

Marriage among Bamasaba

By Nandemu Barasa, March 15 2011

Marriage in the Bamasaba people is a complex affair tied together with economic, social and political practices where it is viewed as religiously sacred where all the aforementioned components have to be present.

The Bamasaba people believe that marriage is immortal where the living and the departed share strong bonds specially through new-borns who are named after the dead thus continuity of the lineage for ages.

Consequently, the Bamasaba people view marriage as drama, where everybody is an actor and not just a spectator. By this, the Bamasaba see marriage as a duty, a requirement from the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate because should it happen that one does not participate he or she is considered a curse to the community, a rebel, a law breaker and abnormal.

Failure to marry or to get married under normal circumstances means one has rejected the society and the society rejects them in return. It is also believed that marriage without procreation is not a complete marriage.

It is believed by Omumasaba that the living dead are reincarnated in part so that aspects of their personalities or physical characteristics are re-born in their descendants. One who has no descendants becomes forever dead since his line of physical continuation is blocked if he does not get married and bear children. "Situti sia muntu sikhakonela ta, olima ne walia, nolile nomenya, nomenya sibala simenya." (It literally means *situti* of man must not lay fallow it must be put in use in order to live and when you live, the world lives which means man must have a family and a family means continuity of the society, and thus the nation.)

This is contained in *Endakano ya mukhobe* an obligation that must not be despised. This is one way of remembering the living dead. It is believed that the living dead (*Basambwa*) are kept by members of their families. Here it means persons in the family do remember someone who has physically died as they believe he or she is still alive in their minds. His name still means something personal and he can appear to members of the family who knew him and recognize him by name.

It is a routine in every house and it is contained in *Endakano ya mukhobe* and it says 'Enyungu ya Namakanda ekhakona bulesia ta, okhebilila basambwa ta.' (The pot of Namakanda must never go without water and remember the ancestors.) It is a very important fact among Bamasaba people. It is in every family that the living dead are kept in personal memory the longest after their physical death. According to Bamasaba philosophy, it is taken to be a serious concern.

For one to die without having a family of their own, one is termed as an outcast and is set to lose all the links with mankind.

However, among the Bamasaba people, marriage is a long process involving certain ritual practices starting with birth rituals in order to make the new born a social member of the community. The process goes through a series of initiation rites. The initiation rites are like the birth of the young people into the state of maturity and responsibility.

They dramatize and effect the incorporation of the young into the full life of their society. It is after initiation where this is observed and an individual is culturally and socially initiated into full manhood or womanhood with all its secrets of, responsibilities, privileges and expectations.

The main purposes of initiation rites are to introduce young people to matters of sex, marriage and procreation and family life after which many young people are allowed to practice what they were taught.

Since the whole community is involved in the initiation rites, it is therefore the entire corporate body of society which prepares the young people for marriage and family life.

Through initiation rites, parents and relatives educate their children on marital affairs.

Most of the people do believe that education only started with schools introduced by the missionaries yet there were structures of organized education among the indigenous peoples of Africa before the arrival of the missionaries. Every society in the world has a culture which is transmitted from generation to generation through their own style of education.

Whether it is referred to as socialization or civilization, indigenous education or traditional, education is education. And as a human process, it is part and parcel of every human society. In indigenous societies, Masaba included, everyone in the community was educated.

Learning was an important process as it ensured continuity and sustainability of life. Thus the saying in Lumasaba goes: *Situti Sikhakonela ta Olima nio walia nolile nomenya nomenya sibala simenya*.

It literally means *situti* of man must not lay fallow it must be put in use in order to live and when you live, the world lives which means man must have a family and a family means continuity of the society and thus the nation.

That means ensuring continuity and sustainability of life. Whatever was learned in Masaba as a community was very much related to their way of life.



Wooden handles that are fixed to a hoe.

***Khuselela* (Engagement / choosing the partner)**

Customarily, finding partners for marriage among Bamasaba people, the choice is made by parents and this may be done even before the children are born.

This means that in one household, there is a young boy; his parents will go to another household where there is a young girl or where there is an expectant mother and propose to the parents of the girl asking for a hand in marriage.

The young persons however get married only when they are mature enough and not immediately after birth or while very young.

The practice in Masaba community, the parents and relatives of young man approach the parents of a particular girl and start marriage negotiations which under normal circumstances, coincides with the puberty stage.



With *Omumasaba*, there are cases where force or pressure has to be applied to force a reluctant young person marry the partner chosen by the parents or relatives.

The normal practice however is for the parents to make the choice with full consent of their son or daughter.

With *Bamasaba* community marriage is not allowed between close relatives and since the range of kinship extends widely, the degree of these prohibitions is also very extensive.

Where marriage may be allowed within the same clan, it is carefully scrutinized to make sure that the parties are not close relatives.

Taboos exist to strengthen marriage prohibitions.

It is feared that children of close relatives will die and that the living dead are not pleased with such marriages and would therefore bring misfortunes to those involved.

Some individuals such as lepers, epileptics and the mentally challenged find it hard to get marriage partners.

Under normal circumstances if it is clear that there are no hindrances the mother of the young man prepares to pay a visit to the chosen girl's parents.

The preparations include a new indigenous hoe which is wrapped in banana fibers called *kamakhola* and carried in a basket.

She will look for a relative or a close friend who accompanies her to the girl's parents.

On arrival they are welcomed warmly and entertained but on departure the team carefully places the hoe wrapped in the banana fibers contained in the new basket at a safe place 'muchabekalwa' in the house of their hosts.

After departure, parents and relatives of the girl will carefully examine the basket and the message passed to the father of the chosen girl.



A fully fixed hoe.

If the message is considered positively then the parents decide to return the hoe fixed on the wooden handle" kumwini" made from special plant (Kumusitati or Kumusangura).

But should the girls parents differ then the hoe will be returned as it was.

If the request is taken positively then a day is set by the mother of the girl accompanied by a close relative or family friend and they will return the hoe to the young man's home with the hoe fixed to a wooden handle where it will also be hidden at a place in the house before departure.

After they have examined and found the results, the mother of the young man breaks news with joy to the relatives and later the father.

And on the other hand if the results are negative she will inform them and therefore look for another place.

If the results are positive, the father of the boy will then initiate bride price negotiations with the family of his would be in-laws.

Source: WestFM