

Honey-Related Customs and Rituals in Uzbek Families

Bazarbayev Sanjar Khamzaevich

History Teacher, Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, Uzbekistan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submission Date: 16 April 2026

Accepted Date: 06 May 2026

Published Date: 31 May 2026

VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue05

Page No. 76-82

DOI: - <https://doi.org/10.37547/social-fsshj-06-05-12>

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes, from an ethnographic perspective, the place of honey and beekeeping products in the system of Uzbek family rituals. It is argued that the role of honey in folk life is not limited to being a foodstuff or a folk-medicine remedy, but also manifests itself as a symbol of sweetness, prosperity, health, affection, harmony, and long life. The study covers the symbolic meaning of honey in rituals connected with the birth of a child, the cradle celebration (beshik to'yi), naming ceremonies, certain childhood rituals, pre-marriage and marriage ceremonies, the "honey-tasting" custom associated with the bride and groom, the adaptation of a new bride to the household, family hospitality, as well as the birthdays, jubilees, and blessing (oq fotiha) rituals of the older generation — grandfathers and grandmothers. It also shows the regional variation of honey-related customs, the fact that some of them are undergoing transformation today, and the ethnological significance of studying them as part of family rituals.

Keywords: - Honey, beekeeping, Uzbek family, customs, ritual, tradition, ethnography, infant, cradle celebration, bride and groom, marriage, sweetness, blessing (oq fotiha), grandfather, grandmother, long life, folk culture.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine the historical and cultural image of any people without its daily life, family relations, customs, and rituals. In the traditional culture of the Uzbek people, a system of rituals has developed that marks a person's growth from birth, marriage, having children, aging, and other important stages of life. Through these rituals, relations between generations have been strengthened, and values such as respect for elders, care for the young, kinship, affection, and solidarity have been passed down from generation to generation. Materials on Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage also assess family rituals as a

socio-cultural system that records birth, coming of age, marriage, and other important stages in a person's life.

In such a ritual system, foodstuffs also performed a special symbolic role. Alongside bread, milk, yogurt (qatiq), oil, sugar, halva, raisins, walnuts, fruit, and other products, honey too has occupied a distinctive place in the daily life and ritual culture of Uzbeks.

The distinctiveness of honey lies in the fact that it simultaneously appears as a gift of nature, a product of labor, a food, a healing remedy, and a

symbolic image. In families engaged in beekeeping, alongside the economic importance of honey, its ritual and spiritual value has also taken shape. In this respect, studying honey as a distinct component of Uzbek family rituals serves to reveal the connection between the material and spiritual culture of the people.

The main purpose of the article is to analyze, in sequence, the customs and rituals connected with honey in Uzbek families on the basis of the various stages of human life, to identify the symbolic meaning of honey in these rituals, and to show its transformation in contemporary family life.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a number of scientific methods used in the fields of ethnology, anthropology, and folklore studies.

First, the historical-comparative method was used to compare the forms of Uzbek family rituals in different periods with practices related to honey. This method made it possible to identify the changes between the historical form of the rituals and their contemporary appearance.

The ethnographic method was used to analyze the place of honey in family life, hospitality, marriage, and jubilee rituals. The ethnographic approach requires studying a ritual not only through its outward form, but together with the attitude of its participants, the ritual's purpose, and its symbolic meaning.

RESULTS

In the Uzbek folk worldview, honey is first associated with the concept of "sweetness." Concepts such as "sweet life," "sweet living," "sweet word," "sweet manner" carry a positive meaning in the people's moral-aesthetic views. For this reason, the use of sweet dishes and sweets in rituals served not only ordinary hospitality but also the function of expressing good wishes.

In Uzbek wedding rituals, the custom of bringing various sweets and confections in order to wish the bride and groom a "sweet" life has been recorded. In this ritual logic, the role of honey becomes even stronger: the natural sweetness of honey is likened to the harmony and happiness of family life.

The second symbolic meaning of honey is

abundance and prosperity. Beekeeping labor is intimately connected with nature; the process of obtaining honey requires labor, patience, and the wise use of nature's gifts. For this reason, in families engaged in beekeeping, honey has been valued not only as a consumable product but also as one of the household's sources of labor and livelihood.

The third aspect is the value of honey as a healing product. Sources indicate that in Uzbek folk medicine, honey has been used together with various plants and other products. Thus, the positive attitude formed toward honey has also strengthened its meaning in rituals as a symbol of "health" and "longevity."

Likewise, the positive use of the image of honey is also observed in oral folk creativity. For example, the use of endearments such as "honey daughter" (asal qizim) and "honey child" (asal bolam) when showing affection to a child shows that honey has become a symbol of sweetness and pleasantness.

Thus, the symbolic meaning of honey in Uzbek culture can be expressed through the following key concepts: honey - sweetness - happiness - love - harmony - health - prosperity - longevity.

It is precisely this semantic chain that underlies the use of honey in family rituals.

The first and most important stage of Uzbek family rituals begins with the birth of a child. The system of rituals connected with the birth of an infant includes keeping the forty-day period (chilla), naming, placing in the cradle, the cradle celebration (beshik to'yi), the first haircut, the first nail-cutting, the tooth celebration, and other customs.

The main purpose of each of these rituals was to express good wishes for the infant's healthy growth, happiness, and future development into a good person.

Scholarly caution is required in assessing the role of honey in rituals connected with infants. This is because the general claim that "in every Uzbek family a newborn infant is always given honey to taste" is not confirmed by reliable ethnographic evidence. Although in certain family and regional practices honey may be used as part of the dastarkhan (spread) prepared for the infant or as

part of a ritual sweet, it is not correct to present it as a mandatory element of a nationwide ritual.

Nevertheless, the concept of “sweetness” occupies an important place in the overall semantics of rituals connected with infants. For example, it has been recorded that at the cradle celebration various sweets are placed on the dastarkhan, and at the end of the ceremony sweets are scattered over the infant while wishing the child happiness. This shows the symbolic closeness of honey to this ritual system.

From this point of view, honey may appear in rituals connected with infants in two forms of meaning: first, as a sweet; and second, as a symbolic expression of the wish that the child's life be “sweet,” healthy, and prosperous.

Giving a name to an infant is one of the important rituals in an Uzbek family. Through the name, the parents' hopes and aspirations for the child's future are expressed. For this reason, in the prayers and wishes recited during the naming ritual, notions such as happiness, health, longevity, and being a person useful to society have been dominant.

In some households, the serving of sweets on the dastarkhan after this ritual, and the offering of tea and honey to guests, reinforces the meaning of a “sweet beginning” for the ceremony. Here, the main function of honey is regarded not as a religious or obligatory ritual act but as a symbol of good intention and hospitality.

The cradle celebration (beshik to'yi) is one of the most important Uzbek family rituals and was traditionally held with great festivity, usually on the occasion of the birth of the first child. It has been recorded that the cradle is prepared and brought by the maternal grandfather, grandmother, uncle, and aunts; that bread, flatbread (patir), and various sweets are placed on the dastarkhan; and that at the end of the ceremony sweets are scattered over the child.

In such a ritual, the presence of honey may vary depending on the region and the family. If honey is placed on the dastarkhan, it may signify not simply an ordinary type of sweet, but the intention that the child's future be sweet and abundant.

The custom of scattering sweets at the cradle

celebration also deserves special attention, since by scattering sweets over the child or over the cradle, it is wished that the child's life be filled with joy, prosperity, and happiness.

Uzbek family rituals are not limited to infancy alone. In the course of a child's growth, rituals such as the first-haircut celebration, the tooth celebration, the first step, the circumcision celebration (sunnat to'yi), and the muchal (twelve-year cycle) celebration have taken shape.

In each of these, sweets occupy an important place. In particular, in rituals marking a child's transition to a new stage of life, it is common to distribute sweets to guests, to express good wishes to the child, and to imagine the child's future as “sweet.”

In this respect, the symbolic function of honey in childhood rituals can be explained through the concept of “the sweetness of life's path.”

The next important stage of Uzbek family rituals concerns marriage and the establishment of a family. Matchmaking, engagement, the betrothal ceremony (fotiha to'yi), the marriage ceremony, the wedding, bringing home the bride, the bride's greeting ceremony (kelin salom), the unveiling ceremony (yuz ochdi), and other rituals form an interconnected system.

In the matchmaking process, the dastarkhan itself also carried symbolic significance. In some places, the bride's family's consent was expressed through various delicacies. At the betrothal ceremony, rituals such as the participation of elders and respected people, the breaking of bread, and the reciting of prayers were performed.

At this stage, the symbolic meaning of honey manifests itself especially strongly, because the wish that the future life of the two young people getting married be “sweet” is one of the core meanings of Uzbek ritual culture.

One of the most interesting marriage customs directly connected with honey is the honey-tasting custom.

In certain regional and family traditions, the custom of giving honey to the groom, or to both the bride and groom, has been recorded in connection with their first meeting in the bridal chamber (chimildiq) after the wedding. In ethnopedagogical

materials, "honey-tasting" is also mentioned separately among the customs of the wedding ceremony. Artistic-ethnographic sources also describe the custom of smearing honey on the bride's finger and having the groom taste it when he enters the bridal chamber.

The meaning of this custom can be explained from several angles.

First, honey is a symbol of a sweet family life. It is wished that the future life of the two newly married people be sweet, harmonious, and happy.

Second, honey is a symbol of love and closeness. The use of honey in the first ritual situation after marriage expressed the positive and sweet course of the new relationship between husband and wife.

Third, honey may also be connected with a wish for abundance and fertility. In the traditional Uzbek worldview, marriage was considered not merely a union of two people but a social event connected with the emergence of a new generation.

For this reason, it is appropriate to assess the honey-tasting custom not as a simple act of food consumption, but as a ritual act expressing the symbolic semantics of marriage.

Rituals connected with bringing home the bride form an important component of Uzbek family rituals. Through rituals such as the bride's greeting (kelin salom), the unveiling (yuz ochdi), meeting the parents-in-law, and getting acquainted with relatives, the new bride's status in the household is established.

In the wishes recited for the new bride, notions such as her having "sweet hands," "sweet words," "a complete household," and "a peaceful family" are found. From this point of view, the image of honey also draws close, in semantic terms, to the notion of "the sweet-handed bride."

The distribution of various sweets at the bride's greeting ceremony, or the serving of honey and other sweet products to guests, can be interpreted as a symbol of the "sweetness and abundance" that the new bride brings into the household.

However, here too one should refrain from drawing a firm conclusion that honey was a mandatory ritual element in all regions, since the regional variants of Uzbek wedding rituals differ

considerably from one another.

After the wedding, there existed a tradition of relatives, in-laws, and neighbors inviting the bride and groom to their homes for hospitality. The "invitation" or "summoning" ceremony served to strengthen kinship relations after the wedding.

At such gatherings, the dastarkhan held special significance. Alongside various national dishes, bread, sweets, fruits, and other delicacies, honey too could be part of the hospitality.

In this case, the main function of honey was to express the acceptance of the new family into the circle of relatives and to convey mutual respect and affection.

When a child is born into the family of a young bride and groom, the rituals move to a new stage. The former bride and groom now become the infant's parents. In this way, family rituals pass continuously from one generation to the next.

In this process, honey may again appear as a symbol of sweetness, health, and abundance. Acts such as the dastarkhan prepared for the infant, welcoming guests, and sharing sweets with relatives publicly confirm the family's new status.

Thus, the ritual function of honey does not end with a single ceremony. It may serve as a symbolic means linking the various life stages of the family with one another.

In the Uzbek family, the older generation – grandfather, grandmother, otaxon, onaxon, elders, and venerable elders – has held a special standing. Receiving their blessing and consent, inviting them to the dastarkhan, and showing them respect at family rituals are considered ancient traditions.

In particular, at the establishment of a new family, the birth of a child, major family events, and jubilees, the blessing of representatives of the older generation has strengthened the spiritual aspect of the ritual.

In this process, honey is connected with symbolic notions such as "sweet blessing," "sweet wish," and "a long and sweet life". Serving honey to elderly otaxon and onaxon, or giving honey as a gift, where this exists at the family level, may express the wish that they live a long life, remain healthy, and enjoy the comfort of their grandchildren and great-

grandchildren.

In Uzbek families there are also jubilees and family celebrations connected with a person's advancing age. In particular, milestones such as the ages of 60, 70, and 80 are important from the standpoint of recognizing the life path of a representative of the older generation, their contribution to the family, and their services toward their children and grandchildren.

Calling the events connected with these ages a "special ritual dedicated to honey" is not scientifically accurate. However, in some families it is possible that, during such jubilees, honey, sweets, tea, and other delicacies are placed on the dastarkhan, and that there is a custom of receiving a blessing from the elderly person and expressing sweet wishes to them.

In such a situation, the symbolic meaning of honey appears in three directions.

The first is longevity. Because honey has long been associated with health and vigor, it is likened to the life of an elderly person.

The second is the sweetness of life. For a person who has reached the age of 60 to 80, the main achievement of life is connected with seeing the flourishing of children and grandchildren and ensuring the continuity of the family. Honey, in turn, is interpreted as a symbol of the "sweet life" lived together with these children and grandchildren.

The third is blessing and the continuity of generations. The blessing of an elderly person is regarded as a spiritual legacy for the family's future generations. For this reason, the presence of honey at the jubilee dastarkhan may become a symbol of a "sweet blessing."

In such rituals, the most important aspect is not honey itself but the respect, blessing, gratitude, and continuity of generations that have taken shape around it.

In this respect, it is scientifically preferable to study rituals connected with otaxon and onaxon aged 60–70–80 not as a separate "honey ritual," but as family jubilee rituals in which a symbolic element of honey may be present.

In Uzbek folk traditions there is a custom of marking a person's particular age stages, especially noting the muchal (twelve-year cycle) ages. Views connected with the muchal symbolically express that a person has passed through a certain period of life and entered the next stage.

At birthdays and family jubilees, sweets, fruits, cake, confections, and, in some families, honey may adorn the dastarkhan. Here, honey expresses the wish that "the new age be sweet and abundant."

The giving of honey as a gift to elderly people on their birthday by their children and grandchildren is significant not so much for its economic value as for its spiritual value. Such a gift may express wishes along the lines of "be healthy," "may your years be sweet," and "may you enjoy the comfort of your grandchildren."

The ritual use of honey cannot be limited only to large weddings or celebrations. In an Uzbek family, honey may also be placed on the dastarkhan in everyday and periodic social practices such as receiving guests, visiting relatives, relations between in-laws (quda-andachilik), and visiting one another on holidays.

In particular, in families engaged in beekeeping, serving honey to guests may become a way of displaying the household's own labor product, showing appreciation for the guest, and receiving a blessing from them.

This shows the mutual harmony between the economic and ritual functions of honey.

The place of honey in the Uzbek household cannot be fully understood without folk medicine. In traditional practice, honey has been consumed together with various plants and products. Some sources note that in folk medicine honey has been used together with various plants.

This has influenced the formation of a positive attitude toward honey. On one hand, people valued honey as a sweet and tasty product; on the other, they associated it with health.

As a result, the ritual semantics of honey has also formed on the basis of the triad "sweetness + health + abundance."

Studying the place of honey in Uzbek culture only within the framework of family rituals is not sufficient. Some sources also mention folk festivals and celebrations such as the “Honey Festival” (Asal sayli).

Events such as the Honey Festival are connected with beekeeping labor, the riches of nature, and the people's culture of collective leisure. Events of this kind go beyond the family circle and are held at the level of a neighborhood (mahalla) or village.

For this reason, rituals connected with honey can be conditionally divided into three groups:

1. family rituals – infant rituals, the cradle celebration, marriage, bride and groom rituals, jubilees;
2. every day-social custom – hospitality, meetings with relatives, gift-giving;
3. collective seasonal events – the Honey Festival and folk festivals connected with beekeeping.

Such a classification shows the multifunctional nature of honey in Uzbek culture.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained show that the role of honey in Uzbek family rituals can be assessed on three main levels.

The first level is the material-functional level. At this stage, honey appears as a food, a sweet, a gift, and a hospitality product.

The second level is the symbolic-semantic level. Here, honey expresses concepts such as “sweet life,” “happiness,” “harmony,” “love,” “abundance,” “health,” and “longevity.”

The third level is the social-educational level. Through practices connected with honey, the younger generation is instilled with notions such as respect for elders, hospitality, generosity, family values, and the continuity of generations.

In particular, the honey-tasting custom in marriage rituals shows honey's direct symbolic function. Here, honey's natural property – its sweetness – is transferred to the future life of the new family.

In infant rituals, however, the situation is

somewhat different. Here it is not honey itself but rather the category of sweetness that is more important. Therefore, rather than generalizing the presence of honey in infant rituals across all regions, it is more appropriate to study it as a regional-ethnographic variant.

In the twenty-first century, Uzbek family rituals are changing considerably. As a result of urbanization, migration, modern wedding culture, mass media, and a new way of life, many ancient customs are being reduced or are taking on new forms.

For example, complex ritual actions that were formerly performed in certain rituals are today preserved only in the form of distributing sweets, offering a blessing, or giving a gift. It is also observed that the cradle celebration is becoming simpler in some regions, and that certain ancient beliefs and superstitions connected with infants are declining.

A similar transformation may be observed in honey-related customs. An act that was formerly performed at a specific stage of the ritual may today become a simple element of the dastarkhan or a form of gift.

For example, acts such as giving honey to newlyweds, giving honey as a gift to elderly parents, or placing honey on the dastarkhan prepared for an infant, even if they no longer preserve the full form of the ancient ritual, may continue to carry on its symbolic meaning.

One of the main functions of Uzbek family rituals is the socialization of the younger generation. By taking part in rituals, a child learns values such as respect for elders, hospitality, kinship, generosity, gratitude, and collectivity.

Honey-related rituals also carry a similar educational content. Connecting honey with labor conveys to the child the link between nature and human labor. Beekeeping itself serves to instill notions such as collective labor, order, diligence, and a careful attitude toward nature.

Expressing honey-related wishes to a newly married couple teaches the family to value affection and harmony, while serving honey or giving it as a gift to elderly otaxon and onaxon expresses respect for the older generation.

In this sense, honey in Uzbek family rituals serves not only as a food product but also as an educational symbol.

CONCLUSION

Studying the customs and rituals connected with honey in Uzbek families makes it possible to reveal the intimate connection between the material and spiritual culture of the people. In traditional Uzbek life, honey appears as a food product, a folk-medicine remedy, a gift, and an element of the ritual dastarkhan, while at the same time embodying certain symbolic meanings.

The results of the study show that the ritual semantics of honey are, above all, connected with the concepts of “sweet life,” “harmony,” “love,” “abundance,” “health,” and “longevity”. In particular, the honey-tasting custom connected with the bride and groom clearly demonstrates honey's direct ritual function.

In rituals connected with infants, however, generalizing the role of honey and presenting it as an obligatory ritual element for all Uzbek families is not accurate. Nevertheless, the use of sweets in the cradle celebration and other childhood rituals serves as an important basis for understanding the symbolic semantics of honey.

While honey appears as a symbol of a sweet and harmonious married life for young couples after marriage, in the jubilees and family events connected with the older generation – otaxon and onaxon aged 60, 70, and 80 – it may be interpreted as a symbol of longevity, health, a sweet life, and the continuity of generations.

In this way, honey appears in Uzbek family rituals as one of the symbolic means linking the various stages of life. Its quality of “sweetness” harmonizes with the people's notions of family happiness, harmony, and prosperity.

Although some of these customs are losing their ancient form today, their content – a sweet life, affection, respect for elders, the flourishing of children, and family harmony – continues to retain its significance in modern Uzbek families as well.

Thus, researching honey-related customs is not merely a study of the history of a single foodstuff, but also makes it possible to explore the Uzbek

people's traditional notions of family, marriage, children, old age, the continuity of generations, and happiness as well.

REFERENCES

1. Sattor M. O'zbek udumlari. – Toshkent: Adolat, 2004. – 208 b. Kitob inson tug'ilishidan boshlab umrining keyingi bosqichlarigacha bo'lgan milliy urf-odat va an'analarni qamrab oladi.
2. Sarimsoqov B. O'zbek marosim folklori. – Toshkent: Fan, 1986. – 128 b.
3. Alaviya M. O'zbek xalq marosim qo'shiqlari. – Toshkent, 1984.
4. Jo'rayev M. O'zbek mavsumiy marosim folklori. – Toshkent: Fan, 2008. – 292 b.
5. O'zbekiston nomoddiy madaniy merosi. Oilaviy marosimlar. Toshkent-2010
6. Axmedova O., Isakulova N., Abdullayeva M. Xalq tabobati bilan bog'liq bilim va ko'nikmalar . Toshkent 2022.
7. Sulaymonov M. O'zbek folklori. Namangan – 2016
8. Yo'ldoshev Q. Eskirmas tuyg'ularning yangicha tasviri. Toshkent – 2012, 124-b