

# MARRIAGE PRACTICES AMONG THE SHINASHA COMMUNITY IN DIBATE DISTRICT, BENISHANGUL- GUMUZ NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE, NORTH- WESTERN ETHIOPIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Culture is unique features of one community. Though, the community belief and live with the culture he behaves. So, the major objective of this research paper is to describe marriage practice and types of marriage among Dibate Shinasha community Northern -Western, Ethiopia. The research was conducting by using both primary and secondary sources. So, the study indicates that in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Mettekel Zone, Dibate District the Shinasha community have different marriage types are practiced. These are Wida, Ts'tsa, Biqqa (Puriyya), Jiwa and N'aata'. Wida marriage system was practiced by the interest of the young family members. In this marriage practice the shimagiles from the beginning up to the end followed the process. Ts'tsa was practiced by agreement between the young male and female but not accepted by both families due to it was out of the interest of the family. Biqqa (Puriyya) was practiced by force means the young man and his friends collaborate and took the girl. Jiwa was practiced by taking the leaf of tree by the shimagiles went to the female's house. This was also targeted due to the young boy want to immediately to marry the girl. Finally, N'aata' marriage which was practiced when the husband of the woman died the elder of the husband brother or relative family married the woman by agreement.*

**Keywords:** *Marriage practices, Shinasha, Dibate, Wida, Ts'tsa, Giwa, Biqqa (Puriyya), and N'aata'*

## INTRODUCTION

Every society have its own culture, belief, habit and norm from the past up to the present and continue for the future. So, this valuable culture has to be transmitted to the next generation as part of one's society history. Traditional marriage customs vary by ethnic group, although many customs are Trans ethnic. Arranged marriages are the norm, although this practice is becoming much less common, especially in urban areas. The presentation of a present from the male's family to the female's family is common. The amount is not fixed and varies with the wealth of the families. The present may include livestock, money, or other socially valued items. (Wolde sellase,2002).

Marriage is one of the cultural activities that differ from one ethnic group to the other. It is the central factor in establishing family life and encourages someone's course of moving from early life stage to adulthood. Marriage ceremony is a cultural authorization of sexual intercourse between the married partners of the pair and generally, by the expectation that children will be born of the relationship (International encyclopedia of Social science 1977 cited in Gemechu and Assefa, 2006).

Marriage is a social organization that approves certain aspects of relationship between male and female. It is an institution that suggests in us deep – scanted feelings about questions of right and wrong, good, and evil and traditional versus modern within families' argument, many occur about what is suitable premarital behavior, what is marriage ceremony and how long should it last (Peter, 2010). Ethiopia is an ideal site for studying marriage tradition because it is considered by extensive-environmental, ethnic variety with different religion and with wide diversity. Traditional marriage is entrenched in socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs in many societies, but beyond formal facts, the relationships between faith and traditional marriage are complex and change depending on the community (Gemignani and Wodon, 2015). The institution of marriage seems to be the common element of all cultures around the world. Nevertheless, in every culture the institution of marriage is treated differently.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Traditional marriage practice is old phenomenon in Ethiopia which have different characteristics. This is also practiced in Dibate district among the Shinasha community in several years ago. But now a days most of the educated society among the community practice was decreased from time to time. Even though most scholars do research in the area among the Shinasha community they didn't gave due attention to the traditional marriage practice in organized and comprised way. For example, Abebe (2015), Abreham (2018), Addisu (2000), Ali (1998), Bender (1981), Micha and Lemma (2002), Tilahun (2014), Nigist (2000), Safafe (1983), Gemechu (2006), Meron (2017). The value and contribution of traditional marriage practice has been underestimated due absence of studies carried out before. Therefore, this study explores and describe traditional marriage practice as valuable, culture of Dibate district.

## **THE RESEARCH SITE**

Geographically Dibate Woreda was bound in the East by Guangua Woreda of Awi Zone administration, in the West by Bullen, in the North by Mandura Woreda and in the South by Yaso Woreda. The total area of Dibate Woreda was 368.289 hectare and the climate of the area was Qola. The annual rainfall of the Woreda reaches 900mm and the average temperature reaches from 25-29c0. Most of the rain comes from March up to October. (Benishangul-Gumuz communication office, 2000).

The total cultivated land of the Woreda for agriculture was 85,482 from this 76,252 was cultivated and the rest 438 hectare used for irrigation. In Dibate Woreda totally there were 28 kebeles and the center of the Woreda was named as Dibate. The Woreda was far distance from Addis Ababa at 547km, from the regional center Asosa 436 km and far distance from the zone Gilgel-Belles in 58km. The name of the woreda comes from the Gumuz ethnic *Dibata* and the name of the Woreda named Dibate. (Dibate Woreda communication office, 2000).

The Shinasha people were today found in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state of Mettekel Zone. Mettekel Zone have seven Woredas namely Dibate, Bullen, Wombera, Mandura, Dangur, Guba, Pawi. Among this Woredas mostly the Shinasha were found in Bullen, Wombera, Dibate and Dangur Woredas respectively. In the study area Dibate Woreda there were also other communities like Amhara, Agawu, Oromo, Gumuz and others live together. (Tsega, 2005).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research method with ethnographical research approach to understand the experiences of marriage practices. Qualitative research aims as describing making sense of interpreting (reconstructing) in terms of meaning that the subject express (Thyer, 2001).

The study employed purposive sampling strategy to identify specific study area in Dibate Woreda *Girize kebele*. Purposive sampling helps mostly effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain in which participants who have knowledge and expertise socio-cultural practice of society.

The primary and secondary sources of data were used for the study. The primary source of data was collected through key informants, interviewee and focus group discussions. Twenty Key informant interview was conducted with individual who have expertise and good knowledge of marriage practices. The key informants include elders, woreda head of culture and tourism office.

Four focus Group Discussions as carefully planned discussion designed to obtain information about marriage practices. Hence the FGD is an appropriate method to obtain different opinion of the respondents with the necessary for deeper understanding of the traditional marriage practices in the Shinasha with existing justification. The secondary data were collected through document analysis and the review literature. The contents of published materials used in the study were used in the process of data analysis and triangulation. Again, the response and experience of the participants of the study was interpreted and analyzed and carefully to avoid potential bias of information.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher needs to consider ethical standard of the host community on which the research was conducted. Therefore, I considered the social and cultural norms of the host community on whom the research was carried out. The Zone, District and *kebele* governing bodies were communicated and consent was obtained from them. The objective and purpose of the research was clearly communicated to participants. While writing the report, I was ceased from using unnecessary terms that may dissatisfy the participant of the study and I tried to avoid my personal biases. Privacy and secrecy were ensured, and therefore it was impossible to know who said what. The interest of the participants was given due place in the process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of the Shinasha community.

The Shinasha people mainly inhabiting areas north of the Blue Nile, river in what is now Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State, North-West of Ethiopia. The shinasha people relate themselves to the gonga peoples which relate themselves to the Middle East. The word Gonga is familiar to the Boro-shinasha. Gonga is commonly used for many centuries by shinasha people from various localities of the shinasha relation with other Gonga people. (Abebe, 2012).

Then this people crossed red sea led by Hamati and entered Egypt. In 3679 BC the shinasha entered Ethiopia via Blue Nile and settled to North and South of Blue Nile, Wollega, Gojjam and Gondar. (Taye, 1987). Then continued their move to Mettekel forced by the military expedition from Christian kingdom (Tsega, 2005). The native name for shinasha according to local narratives was “Boro” as now called Boro-Shinasha (Addisu, 2000). The Shinasha have been known by different names. Among this Shinasha, Boro, Dangabo and Sinicho can be mentioned. So, in Shinasha community of Dibate district there are five types of traditional marriage which are discussed below these are: *Wida*, *T's'ts*, *Biqqa (puriyya)*, *Giwa* and *'Nataa*.'

### 1. *Wida*

This type of marriage has great acceptance among the community of the Shinasha people. *Wida* was practiced first by the interest of the male family ask the interest of the female family. The young man's family ensures that the family of the bride and groom are not related by blood. To confirm this, they would previously search through at least seven generations of family lineage. At present, a five-generation search is sufficient. (Getachawu, 2007).

The message was sent either by letter or orally by the elder peoples. A mediator is a critical individual as bridges the gap between the two families. Once the man's family has identified a prospective bride,

they send a mediator to the young woman’s parents to declare their intentions. After hearing what the mediator has to say, the woman’s parents will impose a few conditions for the young man’s parents to meet. The mediator conveys this message to the man’s family. Arrangements for the date and place of the next meeting are also sent to the mediator, who relays the information to the groom’s parents. (Sahilu ,2007).

The father of the daughter after receiving the message first discuss with his own family to give response to check traditional practice of *Miliky* (to see obstacle) and also dream for the final response. This was named by the community called *ware dyla* (ዌረ-ዴላ and *gumedla* (ጉምደላ). (Addisu, 2000).

To see some symptoms whether good or bad to accept the marriage for example in their house to check whether the fire was on or off from the night up to morning and also to check the *bikil* how it was in a good way germinate or not. If the fire stays tonight up to morning and the seed in a good way germinates it was a good *Miliky* and they accept the marriage. But if the fire no long stays up to down morning and the seed was not germinating the *milky* was bad and not accept the marriage. If the family accept the marriage the family of the daughter give for the survival of continuing life different materials and also give cow. After this the male young boy take the daughter to his house by pack animal like horse, mule. The family and neighbors dance a dance by saying: (Informants: Bezabih, Gemechu and Abel).

|                 |                 |                               |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| ገዩ ገዩ ገይሮ       | የኛ ልጅ           | our son                       |
| ደኔ ዋዋ ገይ ዴና     | እንኳን ደህና መጣህ    | welcome                       |
| ዴኔ ዋዋ ገይ ዴና     | እንኳን ደህና መጣሽ    | welcome                       |
| አሽ አሽ አሽ ጅልቆ    | ሰዉ ሰዉ የሚወደዉ     | man have to love each other   |
| ኖ አሽኒ ጉዩን ገሮ ደዋ | አማቻችን ሁሉም ይወደዋል | our new relative all love him |

The above meaning was that our *mushiras* welcome and say dancing a dance by moving round two times the house and stand in front of the gate. In the middle *mushirit* on the right the husband and on the left the main *mize* stands. Then the mother of the young boy comes takes ጃሊ ጃይጉምገ means bamboo stand material from her son and said አዋሩ ነይ ዋሬ ዋሬ. It means the daughter is coming and make dance and join both *torena zenge* and say ሽሬ ዘብረረዋ. It means *Shilala* which means ቢሻ.ፆ. It means male boy marriage got acceptance when this ceremony was accomplished. Then it was expected that the male transfers from the left to the right. (Meseret ,2014).

Finally, the male and female have special area in the house was arranged and seat there and it was called ጃንጉራ ቁጣ. Which means the female's some part of her hair was cut. This was due to representing now she was married. Up to one week the two male and females stay in respected area without work simply by eating and drinking. After a week the female start to work in the house. After one month up to a year the male and females called by the female's family to return and enjoy and to know the family of the female. (Informants:Gelayinesh,Guremesa and Teshale )

**2. ፕስጥሳ**

This was marriage practiced by the agreement of the male and the female to take the initiative without concerning their family. At the beginning there was now how of agreement between the two families. But the young female and the male initiated in participating in the marriage due to the following factors like dalliance of the marriage, the two male and females be active in love, both families lack of money for the cost of the marriage. This was done first the boy finds the friends of the young girl to ask and arrange the date of meeting. Then with secrete without the information of especially the female family. Then the boy took the girl and move to his relatives. The ceremony of marriage was not the same day on the boy side strong ceremony took place but on the female family small ceremony took place. (Informants: Gonese, Tejitu and Tewachawu ).

The female family may make small ceremony after a year or two year or sometimes may have no ceremony on the female family. In the ፕስጥሳ marriage system first the father of the boy family sent to the female families as soon as in the morning by the messengers. If this was not done the family of the females not happy and expect the male family undermine us and may led in to conflict. The messenger when reach in the female house first talk different issues and then enter to the main issue. He explains about the male's family strong side and they start conversation. (Informants: Mosisa,Tadele and Tejitu ).

The messenger

|                  |                          |                                |
|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ጀመሽ እረፊ          | በምንም ቅር አትሰኝም            | not to become sad              |
| ናኑናትኒበምደንፍ       | እኔ የልጁን ቤተሰብ በደንብ አዉቃለሁ  | I know well the boy's families |
| ታየራ በጉኔ ዳኞሽ ፊሊቱዊ | አንተንም ከእኔ በላይ ልታዉቅ ትችላለህ | I expect you also know them    |

The female father:

|            |                    |                                 |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| ሃን ኤጉር ኔማ  | ይህ የምን ባህል ነዉ?     | What type of culture is this?   |
| ጣልዊ ሸአ ሹንጎ | የጨለማ ጉዞ ደስ ይላል ወይ? | Movement to dark is that happy? |

ሸአ አዋ ብቃን                      ጉዞ በጸሀይ ነው ደስ የሚለው? Movement is happy during the day time.

Then the messenger takeout the letter and gave for the female father. Then if the female family accept, they decide the date of meeting. Then the next meeting the messenger and some members come to the female family by taking 1000birr for compensation. Then conversation started like this

The father of the daughter said:

|              |                 |                        |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| ሀኒ ጋጫ        | ይህ ንቀት ነው       | this is undermining    |
| ኤቃሊ ሀናቆ ኢትቃል | ለምን እንዲህ ታደርጋለህ | why you do such things |
| ቃዜ ኢትሽ ታቃዙ   | እምቢ ብደቸሁ ነው     | I am not agreeing      |

The father of the son responses as follows:

|           |                    |                            |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ሀን ኖዴ ዋካሌ | ይህ በኛ የተጀመረ አይደለም  | this was not started by us |
| ንጃጎ ጌያ ትኒ | የአንተን ዝምድና ፈልገን ነው | we need your relativeness  |
| ፍይፈ       | አትቆጣ               | not to angry               |

Then the mediator’s after listening of both conversations to agree them they say as follows:

|               |                      |  |
|---------------|----------------------|--|
| ሀን አይዴ ፍይት ሸሊ | የሚያስቆጣ አይደለም         | this condition not make angry              |
| ደስ ደን ቤካ      | ይህ ከድሮ ጀምሮ ያለ ነገር ነው | this culture exists since our past history |
| ዋትስ ደተሬ       | የሆነው ሆኗል             | Things are already accomplished            |
| ኤጉር ወተርስ      | ምንም አይደለም            | don’t bother                               |
| ሄንፈንስ ሸንጋሊ    | አንተ የሰራታው ጥሩ አይደለም   | the male what you did was not good         |

After great conversation agreement was setup between the two groups. Then the father of the son gave some amount of gift for the female family. After this took place the female went back to her family after great discussion with the respected date with her husband and some friends. Finally, on the day the female families welcomed and they know their new relatives’ husband of their daughter. (Assefa ,2014).

### 3. *Biqqa (puriyya)*

This type of marriage was practiced by force. This was a process when young boy loves some one girl and participate in the process without the information even from his families. He accomplishes this task suddenly supporting by his friends by searching information when and where the female moves. He got this information from the female friend places like around the river, market, millet house on the journey. The process is that as soon as when he sees the female, he said ፕረሪ ከላማሪ (*prere kimary*) which means now I abduct you make dirty you. (Informants: Tejitu, Assegie and Shibashi ).

During this time, they become careful not seen by the female family. Unfortunately, if her families saw the case it led to great conflict. After this the young boy and his friends took the girl to the neighbor house of the boy. As soon as when the boy's family hears the news, they send messenger either orally or by letter. First the messenger's talks about the cows and environments then enter to the main issues and try to persuade the father of the girl. The next day the relatives of the boy went to the girl's family to discuss the issues but the father of the girl become angry and shout not talk to the groups. Then the groups returned back to their home. The next day for the second time the relatives of the boy went to the female family as soon as possible to persuade the father of the daughter. (Meron ,2005).

This *Biqqa* marriage was difficult sometimes it led to great conflict among the two families. This type of marriage has no much acceptance by the community. The marriage was arranged by the boy by fearing may be another person took her and the aim is to make for himself. In this marriage the father of the boy pay reparation by cash or in kind. The father of the boy begs the daughter's family any man can make mistake please forgive us. Even persons who have blood feud reach an agreement to persuade. Finally, the boy family make small ceremony and took their son from the neighbor house. The *Biqqa* marriage was not hot and accepted by both male and the female families due to they have no information and interest about the marriage. (Wodisha,2010).

### 4. *Giwa*

This type of marriage was taking place when already agreed boy's family and female family previously the marriage. This was taking place when the boy wants to marry the girl before the expected date of agreements between the two families. The process was taking place the boy, his friends and mediators took fresh leaf in the night with great with silent sound. Unfortunately, when the door was open in the morning the groups immediately enter to the interior of the house. As a chance if they got the daughter, they took her and inter to the interior of the house. (Informants: Shibashi Allo, Merdasa Woyessa and Mossisa Alemu ).

After this the families of the girl find relatives and come to agree they have no any chance. This was due to the families of the girl if we say no the marriage in the future in the life of the female, she has no chance and live bad life. In this sudden marriage the family of the female become very angry. This



was undermining us and shows great dislike for the son's family. This type of marriage was not also accepted mostly by the group of the family. This was due to even though we agree at the beginning about the marriage it didn't respect our culture. Especially the females' family were not happy and participate in the marriage ceremony due to the care for their daughter may be if we ignore the marriage bad things exist in our daughters. (Moges,2004).

### 5. 'Nataa'

This type of marriage was practiced when the husband of a woman died. The question was raised for the woman forty days after the death of her husband the marriage was practiced by agreement. First the woman asked to marry and if she refused, she was not forced. But if the woman agrees the marriage the process was took place according to the culture of the community. (Tilahun ,2014 pp,). Traditionally according to the tradition *tskar* was took place only the day of Monday and in the next Tuesday the question was raised for the woman. If possible, the great brother of the ex-husband or if not possible relative of the husband married the woman even though previously, they married. But today now a day this type of marriage was decreased depending on the development of culture in the community, I think.

## CONCLUSION

Culture is identification for one's society. In this study the Shinasha from the past to the present they have their own culture of the traditional marriage systems. Among the traditional marriage *wida* is more accepted by the society. But *Ts'tsa* and *Giwa* have less accepted by the community since it has initiated to marriage without the interest of the parents of both the female and male. Finally, *Biqqa* and 'Nataa' have today almost decreasing in practical cultural marriage of the Shinasha community.

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