



FAMILY CEREMONIES AND TRADITIONS OF THE LO'LI PEOPLE OF THE SURKHAN VALLEY

Mashxura Ruziyeva

Lecturer at the Termez Institute of Economics and Service

E-mail: mashxura.roziyeva@mail.ru

Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 28 th September 2025 Accepted: 26 th October 2025	This article examines the family ceremonies and traditions of the Luli people in the Surkhan Valley. It explores the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of these customs, emphasizing their role in preserving ethnic identity and strengthening family bonds. The study focuses on wedding rituals, birth ceremonies, and other significant family events, demonstrating how these traditions have been preserved and adapted over time. Research is based on fieldwork, interviews with local residents, and historical sources.
Keywords: Luli people, Surkhan Valley, family traditions, wedding rituals, birth ceremonies, cultural heritage, ethnography, social customs.	

INTRODUCTION.

From ancient times to the present, the Luli people have organized their ceremonies collectively, often in combination with other ethnic groups. According to G. Snasarev and A. Troitskaya, at the beginning of the 20th century, various clans of the Luli would gather together, hold several circumcision ceremonies simultaneously, and then each group would return to its own community. The ethnic groups of the Luli conducted ceremonies separately, in an organized manner, rather than privately or individually.

MATERIAL AND METHODS.

The main difference between European Luli and Central Asian Luli lies in their religious affiliations. Like the European Luli, the Central Asian Luli in the past also performed traveling circus acts with domestic animals and trained bears. In the markets, it was common to encounter Luli who enjoyed cockfights and quail contests.

Quail fights were among the popular spectacles in Bukhara Luli communities, held every Saturday. Typically, two teams (called Uchruk and Kyrgyz) would compete with their quails under the supervision of a judge. Participants from various villages of the Bukhara region would come to these events, which served as an important means of maintaining continuous connections among the ethnographic groups of the Luli.

Equestrian competitions were also popular. Among the Luli in neighboring Afghanistan, horse competitions, known as "buzkashi," have been a long-standing tradition inherited from their ancestors. Dancers and singers would often perform at their clan's wedding ceremonies or around bonfires. These shared practices reflect the similarities in the mentality and daily life of these two ethnographic groups. For example, the tents

of the Central Asian Luli closely resemble those of the European Luli [1].

The Luli living in the Surkhan Valley have distinctive national customs that differ from those of the local population. Historically, the Luli migrated from the Indian subcontinent. In India, the cow is considered sacred, and Hindus do not slaughter cows or consume beef. As a result, until relatively recently, the Luli did not keep cows or eat beef.

During the appearance of the new moon, prayers are offered. When the earth trembles, they lie on the ground and symbolically "bite" the earth. This ritual, performed when children turn 100 days old, is believed to strengthen their teeth. The first meaning is to stop the tremor quickly, and the second is to ensure strong teeth.

During the month of Safar, they avoid long journeys, and visits to see a bride are postponed. During the month of Ramadan, the Luli go from house to house in all districts, delivering greetings and blessings.

During a solar eclipse, they follow a specific ritual. They strike the back of iron bowls and pans with sticks to produce a sound [2].

In the village of Zang in the Sherobod district, I observed a camel's excrement hanging on the wall of the elder's house. When I asked about its purpose, I was told it was for "protection," known as "Camel Saint." If a camel falls ill, it cannot be slaughtered out of necessity; it should not be sold at the market. The camel dung is believed to protect against the evil eye. Similarly, horse tack is also believed to ward off evil.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS.

In the past, as in many other peoples of Central Asia, among the Luli, various pre-Islamic beliefs merged with orthodox Islam. The Luli believe in the existence of jinn,



fairies, and spirits called "alvastis." If a jinn or demon bites a person and they turn blue, they are taken to a mullah (Uzbek religious leader) for treatment.

When a new vehicle is purchased, it is customary to take bread, fruits, and other offerings to local shrines such as "Qoraxon Bobo," "Termiz Ota," and "Sulaymon Ota," and receive a prayer from the mullah present there.

In the case of the tandoor (clay oven) or hearth, only men and women who have reached the age of seeing children are allowed to break it; it is considered harmful for younger people. The ritual is performed with permission and prayers. In Denov district, offerings are made to "Qoraxon Bobo" to prevent loss of fruit, whereas in Oltinsoy district, prayers are offered to "Kaptarxona Ota" for the healing of skin diseases and wounds [3].

Under today's market economy, traditional communal views have changed, and the idea of the community as a unified family has largely faded. Unlike the nomadic Luli who used to move in groups, some settled Luli have integrated many elements of the local culture into their traditional customs. This is especially noticeable during wedding ceremonies. Like other Muslims, Luli weddings are conducted according to Sharia law, but some unique customs remain. X. Nazarov notes that for financially poor Luli families, the groom would live with the bride's family until he could earn a sufficient dowry (a practice known as "kochkuyov"). In some cases, if families could not afford the dowry or wedding expenses, arrangements for bride exchanges (qarshi quda) were made. This practice is also observed among Luli living in neighboring Afghanistan [4].

Traditionally, some girls would elope with the young man they loved, following the customs passed down from ancestors. Fifty years ago, cases of abducting underage girls were rare. Ayg'am Bobo, a well-known elder among the Luli of Sherobod and Jarqo'rgon, would convene the village elders to discuss such incidents among minors. In front of the community, he would symbolically strike the couple with his shoe as a form of discussion. This would instill fear in young people, whereas today, the youth no longer fear such authority. Wedding ceremonies can be divided into three groups: customs observed before the wedding, rituals conducted during the wedding, and traditions performed after the wedding [5].

If a young man and woman are in love, the man may elope with the girl. If the groom's parents agree to the marriage, he takes the bride to his home. If the parents object, the groom may take the bride to the home of a relative. After 2–3 days, the groom's parents, accompanied by an elder, visit the bride's home to

apologize for their son's actions and provide a certain amount of dowry. The wedding day is then officially set. The groom's side provides one sheep, a dowry of 4 million soms, covers the costs of the wedding feast, and brings all the items to be placed on the table. Relatives and extended family are invited as guests. The wedding ceremony is held at the bride's home and is called "Oshtu-huronik." No music or entertainment is performed during the ceremony. If financially possible and desired, a wedding may also be held at the groom's house [6].

The traditional custom of giving young girls in marriage, one of the old practices of the Sarqit (a subgroup of Luli), has persisted among some Luli groups to this day, largely because it was impossible to monitor such cases. Many members of these groups did not register births or obtain passports, so they were not officially recorded by state authorities. This situation has reportedly been increasing in recent years.

As in the past, young Luli often marry according to their parents' wishes. Some parents arrange betrothals when children are very young ("quloq tishlatib"), while others wait until the couple comes of age and arrange the marriage with the help of matchmakers. Nevertheless, the Luli custom of "bride kidnapping" continues to occur occasionally [7].

In all Luli groups in the Surxondaryo Valley, ceremonies such as the "fotiha to'yi," the main wedding, "yuz ochdi" (revealing the bride's face), "ota ko'rdi" (introduction to the father), and "kuyov chaqirdi" (inviting the groom) are performed almost identically to those of the local Uzbeks. Minor differences exist, such as the immediate union of the bride and groom on the wedding day. Some older Luli customs, like the groom promising to support the bride and her family while carrying a bag on his shoulder during the wedding, have nearly disappeared. The Luli, like other local peoples, are fond of children. Between the 1960s and 1980s, improved living conditions led to an increase in family size, with households having 5–8 or even 10 or more children.

In the first decades after settling, Luli women traditionally gave birth at home. From the 1980s onwards, the situation changed dramatically, and now Luli women give birth in maternity hospitals [8].

A longstanding custom persists: if a child is not seen for a long time (2–3 years) and then seen, a ritual called "kokil qo'yish" is performed, symbolizing "may we see the child again." In the Surxondaryo Valley, the Luli would remove the kokil only after conducting a ritual called "is chiqarish" at sacred sites such as Sulaymon Ota or Qoraxon Bobo, often involving the sacrifice of a live animal (usually a chicken).



After a child's birth, as with other local peoples, all Luli groups observe the "chilla" period. The chilla is usually held at the bride's parents' home. If the bride's parents live far away, it is observed at the groom's house. Even after settling, the Luli continued to use swings and cradles extensively for many years [9].

CONCLUSION

The study of the Luli people in the Surxondaryo Valley reveals a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and social traditions that have been preserved from ancient times to the present. Their family and wedding ceremonies, child-rearing practices, and communal customs reflect a blend of pre-Islamic beliefs, orthodox Islam, and local adaptations, showing both continuity and change over time.

Historically, Luli communities practiced communal living and collective celebrations, including shared rituals for circumcision, weddings, and festivals. Despite the influence of surrounding cultures and the modern market economy, many traditional practices—such as the "fotiha to'yi," "chilla," and rituals associated with newborns—remain integral to their cultural identity. The customs surrounding marriage, including dowry, bride-groom negotiations, and even the persistence of "bride kidnapping," illustrate the balance between traditional norms and contemporary social pressures.

Child-rearing practices, from the use of cradles and swings to rituals like "kokil qo'yish" and "is chiqarish," demonstrate the Luli's continued respect for sacred customs and the spiritual protection of children. Similarly, the adaptation of birthing practices from home to hospital reflects their responsiveness to modern healthcare while maintaining traditional observances.

Overall, the Luli of Surxondaryo exemplify a community that has preserved its distinctive identity through centuries, integrating old and new practices, while demonstrating resilience in the face of socio-economic and cultural changes. Their customs provide valuable insight into the broader dynamics of ethnic traditions, cultural continuity, and adaptation in Central Asia.

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