

house, exchanging greetings. The sheikh offered them coffee and sweets then they left to spend the day with their families. Meanwhile villagers from neighbouring villages would come to give their greetings on this festive occasion, then go back on the same day.

The guest-house was also used as a gathering place during ceremonies. In the afternoon of a wedding, after having lunch at the bridegroom's house, all the village men assembled in the saha bringing the groom on horseback. Gathered in the saha, they sang and danced until the evening, when the groom was taken back home. Most men stayed behind, dancing in the saha.

When a man died, the village men went to the mosque to pray, and carried the body to the cemetery. After burying the dead, the men came back to the guest-house where they drank coffee together and later on were served lunch or dinner by one of the families related to the deceased.

Thus, the village guest-house was the physical arena where the males of the village as a whole shared festive and sorrowful occasions alike. The guest-house was the unifying centre which strengthened inter-kin bonds.

The Absence of Women

In the guest-house, women were conceptually as well as physically excluded. Through this "male forum", men controlled village events. Women did not directly participate in public matters, political discussions and decision making. Public matters were seen strictly as men's responsibility - usually the elders'.

However, this male control of public political activity and the physical seclusion of women did not entirely exclude the influence of women. In practice, they participated indirectly while moving about in the village during the day. Women gathered information and expressed their views on current issues, while filling their jars