

Hundreds of Turkmen families living in the South of Tajikistan remained to live there after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite having settled long and firmly and holding Tajik passports, the Turkmen carefully preserve the traditions of their ancestors, but also respect local customs.

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The Turkmen can be immediately distinguished from their Tajik neighbors. During religious or official holidays, Turkmen men always wear national hats, and women - traditional long dresses with Turkmen ornaments.



*Dusti district. Photo: CABAR.asia*

It is a rather closed community. All of them have Tajik citizenship; their passports indicate their nationality - the Turkmen. Despite living among Tajiks for a long time, the representatives of this national minority do not assimilate and carefully observe their ancient traditions and rituals. Notably, only few of them marry Tajiks or representatives of

other ethnicities of Tajikistan.

The culture researchers in southern Tajikistan say that the traditions of the Turkmen people differ from Tajik. For example, a few years ago, the custom of bride kidnapping was widespread among the Turkmen living in the district of Dusti, 140 km south of the capital Dushanbe; this custom is not traditional for Tajiks.

But the local Turkmen, as well as their Tajik fellow citizens, observe and support the law “On Regulation of Ceremonies and Traditions”.

**Ismoil Sardorov**, the chairman of the Turkmen mahalla in Dusti district of Khatlon region, says that the adopted in 2008 law significantly reduced the cost of various activities for local residents. Before the adoption of this law, only the bride’s parents had to pay 25 thousand somoni (about 2.5 thousand US dollars) as a bridewealth. Not everyone could afford to get married under those conditions. Now, this amount has decreased by more than half, down to 11 thousand somoni (about 1.1 thousand US dollars).



Ruzi Rakhimov. Photo: CABAR.asia

“When the law “On Regulation of Ceremonies and Traditions” came into force, the Turkmen were in no hurry to abide by it, as they did not want to go against the traditions of their ancestors. After large fines paid by several families (I do not remember what was the amount of fines), now everyone is used to comply with this law. Many are even glad that all are equal in organizing weddings and other ceremonies. Everyone is equal before the law, and the law must be observed by all citizens of the country, regardless of their nationality,” says Sardorov.

In an interview to CABAR, 55-year-old Turkmen-speaking resident of Dehkonobod village in Dusti district of Khatlon region Ruzi Rakhimov said he was born and raised in Tajikistan. His father told him they moved here in 1949, but for what reason they left their homeland, he does not know.

Rakhimov said the bridenapping, one of the ancient traditions of the Turkmen people, can still found among the Tajik Turkmen. Despite prohibited and severely punished for under the laws of their second homeland, there were no precedents when the Turkman would be punished. Still in recent years, this ancient custom is gradually disappearing.

Rakhimov reported that over the recent years, their wedding customs turn more similar to

Tajik. The local Turkmen have developed good-neighborly relations with Tajiks, and in the last few years, there appeared families with Tajik daughters-in-law.

“Ten years ago, none of us could imagine we will become related with Tajiks. It was even a shame if the Tajiks came to seek our girls in marriage,” Ruzi Rakhimov said

To make their daughters or sons marry a Tajik is not in the customs of the local Turkmen. However, the globalization affected them as well, and now, in step with the times, the attitudes of the representatives of both ethnicities in this remote corner of Tajikistan is changing. The first joint families appeared here.

“If a guy and a girl fell in love, but the girl’s parents do not bless her for marriage, then the girl is married to another guy of their nationality. However, if before the wedding or during the wedding this girl is bridenapped by her loved one, then no one, even the girl’s parents, have the right to say or do anything against it,” says Rakhimov.

According to him, “in past years, the girl’s family refused the bridenapped daughter and no one wanted to even look at her.”

“The custom of bridenapping still exists among the Turkmen today, but it is not as common as before. And it is no longer that [parents] turn away from they daughter,” - Rakhimov continues his story. - “But if the parents find out their daughter is in love with someone , and they do not agree [with the choice], they try to hide their daughter to prevent kidnapping.”

**Oguldundi Jumanazarova**, 53-year-old Turkman woman from Dusti says the Turkmen tradition of organizing marriage for the children is slightly different from the Tajik customs. Tajiks, in general, prefer to marry their sons to young, 18-19 years old girls who have completed only a high school. The Turkmen believe their children, both sons and daughters, need to get higher education, and they can create families only after that. According to her, this is one of the main Turkmen traditions.



*Oguldundi Jumanazarova. Photo: CABAR.asia*

“The Turkmen girls get married at the age of 26-27, and none of our guys says that she is too old for this. Guys get married at that age, too. If my son falls in love with a Tajik, and the girl’s parents are not against their marriage, I agree



to take her into my house, as a daughter-in-law. If young people fall in love with each other, parents have no right to oppose their connection, because it is also an old tradition of our ancestors” - said Jumanazarova.



*Turkmen girls. Photo CABAR.asia*

The equality between men and women is observed in a traditional society of Tajik Turkmen. Girls are free to choose their husbands and to continue their education.

This freedom astounds their Tajik neighbors, among who the women are less free and depend on their men. Thus, here one can sometimes hear people questioning whether they are Muslims, and wondering what their religion is.

Ruzi Rakhimov says they are Muslims and follow Imom Azam, which means they, like Tajiks, belong to the Hanafi madhhab, pray in mosques near their Tajik neighbours and comply

with the other Muslim behests.

The Turkmen-speaking citizens live in two districts of Khatlon region and do not have separate mosques. All their religious rites, including the Janazah prayer (funeral prayer), they hold together with the Tajiks. As for the social life, their contribution, for example, in Dusti district, is felt more significantly. The majority of students of higher education institutions are Turkmen, 70 percent of all doctors and medical staff in the region are also representatives of this ethnicity.

The Turkmen, as well as majority of Tajiks in Khatlon region, are engaged in agriculture. Ruzi Rakhimov owns 5 hectares of land on which he grows cotton and wheat. The labor migration is another source of income for Turkmen residents.

In local Dusti district government's department of the Committee of Religion and Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies, they give positive account of the Turkmen. They are the citizens of Tajikistan and every year, like Tajiks, they go on pilgrimage - Hajj, one of the 5 mandatory behests for Muslims. Over the past 10 years, 15 citizens of this national minority have gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

According to official data, 21 thousand Turkmen live in two districts of Khatlon region - Dusti and Qabodiyon. According to our data, Turkmen also live in another district of Khatlon region - Shahritus; however, unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain accurate data on their number.





*Turkmen in traditional dress. Photo: CABAR.asia*

The experts of Khatlon region do not remember when exactly Turkmen migrated to the South of Tajikistan. But many of them noted Turkmen carefully preserve the ancient customs of their ancestors, the subtleties of their language and culture.

**Yasribi Karim**, a sociologist from Khatlon, said that despite the local Turkmen have difficulties in keeping in touch with their historical homeland - the Republic of Turkmenistan, it is surprising how they manage to preserve their customs and traditions.

“Turkmenistan does not make crossing its borders easy for its compatriots living in Tajikistan. However, these citizens remain in love with their historical homeland. Among them there are Turkmen who have never left the borders of their district, but they are proud to talk about Turkmenistan. I remember that there were schools with the Turkmen language of instruction in Khatlon.”

It is known from historical sources that Turkmen appeared in Dusti district about 400 years ago. Most of them are engaged in agriculture, and their role in the local community increases as time goes by.

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