

Marriage system in Eritrean society

Written by shabait Administrator
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In Eritrea there are three kinds of marriages: Customary, religious or public marriages. All three are accepted legally as binding. The customary marriage involves every member of the society and is a big occasion in which close family members have a say. And it is an accession very interesting to observe and understand the tradition and culture of the society.

In this customary way marriage is not just the affairs of the two people who would be joining in matrimony. Everyone in the family has a stake in it. People who do not understand the good culture of the society, or some who think they are 'civilized' may question to why people have to interfere in the affairs of the two lovers and leave them decide their future by themselves.

Why, in the first place, should they have an opinion at all? It, however, is not as simple as it sounds. Because in our society one does not just live for oneself, the person also lives for his children, parents, family, relative, society,... As one African proverb goes 'it takes a village to raise a child.' This is to say that everyone has a contribution in raising a child. Even a person who is not related by blood, guides, advises, even punishes a child when necessary. And since it is a reciprocal thing, one also has a commitment and obligation to each of the people who has made an input in one's life.

In the past a family's obligation to the person who gets married and vice versa was very strong. When it is a boy he can even take a fourth of the grain or food reserve of the household to establish his own home. He is also entitled to an ox for plowing his land if his family can afford it. He can also demand his family to a marriage ceremony. In such circumstance he cannot say the whole thing is his own affair and it should be his opinion. The family has invested a lot of emotional and physical resources. Hence, marriage automatically becomes a family affair.

It is important to see the reality in such a discussion. And the fact is that we have a collectivist culture where there is a high degree of intimacy within our family. It is almost impossible to imagine oneself without the context of a family. And this serves individuals a great deal as that person is constantly encircled by a group of people who care for him and show him love. This gives them the entitlement in having a say in the individual's life to some degree. Therefore any decision one makes automatically affects the family. That is why marriage concerns the whole family than only the individual.

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Contemporary marriages might seem deviating from that of traditional and customary marriages. The young due to engage come to tell their family that they want to marry and ask them to go and ask the family the bride groom for hand for marriage. And the family of the bride groom only accept the proposal for the two have decided by themselves and it is only to make it official and for blessing.

Not all marriages that happen through this above mentioned have the sincere approval of the family. In tradition parents select the wife to be for their sons. The selection is conducted in a way that the parents have good acquaintance of the family of the bride groom from its background to present status. Even they go to the history of fertility, social status, and other relevant information of the family. That is to ensure that the two being engaged would have good life and built sustainable family. It is meant for the good of their children.

The strong belief is that the family we want to build with our spouse should be based on the family that raised us and make us who we are. They want the family we want to build function within the value of the society. Deviating from this tradition might, sometimes, create conflict within the family.

And from moral point of view, it is our duty to help our parents by trying to understand them while trying to make them understand us. Just as they were there for us when we needed them we have to give them the support and appreciation they expect and deserve.

Especially in our society parents and families usually give up a lot of things for their children and always put their children first. Therefore they have the right to feel proud of us. So don't let them down and heed their advice and blessing even in a decision concerning marriage.