

Marriage as a Socio-Cultural Event among the Kanuri from Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Socio-Cultural Perspective seeks to understand why people act as they do base on the influences of their social and cultural group membership. Socio-Culture is part of man's existence on earth, also people, societies, tribes, and ethnic groups have their socio-cultural patterns which gear their lives and most of the time they stick to further purpose of having sanity and coherence in their societies. Among these socio-cultural patterns of life, marriage, is part and parcels of every society's cultural observance. This form of culture dwell more on sociology of each society; and of course, it takes religious tunes also.

Keywords: *Marriage, Kanuri, Event, Socio-Cultural, Islam*

Introduction

Socio is used to form adjectives and noun which describes or refers to thing relating to or involving social factors. Culture is defined by the dictionary to include the tastes in art and manners that are favored by a social group; it also contains all the knowledge and values shared by a society. Culture is the habits, traditions and beliefs of a community, society, or group of people. Socio-Culture, combining social and cultural factors. Socio-Cultural Perspective seeks to understand why people act as they do base on the influences of their social and cultural group membership. Socio-Culture is part of man's existence on earth, also people, societies, tribes, and ethnic groups have their socio-cultural patterns which gear their lives and most of the time they stick to further purpose of having sanity and coherence in their societies. Among these socio-cultural patterns of life, marriage, is in every society's cultural observance.

The Kanuri

The predominant ethnic group in Maiduguri today is undoubtedly the Kanuri; they are mostly found in North and Central parts of the state. The origin of the language, its development and expansion is closely related to the political history of the kingdom of Kanem which was established as early as the ninth century C.E. The major groups that occupied the region North and North-East of Lake Chad were the Bulala, Kanembu and the Zaghawa. Of these three groups who competed for the political power in Kanem, the Kanembu appeared to have taken over the control of the state under the leadership of Sayfawa Mais. Prof. Nur Alkali (1983) observed that Kanuri is simply a dialect of Kanembu and Abdullahi Smith added that Kanuri emerged as a result of the movement of the Kanembu people from Kanem to the area west of Lake Chad. Other sources mentioned that Kanuri was the fifth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, coming after the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Fulani. According to 1963 census, the Kanuri numbered over two and a quarter million in Nigeria and there are many more in Cameroon, Niger and Chad Republics. They are therefore, one of the major ethnic groups in West Africa. The various ethnic groups under the Kanuri are the Bodai, Kara'ama, Manga, karda and Koyam (Muhammad, 2007).

Relationship Between Religion and Culture

Culture is the habits, traditions and beliefs of a community, society, or group of people. Culture is part of man's existence on earth, also people, societies, tribes, and ethnic groups have their socio-cultural patterns which gear their lives and most of the time they stick to further purpose of having sanity and coherence in their societies.

Religion gives transcendental meaning and purpose, and often, a goal to aspire when life is complete. So many cultures have bound themselves together in common that they might all achieve the goal of life in common, by providing those social structures which bind religion and man. The word religion (from which we get our common word Religion) means that which binds.

Religion often gives code of behaviour for society and culture. Faith, moral behaviours, e.t.c. Islam is the religion that has more influences on culture. In Islam there are three fundamental parts; these include Islam, Faith {Imaan} and Ihsan all these are together. Religion has values. Values are guides to behaviour, such as do good, avoid wrong. Religion has the five human values, these are: truth, right conduct, love, peace and non-violence at the core. These are values which sustain the very core of family, home, society, nation and the world.

Marriage according to Kanuri Socio-Culture

Marriage is a contract between two persons who agree to live together as husband and wife. This contract is signed between a man and a woman or a lady and young man. All can happen after considering maturity age of both the parties. The process involved in legalizing the contract for unification has been institutionalized as marriage between husband and wife.

The marriage institution differs from one to another and varies in every society due to some cultural and traditional activities involved during the process in bringing two persons as husband and wife. One has to undergo some different stages of traditional and cultural activities. However, marriage fundamentals involved the parent/guardian of the bride, the part of the groom {either father/guardian}, the pronouncement {*sigar*} and the witness {*shaahid at least two and above*}.

The process of the marriage according to Kanuri culture will be mentioned in the detail in the types of marriage according to Kanuri Culture (Botul, 2019).

Then we are going to look at the socio-cultural events practiced by Kanuri that make the marriage colourful and adorable from Islamic perspectives, comments will be made where necessary these events are as follow;

Special Gift to a Proposed

This is a special gift that is being given to a proposed whom has accepted the love of a person intends to marry in near future. Such a person referred to as a fiancée as given in English, [*T3maji*] in Kanuri, by the time the young man approaches his proposed for marriage and have come to agreement with or without the consent of their parents, but not formally pronounced. It is expected of the young man to send gift to the proposed through his/her relatives.

In most case such a gift is being sent to her during occasions such as *Sallah day*, Market day, or any other relevant occasion. It is through this gift the parent of the proposed can be notified of the relationship that is existing between their daughter and the person who sends the gift. This gift is not given direct to the proposed, but it is going to be given to her mother. The parent will realize the existence of their relationship after discussing with their daughter, who receives the gift. It is also another way of seeking permission from the parent of the girl to allow him

[the young man] to continue his relation/visiting their daughter at home to strengthen their relationship. The gift can be given once or more.

Before the formal notification, some use to give money while others give materials like clothes, shoes, bags, cosmetics to mention but few. This will start presenting the level of their relationship. With this gift the parent of the proposed girl will begin to realize that their daughter is really in love with someone (Falmata, 2005).

Seeking Permission

This is the step that the young man sends his parent to the proposed family seeking for permission to send his [*fulai*] special gift which indicates the level of seriousness. This process involves the groom's family and other representatives. After discussing thoroughly and coming to conclusion by accepting the proposal of the groom, the parents of the bride give go ahead notice to the groom.

This [*fulai*] refers to a gift from the groom that is sent to the bride officially. Presentation of this gift indicates the willing and interest of the groom to marry the girl/lady. It is during this presentation that the two families will discuss their common goal. In the discussion all issues related to the two families will be touched, and if there is other information that is needed by either of the family.

Nushuram is a token number of money/items will be given to the people that brought the special gift to the bride's family. This is not must but, in appreciation to the effort.

Date Fixing

After the *fulai* is being presented to the bride's family, then comes [*sart3*] dating. The two families will meet on a particular day to fix a date for the marriage. Each family will present its suitable date, but first the groom's date will be discussed. If the date chosen by the groom is suitable to the family of the bride and have accepted it, then everything will be set towards the date that is agreed upon. Kola nuts, Sweets and Chewing gums will be distributed to the people within the family and relatives far and near as to inform them of the date of their daughter's marriage. The items brought include some amount of money. As for the old tradition even soap being distributed (Falmata, 2005).

Islam legalizes seeking permission in marriage. In Islam a girl's parent/guardian can give permission for that regard, while widow/divorcee would give her permission by herself. Dowry is the amount collected from husband by the parent/guardian of a girl, while widow/divorcee can collect her dowry, but after agreement among two parties [the side of the groom and that of the bride].

Dowry is the right due for the marriage and will not be spent except with the consent of the girl. In Kanuri culture dowry mostly included among the moneys used in buying for the marriage. Muslim, Nasa'I, Ibn Majaha, Bayhaqi reported that "a divorcee has the of herself from her Waliy{parent/guardian} and of a virgin permission is soughed {i.e her parent/guadians} and her acceptance is her remaining silent.

Bride Decoration

It is part of tradition where hands and legs of the bride is to be decorated with Henna before reaching her husband's house. One week to the day of marriage a special gathering will be set and this gathering is mostly for women of the two families and its called *Nalle/Henna* day. The family of the groom will bring some items recommended [after negotiations before the day] traditionally as named items for the Henna day [*Karai Nallebe*]. These items include dry henna leaves pounded in a big calabash, kola nuts, dates, soaps, slippers, perfumes and pomade to

mention but few. Also, a trouser and jumper has to be included as dress for the bride to wear the day she'll be taken to the groom's house. Nowadays they use yards of wrappers [according to the size of the bride] for that purpose.

On the *Nalle/Henna* day [*a week to the wedding Fatiha*], most of the groom's younger/elder sisters with relatives from both sides of his mother and father will gather in the evening at the groom's family house, before they proceed to the bride's house. The groom's sisters will notify them, just to make them ready for welcoming. After presenting the items, it is expected from the bride's family to either appreciate and thank them, or ask for more [in some cases] of the items, and others that were not taken in return. The bride's family will give [as return] the groom's family either millet or corn or its equivalent. In the items [given to the bride's family] white mat is included purposely for the bride. She will sit on the mat when they come to decorate her with the *Henna/Nalle*. These decorations will be done by her aunties.

This culture is in order with the teachings of Islam, because it is a custom for a woman to decorate and show her beauty, and been beauty is one of the four reasons of one to marry a girl. In the Qur'an female is addressed as been created out of beauty. Thus decoration/fashion is in the nature of girls. Allah S.W.T. says **“that which is bred up in outward show and in dispute cannot make plain speech”** Q.39 v.18 this shows the fashion is in their nature. As such this culture of Kanuri in regard to Islam is considered *urf*.

Contribution/Arrangement

It is the tradition of Kanuri to contribute money, cloths, foodstuff materials, mattress and whatever types of household. A day will be fixed for such contribution by the family of the bride. Some fix a week to the wedding day, while others fix a day to the wedding day according to their level of preparedness. Relatives, friends and well-wishers of the bride will converge on the bride's house with their contributions of any type. On this day, the family of the bride prepare foods and drinks locally made in other to entertain their guests. This gift will be collected and packed in a safe place noting each and every giver of the gift (Falmata, 2005).

The Composition of Marriage Songs

It is the composition of marriage songs used to be performed by some old women a day to the wedding. This culture is being performed in the night just as an entertainment. Some musical instruments are used in order to entertain the gathering.

A big calabash [*k3mo*] with water and a small calabash turned in upside-down, the turned calabash is used as drum while a corn-stalk of not more than one metre long is used as drum-stick in beating the drum [calabash]. The sound produced by the two calabashes and corn-stalk are part of the d3la music. The song of d3la is full of advice to the bride or bridegroom, in the absence of d3la a substitute [*koskoli*] is being performed. *Koskoli* is a form of song done by a group of women in which a bride is advised like the d3la songs. *Koskoli* needs nothing but, a pestle or two are used with a stick or corn-stalk for beating the pestle to produce some kinds of song that rhythms with the song. All these are done just to entertain the guests. The advices in these songs are referred to as d3la.

Putting Bride on a Mat

In the culture the bride will be prepared with all sorts of cleansing and ready for her matrimony. This culture [*fero b3jin g3nat3*] is part of preparations. The bride will be advised to undo her plaited hair for a new plaiting. The bride will be notified of the washing of her hair and elderly women will be waiting to give her piece of advice. After reciting the Glorious Qur'an for protection from all sort of sorceries, [*jins*] Demons and evil-things, the women will advise her [the bride].

This is done because of influence of Islam. Basically, it is necessary for every family of Kanuri to adapt this tradition either in marriage or other ceremonies. It has become part and parcel of Kanuri, as such during the marriage. Especially young girls who are getting married for the first time, to perform this tradition by a learned person known as *Mallam* who use to carry the Glorious Qur'an.

Fero b3jin g3nat3 is mainly done by the sisters or aunties of the brides. Her two hands will be held side-west by her two aunties as to give her support while she sits on the mat and gets-up three times. It is in the final one that Qur'an will be recited.

The tradition of putting bride on the mat and reciting some verses of the Glorious Qur'an is mere culture but not in the Islamic perspective; however, reciting the Qur'an means only seeking protection for the bride. All are done traditionally.

Presenting Cloths to the Groom/Bride and Washing Bride's Head

Family of the bride usually send some items of prepared snacks [*Nyaa*] and clothes as gift to the bridegroom. These items include shoes, clothes, caps, decorated mats, mini carpet [*sallaya*], money, copy of Glorious Qur'an, to mention but few. These items are referred to as *fafarai* in Kanuri culture. It is the number of these items that determine the number of dress/clothes that the bridegroom will send to his bride. [*Tit for tat or vice-versa*]. In the *fafarai*, foodstuff is very important. The number of sacks of grain encourages the groom to give as much as he can to his bride. The father of the bride will prepare everything ready [*fafarai*] and send to the bridegroom's father, some men and women will be delegated to take the items to the house.

In return bridegroom has to see that he has impressed the family of his wife by sending enough and expensive items. These include dress, foot-wear, bangles, ear-rings, soaps, perfumes, pomades, incense [*ka'aji*], lip-sticks, powders, some amount of money. Some women will be selected to take it to the bride's house. These women are mostly bridegroom's sisters and are referred to as *Kusus* in Kanuri culture, whose responsibility is to mediate between the two families after these items are being sent.

Washing the Bride's Hair

This culture is being performed at the bride's house usually the bride has to undo her hair; group of musicians will be called to colour the scene. The type of music is called [*Bala*] in Kanuri rythning together. During performance of this music the bride will be set for a new mortar, while her paternal aunts will wash her hair.

This culture takes place in the morning of the wedding day. After this culture then followed by the culture of hair plaiting. [*K3la k3rta*]

Hair Plaiting

This culture of hair plaiting [of bride] takes place in the afternoon on the wedding day. Elderly women known as [*Duwuram*] i.e., hair plaiter will be invited to plait the hair of the bride, her friends will be singing song of joy. After the plaiting the family of the bride will either give cash or five/six yards of clothing material and some kola-nuts (Falmata, 2005).

Plaiting hair is nature of women; bride to plait her hair in the style that she feels attractive is also their custom and is allowed in Islam. This culture of Kanuri is normal and is also *urf*.

Types of Hair Plaiting

The Kanuri people are rich in different types of hair styles. Right from childhood of a child, the family intends to use hairstyle. This happens when the [Kanuri] family wants to identify their family by using hair tuft. After she has reached the age of eight, the family will prepare

to plait her hair in the style of *K3layask3*. Apart from this hair style, there is also another style *Shangalti* hairstyle, which is plaited after a girl has being married. The hair of a woman will be plaited into two different directions on her head. The first half will be plaited in front while the other half to be plaited backside of the head. Another style is called *Goto*; this is for women that stayed in married life for ten years and above. This style, the hair is plaited to all directions leaving the centre un plaited this portion will be made to look like punk with some slight plaits at the tail end of the hair, its small portion will be plaited towards the forehead in order to fix in a precious stone called *Kari-Kamalam* in Kanuri. This *Kari-Kamalam*s are of different types, some are more expensive than others. They are in different sizes and colours; using *Kari-Kammalam* by a kanuri is an indication of richness.

It is the culture of Kanuri to choose one of these styles by the family and apply it to the bride after one year of marriage. The culture of *k3la falt3* determines either of the two styles i.e., *Shangalti* or *Goto*. The last style of *k3la k3rta* is called *Fijeria* hairstyle, this type is similar to *Shangalti* but, there is a slight difference. The back portion of the hair will be weaved downward, the other portion i.e., forehead will be left unplaited. This type of hairstyle is usually done by middle-aged woman called *Amida* in Kanuri language/tradition.

Bathing Bride and Fashioning Her

After plaiting the bride's hair, next step is bathing the bride i.e., *fero kaslt3*. The bride's paternal aunts are the ones with the responsibility of performing this culture. They [paternal aunts] will take her [the bride] and wash her body. There and then she [bride] will be taken to a room where a new set of dress is ready for her.

While her parents are busy preparing her for a journey to her husband's house, her friends will then go out for *Karimbo*.

Karimbo is an old culture that has been existing long in the Kanuri villages. All friends of the bride will dress in beautiful dress [attires] that is attractive. They will be going from place-to-place singing *Karimbo* song, the youth are giving some money, and this is another way of contribution to the bride by her friends.

Arranging and Decorating Bride's Room

It is the Kanuri culture of arranging and decorating the bride's room to look beautiful and attractive that people can admire. If the room is in good position, some medium carpets are pasted to make the room look beautiful i.e., the arrangement/decoration differs according to the shapes and sizes of the room. Some tokens will be given to those people like kola nuts, chewing gums and some amount of money; some even add sets of clothing materials [wrappers] depending on the volume and size of the work. This *Karai- rota* comes immediately after the family of the bridegroom has sent his own materials to his bride/wife as gift of *Karai lorusabe*. After returning of the Payment called *Gurzamram* in Kanuri culture.

The friends of bride culturally demand money as their friend [the bride] leaves home to her husband's home. The parent of the bride made their final admonition as their daughter leaves the house.

The bride's head will be open in her husband's house culturally and it is called *K3la- f3r3mta*, this happens after mega bargaining between the friends i.e., the bride's and the groom's.

Greeting the Father and Mother In-Law

The following day early in the morning, the bridegroom and his friend will visit [greetings] the bride's family with token gift of blanket to the father-in-law, in return the father in-law will give five/ten yards. In the olden days, brides were taken to their husband's houses on horses

and donkeys at times even camels were used if the family is of high calibre, while the low-class family their brides trek to her husband's house if the house is near. She [the bride] will be accompanied by her relatives mostly her aunts.

In the olden days, if a bride will ride a horse to her husband's house, then there will be two persons attached to her. One will lift her to the back of the horse and the other will hold the horse and make it stable. After accompanying the bride to her matrimonial house, these persons will be paid with amount negotiated; set of ten yards of cloth will be given to them. There the family [of the bride] will advise their son-in-law.

It is the culture of Kanuri to greet father and mother-in-law, the groom will be accompanied by his friends to show their thanks and give blankets/carpet culturally. In return the father/mother-in-law will give five to ten yards of cloth. The gift will be shared among friends when they return. In Islam greetings father/mother-in-law is good but the gift that is exchanged is optional and regarded as custom [*urf*].

Dinner

It is the time for preparing menu [foods, drinks] and all sorts of entertainment for friends and well-wishers of the two families as to rejoice the bride/ the bridegroom that day. A whole ram [for rich family] will be bought, while a half of it [ram] for low ones for that purpose [dinner]. It is this ram that will be slaughtered for the preparation of the foods. While the intestine will be prepared culturally for another event called *Kalawa*.

Bride's family are the cookers of the day up to seventh day of the wedding. i.e., from [*meskeru*] to the seventh day known as [*tulur*]

Making Donations

This is a cultural occasion that takes place at the evening of *meskeru* [dinner] where the two families [i.e., the bride/ the groom] grace the occasion and make their contributions to the groom. *Kalawa* is sort of food cooked with intestine of the ram and enriched with cattle-oil. The prepared food will be brought to the groom with his friends. The groom opens his two hands [palms] while the eldest person of the family or any scholar that is being invited will put some of the food in the hands of the groom, then he [the groom] will be asked to pour back the food to the dish/container. This will be done thrice. It is believed [culturally] that for a person who has under- gone this, his marriage will be blessed with abundance of food and wealth. As such any young that is marrying for the first time will face this culture.

Touching *Ceratotheca Semamoide* Soup

Immediately after the *kalawa* culture, then followed another culture called *kaulu leta*. The two cultures are to initiate the bride and her groom into matrimony. The *kaulu* is herb called *Ceratotheca Semamoide* which its leaves are used for soup [*karkashi*] that is used for in this culture. The leaves are prepared and put into a container or small dish with some water. After *kalawa* is finished, then the same people will be invited to touch the *kaulu* and rob it in the hands of the bridegroom and making contributions.

First to commence is the father of the bridegroom and offering him [the bridegroom] his gift to bless him. Whatever that was given to the bridegroom by the invitees will be announced publically. The friends [of the bridegroom] will be collecting [on his behalf] whatever that has been given and later handed to him [the bridegroom] after the occasion.

Some scholars said “*Walima* means the food provide specifically for the weddings” some said “it is the food provided for happiness or celebration (Al-Khafnawi). Islam encourages *Walima*, when one of the companions of the Prophet [Abdurrahman bn Auf] got married; Prophet {peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him} saw sign then Prophet asked him to provide *Walima*. The scholars opined that the *Walima* is sunna (Ibid). In Kanuri culture there are things that are done. These are like [*Kalawa and Kaulu-leta*] in the name of donation. According to Kanuri culture, *Kalawa* is to taste the patience of the groom by putting hot food in his hand and he [the groom] will hold the hot food for a while before pouring back. This will be done four to five times, and *Kaulu* is to taste blessings that will flow into the new couple.

Seventh Day of the Wedding

Within the family of the bride one or two women will be left behind to help the bride in cooking food and other domestic activities, for the whole of seven days. The bride is at rest eating ready-made meals and wearing her new dresses. She is as a queen doing nothing and everything is done to her. She is given this chance as to allow her to be acquainted with her matrimony. It is believed [in Kanuri culture] that when a girl is married for the first time, she needs to be given seven days rest, this is because [according to Kanuri culture] to endure the pain of her first night of meeting her husband for the first time.

Within these days [seven days] these women will be preparing nutritious foods to the bride as to recover from her pains. The last day of the seven days will be another day for the family of the bride to gather, some gifts are made thus five/six yards, some kola nuts, some amount of money, soaps, detergents to mention but few will be given to the two women. In the evening the bride takes over and will be cooking her first food.

Holding the Steering Stick

The culture of [*Kuruyi muskoro yiko or kuruyi ta*] holding the stirring stick the bride will be called to hold the stirring stick while her parent is watching her, then she will be guided by her aunt as to how she can stir her food. After that she is expected to serve the people that are eating with her husband. That night the rest of the family will leave to their various places (Falmata, 2005).

Recommendations

- Records of culture should be kept.
- Cultural values should be taught to the younger generation.
- Youth should be brought closer in participation of cultural activities.
- Parents should consider the youth as partners in promoting cultural activities.
- Cultural award and prize-giving should be encouraged.
- Disregard to foreign cultures should be discouraged.
- Modification and upgrading of cultures by youth should be discouraged.
- Reviving cultures that are diminishing by making sort of awareness/enlightenment.
- Bringing to the fore the cultural values as to mean unity among the younger and older generation.
- Tracing and teaching the cultures from the root.
- The youth should respect their cultural norms instead of westernization.
- Visitations on cultural sites should be encouraged.
- Ministry of information and culture should establish cultural data base to preserve and protect the cultural values.
- Ministry of education should include cultural activities into the school curriculum.
- The N.G. O's and individuals should create programmes that inculcate cultural values to youth.
- The traditional rulers should engage the youth toward cultural activities and show them the consequences of foreign cultures toward their norms and values.

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