

Sample research paper on rites of passage

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Abstract

Rite of Passage is a term that refers to a ritual or ceremony for a specific and important phase in a person's life. In every part of the world, people celebrate different transitional phases in their own specific ways to mark their importance. In the similar manner, in the Middle East, these rituals or ceremonies vary from culture to culture. Events like birth, adulthood and marriage hold their own significance among different tribes and groups in the region. This paper discusses the marital ceremonies and adulthood rituals that are performed in the Kurdish and the Sunni culture and also compares their similarities and differences.

THE RITES OF PASSAGE

1. Introduction:

Around the world, there exist numerous groups of people and tribes who practice their own different cultures based on their traditional and geographical settings. Every region consists of a variety of cultures and Middle East is one of them. From Arab to Jews, this wide array of cultural groups makes Middle East rich in tradition and ethnic values. Two of these tribal identities include the Kurds and the Sunni Muslims.

2. The Kurds:

The Kurds are found widely in the Middle East. Their geographical settlement does not stay limited to a single country as they never had a land of their own. However, "Kurdistan" is a mountainous area that exists at the meeting point of Iranian, Turkish and Iraqi borders. The roots of Kurd culture are mostly found in the Persian and Ottoman Empire.

2. 1. Kurdish Culture and Rites of Passage:

The Kurdish people do share the common religion of Islam in the Middle Eastern region, but their traditional and ethnic values are much different than the rest of the Muslim groups. Even though majority of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims, there is a certain percentage that belong to the Shia sect.

2. 1. 1. Marriage:

The marital ceremony in the Kurdish culture is, just like any other culture, a heavily celebrated event. Despite all the common display of celebration, there are certain values that are followed among the Kurdish people.

The marriage of a couple is usually arranged between two families. It is a common concept that a man must marry his paternal cousins (father's brother's daughter) in order to strengthen the ties between the two families and also because it is considered that the man has his first rights to his paternal cousin. If the first cousin is somehow not married with the man, the other cousins are considered the possible choices.

The marriage is discussed and decided between the women of the two families first and when the negotiations are done, the men of the family take charge and finalize the settlement. There is a certain amount of wealth that is decided called the " Bride Wealth". This amount is either paid at betrothal or can be paid in small increments till the day of the ceremony. Bride wealth can be gifts, gold, the money for wedding expenses, jewelry, household goods and appliances and also a few weapons such as a revolver or a rifle. The amount of Bride Wealth depends upon the financial status of the groom's family. Some of these families use the bride wealth of their daughters to utilize it for the expenses of their son's marriage. The girl's

family on the other hand, is required to give away dowry with their daughter which is basically livestock or jewelry.

The wedding celebrations consist of dancing and singing. The bride is taken away to the groom's house where she is to sit quietly in a room till the celebrations are over. The Kurdish tradition makes it compulsory for the oldest of the brothers in the family, to stay with his parents along with his wife and children. When the family resources increase and expand, only then are they allowed to leave and make a house of their own. As per the Islamic teachings, the men of Kurdish decent are allowed to have more than one wife, although most of them have monogamous marriages. Mostly the rich men marry more than once as they have more resources and are financially able to support bigger families.

If in any case the man fails to keep the bride happy or does not provide her according to her family's standards, then she has the right to call for divorce. The act of divorce is performed by the man as he announces the bride to be divorced three times. The other way of divorcing the bride involves the complete repayment of the bride wealth by the man.

2. 1. 2. Adulthood:

Circumcision is a common practice in the Muslim world. It is a process which marks the beginnings of adulthood. Male adulthood rite of passage involves the circumcision of a young boy. A tirib or a Godfather is chosen for the boy from among the neighborhood. As he comforts the young one through his painful procedure, the tirib develops a life-long relationship of guidance with the boy. Celebrations are also held as he is officially considered to be of age. This celebration usually involves dressing up the young one and the grown

up men blessing him and congratulating him.

Female circumcision is a very controversial subject as most of the people reject this tradition. There have been a number of incidents of forced circumcision where the young girl has to go through a very painful genital surgery. Most of the times the young ones are given dolls or candies to distract them from the process. Elders of the families, especially females, take their girls to be circumcised as this process is considered to be mandatory for a girl to get ready for marriage. Even though tradition requires this process to be done, most of the modern Kurdish communities negate and reject it to be a part of their family traditions. The female genital mutilation (FGM) has now become a social issue which has been talked upon a lot on the world forum and is being addressed as well.

3. The Sunni Muslims:

Sunni Muslims are the largest group found among Islamic countries. They are the commonly found sect and are scattered all around the world as they constitute the world's biggest religious body. The Sunni group follows the teachings and actions of their last Prophet in Islam, Muhammad.

3. 1. The Sunni Culture:

Sunni Culture is considered to be the orthodox culture in Islam. It is based on the common and widely practiced Islamic traditions and values. All the Sunnis found across the globe follow similar ethnic and cultural ways. The major rites of passage of Sunni culture are discussed below.

3. 1. 1. Marriage:

Sunni marriages are arranged and settled according to the Islamic teachings of Muhammad. These marriages are held between adult members of the

Sunni community and a legal contract is made in presence of witnesses.

There are also a few typical Sunni traditions such as the bride proposing the groom. This tradition is found in the Sunni religion as the first wife of the Prophet did so as well. Another tradition is the use of the phrase “ I agree to..” in the tradition of the Prophet. It is also considered to be a very important component of the Sunni marriage. Marriage between a man and a woman are considered to be beneficial and healthy. The concept of sexuality is sacred and so is the wedding lock.

The Sunni teachings also allow the men to be married maximum four times. But a condition is applied that if the man is financially able and can provide the rights of every wife to the best of his abilities and has the consent of his previous wife, only then, can he marry another woman. This tradition is almost the same among the Kurds and the Sunni Muslims.

Divorce is also a common concept in the Sunni Muslim culture. Both the man and his wife are allowed to call for divorce but only in such conditions where there is no other option to make the situation better and no other way out. But, it is highly recommended that all the available alternatives should be tried and exhausted before deciding to go for a divorce. The woman may call up for divorce “ Khulah”. The man can divorce his wife the same way as Kurds, by renouncing her divorced three times.

After the divorce, the man still has to help the woman financially by sending her money. In case they have children and are separated, the responsibility of the children is still upon the man and he still has to provide for this children.

As compared to the small Shia'ite percentage of Kurds, the Sunni marital rite

of passage does not include the concept of temporary marriage called Mu'tah. However, such a marriage is allowed in the Shia sect where men can marry a woman for a short period of time. Such marriages are usually performed where the man is away from his wife and family from a long period of time. Men who are travelers or who work in labor are usually the ones who take up Mu'tah. This is a major difference between the Sunni and Shia marital traditions.

3. 1. 2. Adulthood:

Just like other important events, adulthood is also considered a significant phase which is marked by performing certain cultural obligations.

Circumcision is a compulsory process for officially declaring adulthood. Most of the Sunni families get it done when the child is still and infant. But another common tradition requires the child to be 12 years of age and done with the recitation of Quran (Muslim Holy Book) when the he is circumcised. Although the subject of circumcision is not mentioned in the Quran, it has been mentioned several times in the teachings and sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

Female circumcision is not a well-followed tradition in the Sunni culture as well. It is performed as per the family traditions. Most of the Sunni groups do not allow it while others find it to be a compulsion. The old and traditional families believed that circumcision for the females has to be done in order for her to be considered for marriage. But these beliefs fluctuate across Sunni groups.

4. Conclusion:

Sunni and Kurdish are two dominant cultures of the Middle East. Their ethnic

identities are strong but their traditions have evolved with the passage of time. The comparison in this paper is between the old rituals and cultural values regarding marriage and adulthood. However, in the modern world some of these values have been completely eliminated such as the circumcision is only performed on boys. The marital traditions of the Kurdish people are still somewhat the same as they consider their traditions to be a major reason why they are still respected in their region. But, the Sunni culture has adopted the western ways while keeping up with the modern world.

References:

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