⁷ National Committee for Statistics Republic of Uzbekistan, 2001. www.adb.org/...Uzbekistan/women

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