

Article

A Masked Ritual: Wedding Night VirginitY Test among Sri Lankan Muslims

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Abstract: The virginitY test in the wedding bed is a widespread custom in many cultures and Sri Lanka is no exception. Wedding night virginitY testing among Muslim community is camouflaged and masked but prevails. As a result, this study was created to investigate the significance, explanations, relevance, and reasoning for the Muslim marital virginitY test as a marriage custom. This study is wholly qualitative. In order to gather data, nine cases were studied in-depth using the snowball sampling technique. One focus group discussion and five key informant interviews were done. The study has shown that the entire virginitY test for the bridal bed is a pointless, damaging, humiliating, and unfair practice. The concept of hymenoplasty is barely understood by respondents. Several terms are used to describe virginitY tests, such as *potti odakkiya* (cracking box), *pon kulippaattal* (bride bathing), etc. The celebration of the virginitY test is marked with a breakfast feast, gifts such as gold jewelry, etc. The wedding bed virginitY test has been viewed as a harmful habit, encouraging feelings of inferiority and decreasing self-worthiness. Despite gender inequalities, it was proposed that the community at large be educated about the unreliability of wedding bed virginitY tests. This study fills a research gap and contributes much-needed empirical data to the academic world by providing an explanatory review on the wedding bed virginitY test among Sri Lankan Muslims.

Keywords: wedding night virginitY test, virginitY test, muslims' wedding, customs, hymen, hymenoplasty, virginitY nuances, virginitY symbols

Introduction

Every nation has unique customs that are considered to be indigenous and traditional. However, many of these have ancestors from other areas of the world, particularly from India and its neighbouring countries. Sri Lanka is really a mysterious country. Even now, its customs, history, and culture are among the most beautiful and exotic in the entire globe. Some claim that in order to comprehend Sri Lankan culture, one must just be a Sri Lankan. Just a few of them include remembering a girl's first period, verifying a bride's virginitY, the "*Dola Duka*" pregnancy appetite, keeping house doors open after funerals, and "*Thovil*," which is Sri Lankan exorcism (Senanayake, 2017).

The wedding bride's virginitY test is a tradition that contains local beliefs and customs with mysterious origins. In Sri Lanka, especially in the Sinhala community, virginitY testing is a common wedding tradition. The bride is given a white sheet at the throne ceremony, which she keeps in her luggage before departing for her honeymoon. The newlywed is examined in this situation to find out if the bride was a virgin when she got married. According to Hussein (2017), this activity has several names. It is known as Isadiya Mangalya (Head-Water Ceremony), Isa DiyaBalantaYaema (going to see the head-water), or simply BalantaYaema in some regions of the country (going to see). On the wedding throne, the bride is wrapped in a white cloth called "*kirikadahelaya*", which is expected to be spread on the wed bed. The bride's mother, the groom's sisters, some older ladies, or in some areas, the washerwoman, would check the kirikadahela for blood stains. The bride's

stains, which came from the rupture of her hymen, are seen as proof that she is a virgin, and this purity is joyfully celebrated. De Silva et al. (2000) in their book, *Cultural Rhapsody: Ceremonial Food and Rituals of Sri Lanka*, they mention that the Rabaan (drum) is beaten by the groom's mother to hear the whole village and a red flower is sent to the bride's mother if evidence of blood stain is found. On the other hand, if the bride could not prove her virginity, the drum is not beaten and a white flower is sent to the bride's mother. In general, homecoming ceremonies are always designed with red attire, which represents blood.

This practice has been carried out by Muslim communities as well. Though the practice does not have the same format or shape, it has been practiced indirectly. Despite being abhorrent to Islamic notions of propriety, the practice is nonetheless prevalent in both urban and rural regions. A research study on local Muslim women, published by the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (MWRAF) in 1999, discovered that the Muslims used a "virginity test" akin to that of the Sinhalese. It mentions that, the bride is given a white cloth to be used on the wedding bed. The couple usually spend their wedding night at the bride's home, and the day after the wedding, the elderly from the groom's family visit the bride's home for breakfast. In Colombo, they came across a custom where a red flower and turmeric are sent to the bridegroom's house if the bride is a virgin. Here, as in the other areas, including Ampara, the bride is given a gold sovereign (or jewellery) by the bridegroom as an appreciation for her virginity after consummation of the marriage (MWRAF, 1999).

This custom is known as "Pon Kulippaattal" (bride bathing) among Muslims, and it involves the groom's sisters visiting the bride's house for a breakfast party with the hidden agenda of examining the blood stain on the bed. If it is witnessed, the bride is gifted a gold ring for her purity. Alternatively, if stains are visible, the girl is seen as having good morals and is given prizes (MWRAF, 1999). The possibility of the bride's life being lived in the shadow of suspicion and doubt if there is no stain will result from her not being regarded as a virgin. Because most Sri Lankans still believe that all virgins will bleed during their first intercourse and that a girl who does not bleed has already had sexual contact, that many young couples face untold misery and unhappiness from the start of their marriage (Hymen and Virginity, 2001).

Though the groom typically presents and brings a white sheet for the wedding bed when the virginity check takes place, this custom is rarely obtrusively observed in Muslim communities. The white sheets are given as part of the Sinhala wedding customs and kept within the groom's honey moon suitcase, which is set up in front of the groom's family and other relatives. On the other hand, Muslim wedding customs do not require such a throne ceremony, but instead, they have a custom of keeping a white sheet in the groom's luggage that is brought to the bride's home or, on occasion, they simply check the bed spread on the night they have their sexual relations without making any prior arrangements. The key distinction in this case is that Muslims' performance is viewed as a concealed practice, while Sinhala community practice is widely known. However, the effects of the virginity test remain the same. In light of this, it was strongly felt that this was a problem that needed to be researched. As the first step this was investigated to show that virginity testing is practiced.

Literature Review

In India, a "thread ritual" is a form of virginity testing. also known as a "thread ceremony or *Kukari ki Rasam*". Not only is the thread used in some cases to torture women, it is also used to check the intactment of the hymen (Peters, 2007). According to Ahmadi (2016), entrenched cultural discourse and behaviors are typically used honor with cultural symbols but not *hujaya*.

Sharmaine, a girl, mentioned that being a virgin is crucial, particularly when getting married. It is stated that if you were discovered to not be a virgin, your in-laws would burn a hole in the middle of the *jira* (fabric used to make the bride's attire). The *jira* will then be useless because the centre will be burned (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018). Traditionally, it was expected that women would refrain from premarital sex, arrive at their weddings as virgins, as shown by the bride wearing a white gown, and "give-up" their virginity to their new husbands during the act of consummating their marriage.

Tadiwanashe, a boy, mentioned that it is regarded highly since it is claimed that when a person gets married, their parents receive compensation for their virginity. If you are no longer a virgin, your parents do not get this cash. Male virgins receive nothing, the boy pays a cow that goes to the girl's family. Wife's parents

compel the husband to give them a cow as a token of appreciation for their efforts in making sure their daughter stayed a virgin till she was married. To honor a woman's virginity, a cow known as *mombe yechimanda* is purchased in addition to the *roora* (bride wealth). The hymen is referred to as a *chimanda*. Traditionally, in Zimbabwe, the young gentleman's aunts were in charge of checking the couple's bedroom the morning after the wedding to determine the virginity of the newlywed girl. These days, though, this is uncommon because most couples choose to spend their wedding night somewhere other than their extended families, such as on their honeymoon. Since the bride is virginal, it is the husband's duty to use *jira remasungiro* to inform the other members of the two households. Invited family members and guests at the bride's family untie this cloth, which might be at least 6 meters long. When the whole family is present, they jive and dance. Everyone can see from the big hole in the center of the fabric that the husband would not pay *mombe yechimanda* and that the parents did not do a good job of raising their daughter (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018).

In the United Kingdom, a record number of young women are seeking help after being forced to take virginity tests. After being compelled into arranged marriages, there have been stories of women being forced by their families to take these contentious tests to "verify" their virginity. In some circumstances, the bride-to-be's family is compelled to submit their daughters to these treatments because the groom's family wants proof of the bride-to-be's virginity. The experiences of victims have been labelled as cruel, traumatic, and extramarital (Malik, 2021). However, a cunning but filthy bride found it easy to get her hands on a blood vial. The majority of medieval homes were close to farms, and butchering animals for dinner was commonplace. A drop of chicken blood might easily be concealed in jewelry and spilt over the blankets throughout the night.

Methodology

This study is entirely a qualitative anthropological study. Despite the fact that this study had a large population, the sample size of the research is very small due to the nature and sensitivity of the research. Nonetheless, it captures the essence of the required findings. Following snowball sampling technique, nine cases were studied in depth to collect data. The sample size was determined by saturation point. Further, the researcher conducted one Focused Group Discussion (FGD), which comprised twelve members from the different ages and life experiences. FGD was mainly used to derive common data related to virginity rituals and customs prevails in the society. Key informants such as midwife, gynecologists, village leader, washer woman and social worker were included in the study to gain additional stories behind virginity testing. Six informal group chats were also used to collect additional data, and the researcher was fortunate to attend three wedding ceremonies during the data collection period. At those wedding ceremonies, there were artificial opportunities created intentionally to discuss about the virginity test, customs, and prior experiences. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim in informants' native language Tamil. The findings were analyzed by performing thematic analysis technique.

The Findings

1. Perceptions on Virginity, Hymen and Hymenoplasty

Available literature on virgins and virginity is vast and has a plethora of perceptions. While religious views see virginity as a gift of God, on the other hand, the scientific world refuses that ideology, mentioning that it cannot be proved. In daily life as well, people have a practice of using the word for commodities. Tissue companies generally use the word virgin and mention that their paper tissues are made up of virgin pulp. Nowadays, hair oil companies usually advertise their products by claiming that the hair oil is made of virgin coconut oil. However, in relation to human, virginity is perceived from a plethora of viewpoints. Followings are the perspectives discussed with various viewpoints.

Virgins and virginity

Typically, the term "virgin" means someone, a man or a woman, who has never had sexual intercourse. According to Hennawy (2016), a guy loses his virginity when his penis enters the vagina. The first time a penis enters a woman's vagina, she also forfeits her virginity. Sharma (2014) gives three principal signs of virginity. They are, first, having an intact hymen, second, having a normal condition of fourchette, and third, having a narrow vagina with rugose walls. Similarly, virgins were described with multiple words, such as "tear

rubber" and "brand new," whereas non-virgins were described as "cheap," "second hand," "used," "dumped," and "useless." Several wall posts in the group suggest that those who save sex for marriage have a strong sense of self-determination, self-will, morals, conduct, and character. (Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2021).

Many young women believe it gives them reason to be proud of themselves (Mhlongo, 2009). Nevertheless, the concept of a virgin is common in wider society. Saving vagina from any form of sex activity, according to Najla, is a form of virginity. She remembered her schooling days when her friends had cracked jokes regarding 'saving the box' until they got married. Delgross (2019) mentions that women in Lebanon (and many other parts of the world) are expected to have an intact hymen until their wedding night, often known in Arab culture as "the night of penetration" ("*laylit al dukhla*"). According to Olamijuwon and Odimegwu (2021), in their research, many wall posts distinguish it from virginity by emphasizing that a young adult can be a virgin (penetrative sexual abstinence) but not sexually pure. There is a concept of purity, which implies that a lady is a virgin who has not engaged in any romantic activities and has not had access to any part of her body.

"Virginity is a special gift to your husband on your wedding night, not a birthday present to your boyfriend, and use your days wisely" (Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2021). According to Najla, not all women can prove their virginity by displaying blood stains on the sheet during the first sexual encounter. Anyway, she was not aware of the blood examination process until she got married and started gaining experience. Though she had experience, she could not realize the seriousness of the virginity test until she had to hear a serious story related to the particular issue where that story she heard ended up in a divorce.

While Aathi explains virginity, she believes that, "*remaining even without a touch of a boy is a virgin*". She claimed that she was a virgin until she got married. Meanwhile, she had zero knowledge about the virginity test that happened on her wedding night. Unfortunately, Aathi was unable to display the blood-stained bed sheet as proof of her virginity. As a result, she believes that this could not be a reliable way of proving the purity of a girl. She claimed that she was very disillusioned and irritated due to the process she underwent on the very first days of her wedding.

Isra, like Aathi, had never heard of virginity before she married. She was only seventeen years old at that time, so she claimed that she did not know about sexual intercourse. In any case, her definition of virginity is the avoidance of sexual relations with men. Isra saw virginity as "loyalty". She exposed that she was always advised by her mother to be and save her virginity by behaving physically soft when she was a small girl. She said that she was not allowed to sit by stretching her legs apart widely and had even been punished for such kinds of activities. Though she was raised in that manner, she claimed that she could not understand the meaning of such advice and punishments. She remembered that she knew from her Sinhala friends that those who were not virgins would faint on the *poruwa* (a wedding throne specially made according to Sinhala wedding rituals) during the *poruwa* ceremony of their wedding.

Mufa, a case in this study engaged enthusiastically, had heard about virginity. She stated that she was unaware of the entire story of any form of virginity examination process performed on her wedding night. However, she could remember that she had shared stories of saving the virginity of girls with her school-age friends. However, she did not know how it could be saved or unspoiled. Virginity, according to her, "*virginity is having no sex until you marry, and virgins are free of sex and sex-related activities.*" According to her knowledge and experiences, the first-time blood stains are a nightmare for some women.

Unlike Mufa, Hiya had never heard of virginity and virginity tests. For her knowledge, virgins save their vaginas from sin, and virginity saves vaginas from sin before and after marriage, even until death. She stressed it as "morality". Ellemers et al. (2019) define morals as identifying what is the right and wrong way to behave in life. Hence, for Hiya, virginity is behaving in the right way in our sexual life. When she elaborated more, she claimed that nobody could steal or ruin a girl's virginity. Female chastity (*castitas*) was also split into three categories by Chen (2010): unmarried, marital, and widowed. However, *castitas* who were married, widowed, or virgins were placed in an increasing order of virtue. According to these religious principles, he says, virginity is the pinnacle of chastity because it can also be attained in other facets or stages of life.

Naha, on the other hand, had heard about virginity and had a virginity test on the wedding night. Nonetheless, she was unaware of it until she encountered it on her wedding day. She defined virginity as remaining without any sex relations until getting married. She simply defined virginity as "virtue".

For Mutaz, having no sex until marriage is virginity, and he claimed that we should save it and wait for the day to come. She had heard about it from a childhood friend. However, Nazla was very aware of who was a virgin and of virginity. She had attended a Sinhala medium school and her friends were Sinhala Buddhists. They have cracked jokes on virginity tests, and the word "*petty kadanawa*" (breaking the box) was very common in jokes. Nevertheless, she was able to understand the meaning of some jokes after she experienced them in her wedding life.

Fara had heard about virginity after her marriage. Before her marriage, she did not have a clear understanding of it. Her husband was not that aware of the process that happens on the wedding night, but his cousins had explained this. For her, virginity is 'purity'. She mentioned that "*all girls should secure their purity. It is a treasure that they have.*" The term "sexual purity" refers to the absence of kissing and romantic relationships, a concept that is closely related to the spiritual dimension of virginity (Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2021). "*Everybody cannot prove it by showing blood, but I have heard that men can understand on the first night based on the behavior and her expressions and reactions whether she is a virgin or not*", Fara stated. Similarly, Hennawy (2016) mentions that, "for the most part, being a virgin is not about whether a woman's hymen is intact or broken. It used to be that on her wedding night, if a woman's first sexual intercourse (losing her virginity) was painful and there was blood on the sheet, it was proof that she was a virgin". Olamijuwon and Odimegwu (2021) find it interesting to mention that "any girl that does not cry and shout on her wedding night is not a virgin."

Different perspectives on hymen

Table 1. Types of Hymen and description

Types of Hymen	Shape and description
Annular or circular	in which the hymen forms a ring around the vaginal opening
Dentate fimbriated or denticular hymen	a hymen with an opening which has serrate edges
Crescentric or Lunar hymen	a moon-shaped hymen, anterior, posterior
Hymen Bifenestratus	a hymen with two openings side by side and a broad septum between them.
Septate	a hymen in which the opening is divided by a narrow septum.
Hymen Subseptus	a hymen in which the opening is partially filled by a septum growing out of one wall, but not reaching the other.
Cribriform or Fenestrated	full of holes
Complete absence of hymen	No hymen at all
Microperforate	almost completely covers the opening but there is the opening which is very small
Imperforate	completely covers the opening

Source: Hennawy (2016)

Cook and Dickens (2009) mention that hymens can be ruptured either by sexual intercourse or in several other ways. Since it is "a tiny membranous tissue with no known biological function, which typically occupies a portion of the external vaginal opening in females" (Mishory et al., 2019). Despite the fact that the normal hymenal appearance in adolescents is still not well documented (Edgardh & Ormstad, 2002). Mishori et al. (2019) explain four types of hymen based on their appearance. The hymen is a leftover tissue just inside the opening of the vagina that is a remnant from how the vagina forms during embryonic development

(Schaffir, 2020). Sommers (2007) mentions that at the same time, the hymen has an amazing ability to repair itself after injuries, especially in young females. The following is a table explaining of various types of hymen assumed by medical research.

In any case, it is still unclear what the human hymen does biologically. According to scientists, it shields an infant's vagina from infection. But in many cultures, the social role of the hymen has been and continues to be a mythological emblem of virginity (Hennawy, 2016). Likewise, this study confirms that most women do not know what a hymen is or how it looks. According to Mohammed et al.'s (2021) study out of the total respondents, 54.2% of participants did not know the many varieties of hymen, and 73.3% of individuals could not define the hymen accurately. It is a tissue, according to Najla, Hiya, and Mutaz. Naha mentioned it as "the thing" broken when intercourse happens for the first time. While Nazla explained the hymen as a piece of muscle, Fara mentioned it as a "flexible" tissue.

Hymenoplasty

Hymenoplasty, Hymenorrhaphy, Hymen Restoration (HR), Hymen replacement surgery, or restoration of the hymenal ring are all terms for reattaching a hymen. Though this medical procedure is offered in some countries, it is unlawful and prohibited in most Arab countries. Hymenoplasty comes under cosmetic surgery as a form of gynaecology. In this surgery for a new marital relationship, narrowing of introitus and re-establishment of virginity happen by repairing the edges of hymenal remnants using absorbable suture materials. According to Mohamed et al. (2021), "it is combined with labial trimming, vaginal tightening, and clitoral unhooding." Hennawy (2016) states that most of the time it is performed on an outpatient basis and with anaesthesia or some times without it.

According to a study conducted in Egypt by Mohamed et al. (2021) with 120 gynaecologists, 49 participants, or about 40.8%, were able to identify hymenoplasty, but only 39 participants, or about 32.5%, knew the various hymenoplasty techniques. The very surprising finding of their study was that, out of all the gynaecologists studied, not even a single gynaecologist received training in hymen reconstruction surgery.

Moreover, in a study conducted in Belgium, Leye et al. (2018) reported that only 11% of the studied gynaecologists had heard or known about hymenoplasty during their elementary medical training. Some people did not recognize and understand the concept since it is entirely a technical term. Only Fara has heard about hymenoplasty, not before marriage but very recently. She explained that hymenoplasty cannot be that successful. Based on the reactions that you show during your fresh experience, men can identify whether it is your novel experience or not.

Though Mutaz did not know about hymenoplasty, she was able to recall one of her best friends who worked at an NGO and had been flown to several countries and had talked about losing virginity with a loose knot. She remembered the words her friend uttered as "there is no need to worry about it; you can fix it again if you want".

Nevertheless, hymenoplasty is not known much by gynaecologists and lay women as a medical practice and has several side effects. In research conducted by Kandela (1996), it was claimed that hymenoplasty reduced the number of honour killings in Egypt by 80%. Accordingly, hymenoplasty continues to be performed all over the world, to those who are in need.

2. Nuances and Local Knowledge on Wedding Night Virginity Testing

Language enables communication and most probably has links with social capital and cultural identification. In that manner, nuances play a colossal important in cultural aspects of societies. Likewise, once a woman having sex for the first time, her hymen breaks and it is called as "popping cherry", a phrase used commonly in television shows and movies and she is legitimately no longer a virgin (Gonzalez, 2017). "*Potti odakkiya*" is very common word used among youngsters related to first time of having sex. This literally means "breaking" box, which leads to compare the word breaking with popping. Similarly Sinhala term has the same meaning. Two thirds of the respondents in a study by Christianson and Erickson (2013) believed that girls are created with a membrane in the vaginal entrance that "breaks" after first sexual contact. It is noticeable that

Western contextual explanation uses a similar utterance more often than not. According to this survey, the most widely held misconception is that the vagina is layered with a "breakable" membrane.

Similarly, "Tsunami hit" is a special word articulated to refer to the first-time intercourse and having blood stains on the bed sheet. After 2004, Sri Lankan people came to know the word "tsunami", since they had to face a massive traumatic disaster unlike anything they had ever heard or experienced. Since then, people have used the term "tsunami" to refer to and name a variety of incidents and events. For instance, the newly introduced rapid paddy harvester is still called the "Tsumai machine". Likewise, the virginity test and blood stain on the bed are named "Tsunami Hit" as well.

Furthermore, "*Thayiraa Paaniya*" is a similarly special word to inquire about the blood stain on the bed. *Thayir* is the Tamil word for curd, and *paani* is the Tamil word for treacle. Curd is white in colour and treacle is in brownish red, and dropps of treacle on a curd pot clearly depicts the meaning and the reason why the word *thayiraa paaniyaa* is used. A bed sheet is always meant for a plain white bed sheet, and treacle on curd is symbolized by a blood stain on the white sheet. It is noteworthy that this word is always uttered as a question format, as in "curd or treacle?"

"*Visesam*" is a word commonly used for the happiness of blood stain proof, which literally means 'special'. At Najla's wedding, her mother asked her sister-in-law "where would *Visesam* happen?". Najla's mother literally meant "*where would the virginity test happen, here at the bride's place or groom's place?*" Without knowing the meaning of the nuance, her sister-in-law answered, "We always have *Visesam* at the groom's place," by just understanding *Visesam* as a celebration. As a result of this misunderstanding, Najla encountered a number of issues during the wedding.

Moreover, "*pon kulippaattal*" is a traditional word that refers to the inspection of blood stains on the bed. *Pon* refers to "bride", while *kulippaattal* refers to "bathing". In Islam, a full body wash is both required and highly advised in various situations, including after sexual activity, after the end of menstruation, and during postpartum bleeding (AlGamdhi et al., 2014). In this sense, in-laws of the bride or young female relatives visit the bride's place based on a short invitation, which is symbolically announced that there is blood stain on the bed. So, the bride waits for her in-laws to commence bathing by pouring one or two cups of water on her head. Ahamadu (2013) stresses that, "early the next morning, the bridegroom's married sisters and female cousins or nearest female relative visit the bridal chamber and prepare its inmates for the bath, in which they are led side by side under a white canopy and bathed."

Further, "*paakka vaara*" or "*paakka pora*" are special nuances used to refer to a virginity test. These words, *Paakka*, is a word embraced from the word *paarthal*, which means "see or to see". Thus, *paaka vaara* and *paakka pora* mean coming to see or going to see. From the bride's point of view, "coming to see" and from the groom's point of view, "going to see" is referred. Farah revealed that her in-laws all "came to see" her. As important as the nuances used to refer to the virginity test, the symbols and celebrations have an immense interest in reporting.

3. Symbols and Celebrations

Culture serves as both a product and a stimulus for human activity. Li (2018) states that, humans are symbolic, and a society consists of such cultural ideologies as language, myth, art, and religion, created by humans using symbols. The human mind, language, and communication cannot be separated from symbols. Both symbols and cultures are closely related to humans. Simply put, communication, the transmission of meaning through language and symbols, is how members of society understand their social environments (Nickerson, 2023). Li (2018) mentions that, symbols are the carriers of cultures, while cultures are the content of symbols, which include both material and spiritual factors. Symbols, existing as a tool, are indispensable for the creation of cultures. The expression of each culture shows a symbolic system with a specific meaning.

In this manner, the wedding bed virginity test among Muslims is most related to symbols and communication. At dawn, there are several special events that happen. The groom and bride are entertained and treated with special egg coffee. Here, the raw egg is put into the hot coffee and mixed well. Next, the bride is gifted with a gold ring by the groom or any valuable gift. Some brides are gifted with valuable chocolates. MWRAF (1999) proves it as, "here as in the other areas, including Ampara, the bride is given a gold sovereign (or jewellery) by the bridegroom as an appreciation for her virginity after consummation of marriage". Stein

(2013) mentions the Armenian ritual of the "red apple," in which the groom's family inspects a bridal couple's bed sheets to determine the bride's virginity, which is still practiced today. If the required virginal blood is found, the groom's family is supposed to send the bride a bowl of red apples.

Bride bathing is a unique symbol and has had a special place in the wedding ceremony of Muslims. However, she has to wait for the in-laws or female relatives of the groom to come and ask her to go to the bathroom to have a bath. This ritual varies according to the region and time. Najla revealed that though she had to have a shower on her own, she remembered her aunty's bridal shower when she was a teen girl. She revealed that,

"We did not have closed bathrooms in those days. My aunty was accompanied to the well, where all of us take showers. She was wearing a skirt that covered her from breast to knee. They asked her to sit down on a stool. There was a bucket filled with fresh water and with red and white flowers. A burnt lime was placed on her head, with beetle leaves placed on the lime. Then turmeric paste was applied to her face and body. Then they poured flower water on her head. One of the in-laws performed this, and others were just watching. By the way, there were fire crackers."

Another symbol and practice related to revealing or invitation is sending beetle leaves to the groom's family. On the betel leaves there is a piece of turmeric and a red flower. Turmeric symbolizes auspiciousness, spring and happiness, while the red flower symbolizes blood stain. Betel leaves are used as a way to share closeness, a way to invite people over, and a way to greet people at all significant moments in one's life. Mufa's mother sent a betel leaf with turmeric and a red flower to her groom's home. At her brother-in-law's wedding, they received a "vattaa", which is a native betel tray, covered with white flowers and a red rose on the white flowers. This "vattaa" came as an invitation to "paaka vaara". MWRAF (1999) validates this as, "in Colombo, we came across a custom where a red flower and turmeric are sent to the bridegroom's house if the bride is a virgin".

In relation to celebrations, red bananas play a vital role in showcasing the purity of the bride. There is always a hand of red banana kept on the table from next day morning onward. Typically, it is not served but just kept and exhibited. Hima revealed that they had to hunt a lot to buy a hand of red banana, since it was the off season.

Similarly, "kadayaapa Saappadu", literally meaning "shop hopper feast", is the breakfast feast arranged to celebrate their daughter's virginity. Though it linguistically means "shop," food is always prepared at home rather than bought from a shop. Grooms' family members are invited to the breakfast feast. In-laws, female family members, and very close family male members visit the bride's family to enjoy a grand breakfast treat there. The MWRAF (1999) states that "the couple usually spend their wedding night at the bride's home, and the day after the wedding, elders from the groom's family visit the bride's home for breakfast."

It is very common to prepare milk rice for this breakfast treat. This milk rice symbolizes the purity of the bride, while happiness, spring, and prosperity are symbolized by it as well. It is obvious that this milk rice plate too has the same colour combination as the curd and treacle, red banana and white bed sheet, with a red-coloured blood stain.

"Madi Maanga" (lap mango) is another main symbol of purity and virginity. The delighted groom goes to the market and buys fish and vegetables on the first forthcoming Friday morning or sometimes next morning. Until then, the bride and groom are not given fish or food. The fish purchased will feed at least 50 people, and the fruits will feed the entire family and neighbors. Fish is cooked for the lunch, and this lunch is called "pilaal saappaadu" (fishy smell feast), "Jummaa Saappadu" (Jumma prayer day feast), or "maamida saappaadu" (mother-in-law's feast). After finishing the lunch feast, Madi Maanga is delivered to neighbours and relatives. All the brought fruit would be shared in equal portions. Once Madi Maanga is received by all the family and the area people, they get to know that the bride is accepted as a virgin.

Moreover, red-coloured attire takes on a special importance in a wedding ceremony. Muslim women always prefer a red-coloured saree or lehenga for their homecoming celebration. Sinhala wedding culture is always associated with deega weddings, and they always spend their first night in a hotel. So, the next morning, they come home and celebrate the homecoming ceremony. Muslim women usually spend their wedding night

at their place itself and go back to the groom's house for "homecoming". The red attire (mostly dark red) worn on that day is usually called "*koora*". On the first day of the wedding, Muslim women wear white bridal attire, which is the most preferred, or sometimes a light-coloured one. The interesting symbol, or the message passed to the community, is white, having turned into red the next morning.

Discussion

The virginity test is always questioned as to whether it is relevant or not. Relevance is whether it is important to the matter at hand. Without relevance, it might be called "irrelevant". In this study, it was quite interesting when it was questioned whether the wedding bed virginity test is relevant to any occasion in life. Wickstrom (2010) studied a rural Kwazulu Natal town called Nkolokotho regarding their virginity testing. He argued that at a time of chronic HIV/AIDS, it has strengthened women's and girls' positions and the testing has become an approach that involves the placement of symbolic means and collective pressure to increase a community's and individual's responsibility for sexual relations. He showed in his study how the virginity test has become a preventive ritual rather than a diagnostic measure (Wickstrom, 2010). The study revealed that after the registration of the marriage and consummation of the wedding, it is useless to test if the newly wed is a virgin or not. Rather, it brings misery and sorrow to some.

According to the study excavations, virginity is perceived as a man or woman having never had sexual intercourse. This idea conflicts with the technical virgins who refrain from only virginal intercourse and enjoy all sorts of other sexual pleasure-seeking according to the reviewed literature elaborated in chapter two. It is described as used or brand new, whereas non-virgins are described as cheap, dumped, useless, or second-hand. The study reveals that respondents perceived that virgins should never have romantic activities and have zero access by boys or men to any parts of their bodies. Eventually, almost all the respondents perceived that virginity remains without a touch of boy until one girl gets married. Moreover, hymen is a term that the studied population had no or little knowledge of. Only two referred to the hymen as a "thing" or a tissue that can be broken by first intercourse. Hymenoplasty is a word hardly known in the community and the studied population.

Tests for virginity, particularly wedding night tests, draw special attention. The phrase "popping cherry" refers to the first time a hymen break. It has several nuances and meanings. Special words such as '*potti odakkiya*,' '*petti kadanawa*,' '*Tsunami hit*,' '*thayira paaniya*,' and '*visesam*' are used to describe the first-time hymen breaks during the first night or first intercourse. Moreover, '*pon kulippaattal*,' '*Paakka vaara or paakka poora*' are the words used to refer to virginity inspection after the consummation.

Symbols and celebrations found related to the wedding bed virginity test draw very special interest. At the next day's dawn, several special occurrences happen, and the first incident is that the couple are served with egg coffee. Bride bathing has a distinct appeal as well. A red flower and a piece of turmeric on a beetle leaf are sent to the groom's family as a symbol of auspiciousness, happiness, and spring, whereas the red flower symbolizes blood. Similarly, in some communities, '*vatta*', a beetle tray with a red flower kept on white flowers, is sent to the groom's family. Both of these symbols play as an invitation to '*paakka vaara*', or coming to inspect the blood stain. Red banana, breakfast feast, red attire of the bride, milk rice, *madi maanga*, '*pilaal saappaadu*', '*maamida saappaadu*', and '*Jumma saappaadu*' are unique symbols of celebrations of the purity of the bride by her family members. The bride is gifted with gold jewelry or any other casual gifts such as a flower bouquet or a bucket of chocolates. Most importantly, despite the gifting process, the trust in the bride and the acceptance made by both families play a critical role in this process.

Furthermore, the relevancy of the ritual is demonstrated. According to the study, it is pointless to test the bride's virginity after the marriage has been legally registered. Furthermore, the study discovered that virginity testing was perceived as a myth rather than a scientifically incorrect practice by the victims or those who were tested. The virginity test in the wedding bed is viewed as weird, inaccurate, biased, unreliable, patriarchal, and overall violent against practice.

Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the significance, explanations, relevance, and reasoning for the Muslim marital virginity test as a marriage custom. The study population had no knowledge of sexuality, virginity, or hymens. Although the terms "sexuality" and "virginity" are frequently used, they are not always understood clearly. Despite having little knowledge, brides are suddenly terrified and perplexed after learning about the process. The wedding bed virginity test has been viewed as a detrimental habit, encouraging feelings of inferiority and decreasing self-worthiness. Moreover, this absence of knowledge has led to worry and a down psychological state for brides. Interferences of family members and relatives regarding examining, inquiring, joking actions related to whether blood stain present or not has led to several discomforts to the bride to a greater extent and to the groom fewer. Brides had to go through shame and shyness in relation to wedding bed virginity testing. Sudden advices and instructions on the wedding day and after regarding sexuality, intercourse and blood stain have caused to have trauma on brides leading to have psychological stress for days. Starting life with doubt, telling lies, stress, embarrassment, and excruciating pain were the first acts and feelings they had. Further, pretending to feel happy and innocence are some of the coping mechanisms followed by brides. The bridal virginity test has a wide range of consequences for the bride, both in their early and later life. Emotional, mental, and physical violence, rejection, depression, weakened self-confidence, and, at its extreme end, divorce are major impacts of it. In an exciting case, despite the fact that she was not even touched by a boy until marriage, Mutaz discovered her life's secret kept within her 18 years, the real cause of her concern over the lack of blood stains, only after participating in this study.

Acknowledgement: We are gratefully acknowledging the financial support provided for the research by National Centre for Advanced Studies, Sri Lanka and the administrative officers for their support and coordination in receiving the grant on time.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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