



## MORTUARY RITES IN COVID-19: MOURNING & BURIAL RITES OF MIGRANTS IN NORTHERN PUNJAB

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to highlight how death serves as a central feature of social ties among the natives of Northern Punjab. Death is a great leveller and one of the most curious aspects of human cognition. Bereavement follows the terminal rites de passage; the transition of the deceased from this world to the other world.

**Methodology:** By using an inductive approach, the ethnographic account of the most significant rite of passage; death was gathered. The primary data is based on case-based narratives and empirical findings gathered during in-depth interviews and participant observation at the locale. A total of thirteen cases of death migrants are discussed in this paper.

**Main Findings:** The findings reveal the social pressures the family of the deceased encountered in the pre and post-death phase both in the country of origin and in the country of destination, how horrors of COVID-19 infection kept the entire bereaved families at a halt to decide their funerary rituals, pandemic's effect on the body's postmortem clearance and death certificate, arrangement for the morgue and grave while the decision of burial was in process, familial politics engaged in decision making, the journey back to the native soil, the burial, mourning, condolence and bereavement rituals of Potohar.

**Applications of this study:** This paper solely focuses on the death rituals of migrants from the Northern Punjab region in COVID-19. The study provides an understanding of the religio-cultural rituals and their transformation in the global pandemic.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The researcher has prepared an account of the death rituals based on the close observations and in-depth insights during the mortuary rites of migrants who expired during the pandemic COVID-19 during doctoral research. No such research has been carried out in Potohar (Northern Punjab) in this context.

**Keywords:** *Death in COVID-19, Mourning Rituals, Liminality, Bereavement, Migrant, Burial, Rites of Passage.*

### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a pandemic that is perceived to be the most dreadful global health catastrophe of this century after world war II that has posed the utmost challenges to humankind (Zeeshan & Sultana, 2020); (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). Migrants are often scapegoated for endangering the lives of native populations in such pandemics. Such diseases are at times perceived as 'foreign', for instance, the cholera case of the 1830s, the 1980's case of HIV/ AIDS, or, more recently, with H1N1 influenza. The case of COVID-19 is no exception to it since individuals of Euro-Asian descent and migrants more generally is getting stigmatized for spreading the virus (IOM, 2020). Not just stigmatization, the overall vulnerability of the migrant population whether living or dead increases in such cases. This research takes into account the issues faced by the bereaved family of migrants who expired during COVID-19 whether they were in their native land or in their country of destination. Pandemic initially resulted in barring the repatriation of the deceased in their native soil and delayed transposition of the bodies to the land of origin of these migrants. The case of migrants from Northern Punjab has been discussed at length in terms of their mortuary rites and protocols observed in liminality.

Life after death and life before birth is the existential questions that we often encounter. A reflection on death is as inescapable as death itself. The core of our being is rooted in death and grief. Grief is considered an extremely personal emotion, however, the way we handle grief and become mournful are the products of the culture we are raised in. Like all sentiments, emotions, and their expression, mourning is also encultured (Lex, 1979). The anthropology of mourning takes into account the cross-cultural significance and practices at the time of death which has largely been transformed by the pandemic.

Transposition of bodies to the native land or waiting for the bereaves family in pandemic has spread the length of liminal phase. Liminality is the stage often considered as between and betwixt, where one is passing through the transition. Similarly, how to mourn for the deceased is prescribed by his achieved status as a migrant. This paper focuses on the death of the migrants and how the bereaved ritualize their mortuary in a pandemic. Unless confirmed by a "social death" whereby the last rites of the individuals are performed, lives of individuals who meet a catastrophe as migrant or those who never



return are considered “social disappearance” by an unconfirmed death (Fregoso, 2017); (Willems, 2018); (Fregoso, 2020). The pandemic has posed several such situations whereby the social disappearance of cases from diasporas’ bodies happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> phases of the pandemic wave and the deaths were not confirmed by the hospital authorities.

People dying out of pandemic were marked infected and were considered as the most susceptible form of new infections, the ones taking their last breath in quarantine facility or death bed in hospitals were already isolated from their families. They were mostly either buried or cremated without intimation to their families. The bereaved ones were later informed of their graves or were merely informed that their loved ones no longer exist. It happened mostly in the countries where the immigrants were living. Immigrants who had their families accompanying them or not were barely handed over the dead bodies. The death of migrants pierced by COVID-19 emerged from an empirical need whereby we need to understand the cultural significance of mortuary rites in Pakistan and the concept of ‘bad death’ in the natural catastrophe. We were confronted, in a growing number of situations, with the need to rethink the borders between life, and death and the intersections between those two states, which result in bad deaths and bad lives (Gatt & Martmez, 2020).

The soul develops with the completion of full life cycle stages (Majali, 2014). Anthropologically speaking, these life cycle stages are taxonomized as birth, adulthood/ marriage, and death. Religiously speaking, life then is a preparation for a soul to pass on through the stages of death and to be fit to progress into the life of death (Wehbe-Alamah, 2008). Death is the most traumatic of these life cycle stages. Each life cycle stage is celebrated and held at length, but generally, the burial rituals are carried out as soon as possible to enable a smooth transition of the deceased to his afterlife especially in Muslims (Majali, 2014).

People grieve over the loss of their loved ones. Understanding the psyche of human beings justifies this ‘grief’ through a ‘mournful’ exhibit in certain cultures. Mourning the dead is found across most religions, especially the Abrahamic religions, but its duration and protocols are not similar (Zeeshan et al., 2020). Understanding the complex entanglement between culture and grieving is a first step toward theorizing about grief in a culturally attuned way and in providing support to culturally diverse grieving people (Rosenblatt, 2008). Beyond that, it can be theoretically of great importance to understand what the cultural differences are. In this case, burial rituals and grief is bound to the status of the deceased migrant but his place of death in covid-19 determines his death rituals.

Religion broadly shapes self-construal; it can be instructive in terms of how culture gets inside people’s heads (Cohen, 2015). Mourning helps by stressing the restorative task which empowers the actions and voices of people who have gone through the experience of bereavement and loss (Zembylas, 2011). Mourning is not merely cultural; it is shaped up by religion as well. Such differences can tell us much about human plasticity; about important variations in human relationships and meanings related to grieving; and the awesome ways in which grieving from culture to culture is embedded in fully functioning, ongoing systems that make sense in their terms even if they are stupefying nonsensical from the perspective of one’s culture (Rosenblatt, 2008).

Each society has come up with its own modes of tackling their grief through different types of mourning across cultures in a complex web of beliefs and customs. Anger, fear, and crying have been so common at the time of death that most cultures sanction the flow of such emotions (Parkes et al., 2015). We can differ between grief and mourning by saying that grief is more of an internal; inward feeling of sorrow whereas mourning is external; it reflects behavior related to grief (Boyd & Nowak, 2012). People do grieve the loss of their family members who die during the process of migration, but they barely mourn for them the way neo-citizens are mourned.

Funerals and mourning customs have remained a significant domain of research for anthropologists however, grief and mourning were largely left to psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry. Over the past three decades, the Freudian model of grief was questioned, and theories were built upon it. Some anthropologists have documented work that tends to illustrate the diversity of grief across Intra and inter socio-cultural groups. Some work has been done for interrogating the epistemological premises that an Anthropology of grief could be built upon. Ethnographers often face limitations and methodological issues while making pluri-disciplinary approaches to grief, especially in Anthropology (Zeeshan et al., 2020); (Engle, 2007). Such seminal work was carried out 30 years ago by Nancy Shepher Hughes which was based on the cultural diversity of grief; Death without weeping based on posthumous reflections and Kleinman’s work on Culture and depression focusing on manifestation, variability, and similitudes of grief across cultures, and societies (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004); (Kleinman, 2012).

The objectives of the study are to understand

1. Rites de (of) passage pertaining to death; since they are one of the most pertinent concepts for smooth transition among different life cycle stages.
2. Liminality in the pandemic Covid-19 especially in case of death-like traumas where mourning serves to ease out the transition of the deceased and the bereaved.



3. How death and funerary rituals serve as one of the core rites which stand central in the lives of Potoharis (inhabitants of Potohar).

**METHODOLOGY**

An inductive approach was primarily used for this research. By using an inductive approach, the ethnographic account of the deaths of migrants from Northern Punjab in Covid-19 was prepared. One of the most significant rites de passage; death was gathered. The methodology adopted for this paper is descriptive. Rapport was established in the field during the ongoing doctoral fieldwork. The participant observation; whereby the approach of the participant as a researcher is used as the primary research method. The primary data is based on case-based narratives and empirical findings gathered during in-depth interviews and participant observation in the locale. Having close connection and some roots in the field, enabled to caste close observations and seek in-depth insights on deaths of migrants in covid-19. Traumas of death were amplified. They were central to the lives of the migrant communities. The most pertinent feature establishing and disrupting network ties in the locale was ‘death’. The deaths of the migrants compelled me for taking up this article due to the amplification of the traumas which prolonged the liminal rituals at death. The deaths occurring during doctoral fieldwork were taken into account. Rapport was already established in the field due to the ongoing fieldwork. The primary method of research was Participant observation; whereby the approach of the participant as a researcher is used. No prior tool or observatory checklist was prepared beforehand to avoid research biases and naïve scope. A total of thirteen cases of death migrants are taken into account. Six migrants who expired in their destination lands and seven migrants who passed away in their native land were taken into account. Generally, in normal circumstances, the bodies of the migrants are transposed from countries of destination to the country of origin; Pakistan, but the pandemic transformed the protocols of death and funerary rites.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

COVID -19 death toll has already surpassed the deaths of Ebola, MERS, and SARS (Khan, Chaudhry, & Zeeshan., 2020). However, the scope of the paper is limited to the deaths of migrants from Potohar in the pandemic. The interaction of the virus causing COVID-19 and its social environment exerts an unequal burden on the most disadvantaged members of society (Drefahl et al., 2020). Therefore, the following table is generated based on data gathered from the deaths of migrants from the field over, eight months i. e., June 2020 to January 2021. The total number of deaths are taken into account are thirteen; seven deceased in their native land, whereas six expired in their destination lands.

**Table 1:** Deaths of Migrants are taken into account from June 20-January 21

Deaths of Migrants are taken into account from June 20-January 21							
Deaths of Migrants in Native land							
Cause of the death reported by the families	Heart Attack		Heart Failure		Covid-19	Terminal Illness	Total death cases taken into account
	2		2		2	1	7
Deaths of Potohari Migrants abroad							
Countries of Destination	UAE		UK		Australia	Kuwait	Total dead bodies are taken into account
	2		2		1	1	6
Burial arrangement	Transpose to native land	Undisclosed	Transpose to native land	Buried in destination land	Cremation	Undisclosed	
	1	1	1	1	1	1	6

**Source:** Doctoral Field Data collected by the co-author

Since there is no such concept of a confirmed death at a medical facility, generally the cause of the death is reported by the deceased family for issuance of the death certificate. The causes of deaths reported by the families of the aggrieved was a heart attack, heart failure, terminal illness, and corona. Out of the seven cases, five were at home. They were not tested for corona and their cause of death were shared by the families confirmed by a local doctor. The two cases which tested positive for corona were shifted to a medical facility nearby for quarantine where they expired after 7-10 days due to failure of lungs. There could have been more corona positive cases, but due to stigmatization and fear of ‘bad death’, the individuals and families were reluctant for getting the individuals tested. All these seven migrants who passed in this period had returned

from their destination land in 2020 in the aftermath of the covid-19 declaration as a global pandemic. The death rites of all the five migrants reported of heart attack, heart failure, and terminal illness were performed the same way as they were previously observed in the locale. However, in the two cases where corona was the reported cause of death, the attendance of the mourners was even larger than the other five funerals. the curiosity of seeing a dead who died of covid was immense. However, there was a reluctance on part of the younger generation and the educated class to avoid attending such funerals but the social pressure for attendance was immense. Since participation in all these funerals was made by observing some distancing protocols, the curiosity to know the last moments of corona positive patients from the family and seeing his body was immense.

Apart from these deaths, there were six deaths of migrants in their destination land reported in the field during those eight months. It is believed and documented that the virus had been spreading undetected among migrant workers living in overcrowded dormitories (Nature, 2010). The 1<sup>st</sup> death of migrants reported in the UAE was during the first wave of pandemic covid-19. The migrant was working in labor class and the familial pressure for transposing the body back to native land was immense which took a month for clearance of the body in repatriation. The two major issues faced for its clearance was testing the body negative for coronavirus and clearance of his dues in the country where he was employed. The other death was confirmed of corona and the body never returned. The grieving prolongs in his aggrieved family back in Potohar since neither his mode of burial nor the place of his gravestone was communicated to them.

The death cases from the UK occurred after the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of covid-19 in December and January. One of the family was affluent enough and had very strong familial ties in their native lands whereby the body was transposed from the UK after getting clearance and buried in native soil on the eighth day after death. This body was accompanied by thirty family members which included his five children, wife, brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins who kept getting clearance after getting negatively tested for Corona and kept repatriating for the funeral. The immediate family left after five days without observing any quarantine measures in Pakistan. The other death from the UK was reported of a dual citizen who was 70 plus and was living alone in a government facility. His wife had left him in the UK for another marriage. He had six married children living abroad and in Pakistan, but according to his will, his body was not sent back to Pakistan, rather buried in the UK with proper religious and cultural protocols. The travel restrictions were not strict at that time to and from the UK, but he had made it clear before death that his dead body awaits none and he should be immediately returned to the soil after death. His children and family sought *fatwa* (A non-binding religious opinion from a religious cleric based on jurisprudence in response to an individual question) from a religious cleric who said that his aggrieved family can only attend their father's funeral live on video but cannot offer his funerary prayer alongside. Later, a *ghayabana namaz e janaza* (funerary prayers offered in the absence of the dead body) was offered in his regard.

The case of death reported from Kuwait was that of a migrant settled there for the past two decades. His family of procreation was living along with him. The deceased is reported in his mid-forties. He was reported testing corona positive during the 2<sup>nd</sup> pandemic wave and was observing quarantine at home. On the second day of his infection, he reported shortness of breath and was shifted to a nearby medical facility. The family was barred from visiting him and was informed of his critical condition in ICU. On the eighth day of his admission to the hospital, his family was informed of his death. Upon contacting the hospital for the body, it was revealed that he died 2-3 days back, but due to the Covid protocols, he was immediately buried without informing the family. Nobody knows his burial and his family was identified of his gravestone after ten days of insistence by his family and a cousin living abroad. The grieving siblings and family in Potohar could not re-unite to date due to the travel restrictions.

The situations that we call “social disappearance” create these forms of death in life, of suspended life, of incomplete life in which subjects, since their last rites were not performed (Gatti & Martinez, 2020). They were dead but living in the lives of their dear ones. After their burial or cremation, the families were informed due to the horrors of the pandemic (Fregoso, 2020). Similar is a case of death reported from Australia. The lady was visiting his son as a short-term migrant. She got stuck due to the pandemic and could not travel back. As soon as she was tested positive for the corona, she was shifted to a quarantine facility at a government hospital. On the tenth day of her infection, her family was informed of her death. Upon requesting the body, they were informed that she was cremated to ensure the suspected spread of the virus. This case happened during the first wave of the pandemic in June 2020 which spread chills in the spines of the parents visiting their migrant children abroad. The news was spread in the field like anything and a lot of unrest was caused among the elderly living abroad. The unrest was caused not by her death, but by the burial type ‘cremation’ since it is religion-culturally unacceptable to burn the body of a Muslim. No resistance could be made by his family since their consent was not taken into account before processing the dead body. His son wanted to file a law pursuit against the government but his fellows stopped him since his case for immigration was already filed.

## DISCUSSION

A community's mourning is essentially universal and that all mankind is moved by the same traumatic event (Engle, 2007).



There, however, are only a few in-depth studies regarding grief in cultures around the world and specific roles that rituals and beliefs related to death may have in the grieving process (Aksoz-Efe et al., 2018). Pandemic, COVID-19 has prolonged the liminal phase; rites de passage at the time of death. The period of mourning has prolonged and the traumas of deaths in COVID-19 especially in cases of migrants have multiplied. In pandemics, the attraction of anthropological expertise on funerary practices, and the perception of the significance of “culture” in this regard, but the dismissal of anthropological insight on home care and burial is neglected. While anthropologists were considered to contribute uniquely to understanding the care of dead bodies, the care for sick people was not seen as subject to “cultural” norms and sensitivities (Manderson & Levine, 2020). A lot needs to be studied and investigated in this regard to understand the cultural sensitivities while body transposition and performing the mortuary rituals of the migrants in their countries of destination specifically.

### Announcement of Death

Most of the migrants are no more connected to their native areas. Whenever a death happens in a migrant family in this region, the one who is socially well connected takes a step forward for the arrangements. People know him and condole with him. Generally, if a death occurs here in the native land, the body is immediately positioned properly and given first bath before public announcement. The house is immediately vacated. A new charpoy, blanket, bedding is reserved for the embodiment of the body. After an initial or preliminary bath, the body is centrally placed. Gathering of the elderly is made. Some neighbors and relatives initiate communicating the news to their relatives, and family. When the time of burial is decided, it is announced from the loudspeakers of the mosque. People from the town, village, and nearby areas perceive it as an open invitation to visit the deceased house and participate in the funeral rites of the deceased. Out of the seven deaths of migrants from June 2020 till January 2021, five of them expired at their homes. They were not tested of corona; hence the cause of death was generally marked as heart attack or heart failure. Two of them passed in a medical facility and were tested positive. The data has been taken from a rural locale, most of the inhabitants were not reluctant of attending the funerals and gathered at the place of the deceased immediately after death announcements. No SoPs (Standard Operating Procedures) of the pandemic was followed in those congregations.

All friends, relatives, and community members prefer to come for *akhri dedaar* (last gaze/view of the deceased) of the deceased. These rituals prevailed for the death of migrants who were already in their native area either on a vacation or who already migrated back to Pakistan haunted by the pandemic. In cases, whereby the death occurred abroad, multiple announcements were made. An initial announcement was made on the confirmation of death which marked the initiation of *Phoori* (Mourning; generally, it lasts from the day death is announced until 40 days in this region). The house of the deceased is vacated no matter the body is transposed back or not. People from the neighborhood are the first ones who gather for condolence. Consecutive announcements are made once the decision for burial is made. Generally, the death announcements are made irrespective of the time. Whenever a loudspeaker from the mosque is switched on unusual times other than *azan* (Call for Namaz; Muslim prayers), is expected for an announcement of death. Unless there is an emergency in the burial of the dead, the announcement time marks from *Fajr* (1<sup>st</sup> prayer offered at dawn) to *Isha* (Last prayer offered after dusk).

### Body Transposition

In case, the dead body has to come from abroad, funeral rites are delayed till the time the dead body is received. Delays receiving bodies put families and communities in limbo, unsure of when they would be able to grieve and move forward with life following deaths (Entress et al., 2020). Nowadays when dead bodies are difficult to be transported from abroad, burial arrangements are not done but the rest of the funeral rites like mourning, *fatiha* (A prayer made for the deceased), *qul* (Qul has two meanings. In the context of death, it is marked as the prayer ritual or event i.e., the third day after death. Whereas, in other sense, it is a Quranic Surah that affirms the sovereignty of the almighty) and *chaaleswan* (*Chehlum*: marked by the 40<sup>th</sup> day of death) are still performed. The bodies coming from abroad, the household in the home country makes the arrangement. All these arrangements are made. The *gor kan* (the one who prepares the grave) is never paid. Digging out graves is culturally carried out for each other as an indicator of balanced reciprocity. It is also carried out of fraternity and the social pressure that abides the natives offer cooperation during the burial arrangement for the dead. If one brother is in *janaza* (funeral), the other look after the grave to share the burden and responsibilities of each other.

Body politics is often carried out on the dead bodies of the dual nationals especially while deciding the country of burial either it be their land of origin or destination. People carry out this decision backed by the social and familial pressures. ‘*Log kya kahen gay?*’ (What will people say and think of us? Most of the familial decisions are accorded with the social pressures based on social appropriateness and acceptance). Firstly, it is the familial pressure from the land of origin and the natives’ gossip which forces the families of the neo-citizens to transpose the body back to its native land. It serves as the most pertinent and decisive factor. Secondly, the bigger funeral is a power show, the bigger the funeral, the more one’s social network, and contacts are displayed, the social positioning in the community is displayed through such large attendances. Thirdly, to bear the cost of graves in the UK, Europe, Australia, and the USA a big chunk of money is required. Many people



believe that rather than paying that cost, it is feasible to cover the cost involved in the transposition of the dead to its native soil.

From Gulf, it is a compulsion to seek the body back to Pakistan. People generally have no arrangements when the deceased from a low socio-economic or labor class. The arrangements are either made by the firm who contracted the deceased or resources are pooled in by the fellows living with him in cases when the deceased was not working with a firm and that too once his dues are cleared by the contracting firm. In Europe, it is believed that people generally do not attend graveyards. They are either very busy in their lives or are not considered as 'practicing Muslims' (The term is often used to define the culturally prescribed practices which may or may not have any religious origin and tradition. Visiting and maintaining the graves is one such Pakistani ritual believed to be a practice that has to be made by practicing Muslims) from the perspective of the natives.

In terminal care, people understand the difference of dying, death and life. Differences in language and culture cannot make the emotions attached to them translatable since the transcendental reality is left. They could be superficially helpful but ethnocentric where we consider our cultural expression between death and grief superior to that of others (Rossenblat, 2014). Two cases of deaths from terminal illness were reported. One in Pakistan and another in the UK. The one who repatriated to Pakistan was living at his place whereas the one in the UK was in a medical facility. All those family members of the deceased whose body was decided to be transposed back were getting tested for corona. All those who were testing negative traveling back to their native region. The immediate family which included the deceased's brother, his offspring, and spouse decided to travel with the body. The body reached its native land after eight days of death. But both these deaths were termed as 'good deaths' by their families and were culturally observed in somberness. Cultural roots are so overpowering that the idea of immediate burial rooted in religion was overlooked. However, the immediate family of the returnees' expressed that the most difficult phase and the challenge was the decision of burial and the liminal phase when they were making the arrangement. The grief prolonged unless they reached their native land where they mourned out loudly for hours before the burial.

### **Burial Protocols**

A Muslim burial should take place as soon as possible preferably within 24 hours. It is believed that the delay can cause distress to the relatives and if unavoidable the reason should be carefully communicated to the relatives (Majali, 2014). With the rapid increase in COVID-19 deaths, cultural practices for the dead have also been forced to change, furthering the trauma experienced by families and communities. Around the world, funerals were limited or canceled because of COVID-19, and cultural practices to honor the dead were not followed (Entress et al., 2020) & (Goh, 2020). There is also a local concept that one wants to be buried in the familial graveyard with his/ her ancestors, to connect with the bodies and souls of the family. One who visits one grave will visit the entire family's graves. If any grave is ignored, people mock and scorn their siblings and family. People are more into practicing the cultural norms about graves as compared to the religious prescriptions. The custom in Potohar leads to weekly attendance to the grave or a fortnight visit and all occasional visits on *Eids* (There are two Eids celebrated by Muslims worldwide. One is held after the month of Ramzan, on 1<sup>st</sup> of Shawwal. The other is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Zilhaj after the Muslims complete their pilgrim to the holy Makkah) and *Shabrat* (A holy night celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shaban on which all the deceased souls are believed to be free to meet their families). Graves are cemented and repaired in Moharram. In the UK, the Muslim community keeps on paying on monthly basis a certain amount, a fixed amount and some pay a bit extra. It is only for Pakistanis; one body and two bereaved family members are paid the cost of travelling when getting back to Pakistan.

After the second bath, generally held at one's place, the dead body is placed aside. The people who are well acquainted with the knowledge of performing *ghusal* (Bathing the dead body in a religiously prescribed manner) come forward. Generally, two major types of this bathe were seen; either in accordance with Shia or Sunni jurisprudence, however, not much rigidity in these protocols is observed here. Once the body is prepared, the *janaza* (dead body) is taken off for *namaz e janaza* (Muslim funerary prayer). The body is carried by the immediate family members especially in *Saadat* (Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) family). If the deceased is a female and there are enough men in the family, only the mahram or close family members shoulder the body. In the case of men, anyone can volunteer to shoulder the *janaza*. The body is shouldered on rotation and up to the will of the people, people keep on observing each other. Who-ever seems tired, is given relief by being replaced. In the rural populace of Northern Punjab, there is no concept of *gor kan* as a professional. If anyone's awaited from the immediate family of the deceased, the burial is put to hold in the graveyard. Any *janaza gah* (The place designated to offer the Muslims funerary prayers), ground, or farm is used for the funeral ceremonies. If it is rainy, the mosque is used to offering the funerary prayer.

### **Participation in Funerary rites & Mutation of Social Differences**

Of exile, nostalgia, and mourning, the diasporic sensibility calls for the participation of the entire community in the funerary rites (Hussain et al., 2019). Whenever a body is coming from abroad, people keep visiting the house of the bereaved family

on daily basis especially from the neighborhood. The other relatives living at a distance and acquaintances visit at least once before the body arrives. Participation in the funeral rites is considered very important in the culture of Potohar as this is the occasion where people generally forget about their grievances and enmity and show solidarity by offering condolence to the family. Experiences of mourning bind humans together (Butler, 2004). All the grudges and issues are set aside and familial issues are muted on death and people ensure maximum and timely participation in deaths. A common saying is that participation in weddings may be optional but attending funeral rites is mandatory for all friends and enemies. The time of funeral prayer is decided by the immediate family members of the deceased and generally, people are hurried to bury the dead body within few hours after death. It is believed that everybody has to die either friend or enemy, so in case of death, everybody should come forward to offer condolence.

### Mourning Protocols in Potohar

Generally, Mourning is considered a smooth transition for grieving families. Such as a liminal ritual of grief serves as a rite de passage between loss and re-enactment to the routine life (Zeeshan et al., 2020). As long as the *chehlum* (40<sup>th</sup> day after death) is carried out, the *phoori* continues. *Phoori* is the primary mourning ritual which is termed after laying sheets on the floor designating it to the deceased' mourning by his family and all those coming to offer condolence. Every incoming guest is served with cold drinks, tea, biscuits and even meals if it is time for the meal. Every Thursday, the entire *baradari* (kin group) is called upon. Nobody comes without invitation after the death day and funeral. All those who are to be called, are informed on phone about the time. On Thursday, either 11 am *khatam* (the closure prayer) or after *asar* (The third prayer of the day offered in the afternoon) or *dua* (prayer) is carried out. Before that madrasa children carry out the recitation of the Holy Quran. From the Saudi Arab and the Gulf up to one to two months are consumed by the body's transposition. All the dues of the body are paid. The body is placed in the coffin after funeral and frozen in the morgue, unless his/ her dues are cleared his / dues are paid back, and then NoC or clearance to the body is made. From the UK, the for immediate flight is arranged, not before the doctor clearance is given, the doctor prescribes the cause of death his/ her certificate unless it is weekend.

People grieve over the loss of their loved ones. Understanding the psyche of human beings justifies this 'grief' through a 'mournful' exhibit in certain cultures. Mourning the dead is found across most of religions, especially the Abrahamic religions, but its duration and protocols are dissimilar (Lex, 1979). Mourning the dead varies cross-culturally within Pakistan. In many instances, people dramatize mourning, in loud voice. It is a tradition, the closer the relative, the higher the pitch. *bayan* is carried out, the deeds and all his ancestors are reminded, all his good deeds are recalled, they serve as *gawahi* (confessions) in his favor. All the ones who are coming for condolence, call their deceased ones and are often crying recalling their deceased family members. The women make a circle, kept on crying, beat their faces, they were circling the body, which is are nowadays, in remote villages, they beat their thighs and chest. *Jawan mout* (death of a young one) has a huge funeral, all accidental deaths and emergencies have larger funerals, people get frightened because of it. The dead bodies are not left alone. It is considered a non-normative death rite during the liminal phase to leave a *luggi* (alone) body. When a night happens for some reason in the process of death rites, the entire neighborhood keeps sitting next to the body. When nobody is crying, more *bains* (The tradition of mourning out loudly) are carried out to make people cry. When to mourn, how to mourn, how long to mourn, mourning singularly or collectively, what to eat and offer others, how to sit, what to wear while mourning is all religio-culturally prescribed (Zeeshan et al., 2020). Though migrants adopt the host dialects and language as they tend to assimilate in the host cultures, but when they return to their native land they mourn in their (mother tongue) (Chaudhry et al., 2019). When women come for mourning, they generally recall contributions of the deceased particularly in the case where the deceased was a new citizen, his pattern of remittances is explained with great gratitude. Like on the occasion of death, the daughter of the deceased (from the UK) was observed saying:

*"my father used to send clothes and toys for my children, he was paying the installment of my apartment. Now he is no more. I am left an orphan. No one will ever ask me what I need. He was sick but did not return to Pakistan just for the financial prosperity of his children staying in Pakistan. He made a huge sacrifice by spending his life in pades (abroad).*

### Cultural Norms of Mortuary Prayers

In most families, 1<sup>st</sup> *Kalma* (The first *Kalma* is the primary belief of Muslims across the globe. It is the word of purity and states that 'there is no God, but Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is his messenger') is recited immediately after death, some recite the Quran. The recital of Quran is generally organized after the funeral if the liminal span between death and the burial lasts between a day or two. However, in cases where several days or weeks are spent between the two, the Quranic recitation is started before burial. Nevertheless, before burial of the deceased, *dua* is not carried out. People who do not mourn out loudly or do an explicit exhibit of their trauma often term death as '*raza-e-rabbi*' (will of the Almighty) or '*Allah ki marzi*'. On the day of burial, once the family gets back from the graveyard, people do not visit the family. Only the close relatives gather to commemorate the deceased. It is believed that this break is given to the family so that they can relax after the tiresome burial process. The condolers start visiting start from the next day of the burial. In some families, *soyam* (the fourth

day after death was designated to prayers for the deceased replaced by *soyam* in the culture of Potohar) of the deceased is held. *Soyam* is also termed as 'Qul' or 'Qul khwani' which is named after the recital of *Qul*. It is a gathering where recital of Quranic verses is carried out by *Madrasah* (Religious seminary where pupils are equipped with Islamic education) children and in family members. The well-off people call upon the *Molvi* (cleric), *naat khwan* (The one who recites verses in praise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) and children from *madrasah*. The *molvi* delivers a religious sermon or speech. *Naat khwan* recites *naatein* (Poetic praise of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) and *Qirat* (the recitation from the Holy Quran) is made by the cleric or the *madrasah* children. At the end, *dua* is carried out. A feast is offered to all the attendees which varies from the socio-economic status of the bereaved family. It is generally expected from the families of the deceased to throw a big feast to all the attendees on this day. The people generally hold *dua* at the designated and announced time which is either before *zuhr* (2<sup>nd</sup> Muslim prayer of the day offered at the noon) or *asar* prayers. 11:00-11:30am is the ideal the time for closure of this ceremony. Since *Zawal* (the time when sun reaches its zenith) is the time when no religious activity is carried out. Where *Qul* is not practiced, *Chautha* is held on 4<sup>th</sup> day after death.

### Funeral Food

As soon as the body is taken out of the house, the food is offered to the ladies, every single individual who joins to offer condolence are offered food. In earlier times, when the modes of communication were not quick, often the death news was spread among the close ones late. Cooking comes to halt in the family where death has taken place. They are fed by the neighbors as long as the mortuary rituals of the dead are not over, generally up to three days of the burial. Since communication is swift in modern days, one-time meal is offered to the mourners and condolers at once after the dead one is departed from home. Generally, the immediate family of the deceased or his affinal arrange the feast. People cooperate with each other all the post-funeral feasts which include *soyam* (third day after death), or *chautha*, *jumeraten* (Thursday prayers held for the deceased) and *chehlum* (40<sup>th</sup> day after death).

The funerary feast which are offered on the day of burial does not comprise any sweet dish or fruit. However, on the *Qul* or *Chautha* seasonal fruits, dry fruits, and a sweet dish is offered. The sweets dish traditionally prepared in Potohar is often *halwa* (A traditional pudding often made of wheat flour or semolina with cane sugar, oil/ghee, or processed sugar with dry fruits toppings) which is occasionally and contemporarily replaced with *zarda* (Yellow-colored sweet rice with nuts and sweets). Multiple dishes of the deceased choice are also prepared on this day and offered to his relatives. *Lota* (An open vessel with a handle and spout for pouring water is often used for making ablution), shoes, *tasbeeh* (Paternosters or counter, beads for counting the verses), and clothes are also offered for *khatam*. *Jah namaz*, *topi* (prayer cap) are held in a tray, and offerings are made in the name of the Almighty by mentioning of its reward to the deceased soul. The *sawab* (ajar or reward) of the things offered to the needy or the religious cleric is believed to provide *eesal* (reward or blessings) to the deceased soul, *rooh ko sawab* (blessings to the deceased's' soul). In the *dua* for the deceased, the prayers are made about the gift offered to the progeny of the prophet, *caliphs* (the first four Muslim Caliphs after the Prophet PBUH), the *ashaab* (companions of the Prophet PBUH), *aulia Allah* (The ones are chosen and alleviated by Allah) is presented. People in Potohar religio-culturally attend such gatherings since it helps in social networking and socializing active. Also, participating in *dua* is believed to encompass the blessing to all the attendees and their deceased ones. People mainly attend funerals for reciprocity and social contact. Often balanced reciprocity is maintained at every point of time during the mortuary rituals.

From the field observations, there were two schools of thoughts in the *Sunnis* (The term comes from Ahl-e-Sunnah, meaning people of tradition. They are generally known to be the ones following Abu Bakar (RA) as the first Caliph after the Prophet) at the locale: *Hanafi* (An orthodox school of Sunni Muslim jurisprudence followed especially in Southern and Central Asia), *Deobandi* (This movement is aligned with Wahhabism and advances an equally orthodox or puritanical interpretation-, of Islam) and *Barelvi* (A term used for movement of Sufi, Sunni Islam originating in the Indian Sub-continent). Within *Deobands* (The ones who follow the Deoband school of Islamic interpretation), ones go the shrines of *aulia Allah* whereas the others call it *bidah* (The ones who follow the Deoband school of Islamic interpretation). A new *jamat ul muslimeen* is also appearing in Potohar who are considered as *wahabis* (Members of a puritanical Muslim sect founded in Arabia in the eighteenth century by Muhammad ibn-Abdul Wahab, and revived by Ibn-e-Saud in the twentieth century) do not believe in any blessings, *dua* or post burial prayers for the deceased at all. Most of the *Hanafi*, *Deobandis*, and *Wahabis* were not engaging in post-humous rituals for the deceased soul hence do not hold such ritualistic prayers.

### CONCLUSION

There are certain ways in which the mortuary rituals are performed. However, the deaths that occurred in pandemic covid-19 have altered the pattern of mortuary rituals especially for the ones who died of covid or who died in covid. The liminal phase was extended and the trauma of death was prolonged where the dead bodies are not returned to the aggrieving families. There are two types of deaths discussed in this paper; the ones who expired in their native land after returning in the covid-19 and the ones who deceased during the pandemic abroad. On one hand, we discuss the mortuary rituals and liminal rites of the dual nationals, who are honored by their family and community who look forward to their burial rites, whereas on the





other, several such citizens have lost their lives in a pandemic or due to covid living abroad while their families made it to native land or not. In cases where the announcement of death was not made before the disposition of the body, the idea of bad death or unfinished mortuary rituals prevailed which gloomed as the biggest trauma of the death in this pandemic. The liminal phase of death and burial never appeared or it was expanded for the aggrieved families could not receive their death news or the deceased bodies for burial to complete their funerary rites which amplified the trauma of the death of migrants in this pandemic.

### LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

Covid-19 and the gender of the researchers barred the respondents from taking part in the burial rites of the deceased migrants. The observation was cast following some distancing protocols. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the ethnographic account could not be visually aided. Such anthropological studies are required to seek insight into the cultural sensitivities during the pandemics by the cross-cultural understanding of death and mortuary rituals rather than undermining the cultural norms.

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The article has been written by the primary author. The data has been gathered by the second author. The third author has helped in literature review and citations.

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