

CHOICE OF A PARTNER IN AFRICAN TRADITION

The following were the ways through which marriage partners were chosen in African Traditional Society.

1. The children had freedom to choose their own partners. In such a case, it was a boy to show interest in a girl and make an approach.
2. The parents could also make choices on behalf of their children. This was by identifying a potential marriage partner for their children. Some could approach the family of the girl and declare their intentions.
3. However, the parents could not approve the choice made by their children. The children had to respect the views of their parents about their choices.
4. Some choices made include capturing the girl. This was arranged and organized by the boys after carefully identifying the girl. The bride wealth was taken later after the parents' acceptance.
5. There was also the use of a go-between or mediator. The boy intending to marry used someone or a messenger to declare the intention.
6. In some societies, choices were made by making the girl and the boy to have a fight (wrestling). The choice could only be approved upon the boy wrestling the girl down.
7. In some cultures, choices were made through elopement. The boy and girl could secretly begin living together.
8. Some people made choices out of excitement especially during beer party. In such a case, the parents of either the girl or boy could give away their daughter or son as a result of happiness.
9. In some cultures, there was a practice of booking pregnancy. The parents could agree to exchange their children for marriage in case fortune could allow them to be of the opposite sex.

QUALITIES CONSIDERED FOR A MARRIAGE PARTNER IN AFRICAN TRADITION

The following aspects were considered when choosing marriage partners in African tradition.

- (i) They considered the family background of either the boy or girl. They put their interest on morality of a family.
- (ii) The health status of a partner was a great concern. Attention was directed towards tracing whether some kind of disease like leprosy and sickle cells existed in the family lineage.

- (iii) Virginitv was important aspect in choosing marriage partners. The girl was expected to be virgin. Virginitv commanded respect and sometimes rewards to the family as it proved the proper upbringing of the girl.
- (iv) The African considered the character of the boy or girl. An ideal choice considered one with qualities like respect, honest and kindness among others.
- (v) The clan was also considered. The partners were expected to be of different clans as those in the same clan were brothers and sisters.
- (vi) The hospitality of the partner was one of the qualities taken into consideration. An ideal choice was person who was welcoming, generous and could get a long easily and freely with everyone.
- (vii) The beauty of the girl was a quality the Africans looked for. Those with waistlines and beads around their necks, arms and the waist were admired.
- (viii) The economic status particularly that of the boy was important when choosing a marriage partner. Wealth such as cattle and goats proved that the family was capable of taking care of the incoming wife.
- (ix) The cultural background of each partner was considered. There had to be some harmony and understanding in the two cultures.
- (x) The ability of each partner to work was considered. Each partner had to be active when doing domestic duties like cultivation and cooking among others.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

1. Preparing the young ones for marriage began at puberty stage. This was the period that the boys and girls appeared to be ready for marriage life.
2. The boys were taught by their uncles and the girls by their aunts. The teaching involved marriage related issues.
3. The girls were taught to keep their virginitv. Virginitv proved the moral uprightness of the girl.
4. The girl was also taught motherly experiences including menstruation, breastfeeding and giving birth.
5. In some cultures, there were initiation ceremonies like circumcision. Among the Bagishu, male children were circumcised to show their maturity and readiness for marriage.
6. The boys were encouraged to identify potential partners and inform the uncles or parents accordingly.
7. In some societies, the girls ready for marriage were kept away from the public. During this isolation, she was made to undergo the process of beautification.

8. The families of the boy and the girl were introduced to each other. This involved declaring marriage intentions.
9. The boy's family could arrange bride wealth and inform the family of the girl about their readiness.
10. The girl's family was expected to respond to the declared intention of marrying their daughter.
11. On the day of the marriage ceremony, the groom's family presented gifts to the family of the bride. Items like domestic animals, backcloth and alcoholic drinks were among those delivered.
12. In some cultures, the boy and the girl could be allowed to have the first sexual intercourse on that day under the supervision of the aunts.

POLYGAMY IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA

Polygamy was valued and common in African Traditional Society because of the following reasons;

1. It provided a solution to infertile marriages. The man was encouraged to marry another wife in case the first was infertile.
2. Polygamy was prestigious. Men with more than one wife earned respect from the community for their ability to care and make the wives to live in harmony.
3. Polygamy guaranteed permanency in marriages. Instead of divorcing one wife, the man was encouraged to marry another wife as a way of disciplining her.
4. Polygamy catered for the problem of widows. After the death of her husband, the brother of the deceased was allowed to officially become her husband.
5. It ensured that there was sexual satisfaction on the side of men. In the events of prolonged illness, menstruation and pregnancy or immediately after giving birth, men derived their sexual satisfaction from the other wives. This helped to control the sexual behavior of the man.
6. To some men, polygamy ensured that children of both sexes were born. They tended to marry another wife in case the first wives were producing only single sex.
7. Polygamy provided enough labour force in the family. The many wives and their children eased domestic duties including cooking, collecting firewood and digging.
8. Polygamy ensured that all women were married. This promoted their cultures as marriage was compulsory for every grown up.
9. Polygamy was taken as the way of disciplining the intolerable behavior of the first wife. Therefore, marrying another wife was a way of teaching the first wife proper behavior.

10. Polygamy was a sign of wealth. It showed that the man had enough material wealth including land and animals like cattle, goats and sheep among others.
11. Polygamy ensured that the bond of kinship extended. Through it many people became related. This helped to create harmony in the society.
12. Polygamy provided security in the family. The many members were able to defend themselves against any threat.
13. Polygamy catered for unforeseen problems like prolonged sickness or death of one wife. The other normal wife could continue with the family business.

DIVORCE IN TRADITION AFRICA

In African Traditional Society, marriage was a social affair built on permanent basis. This explains why cases of divorce were very scarce.

A number of steps were taken to protect marriages and this helped to make marriages permanent as people desired.

1. There was adequate sex education before, during and after marriage ceremony. These prepared children fully of their marital roles and it gave them insight on marriage relationship at tender ages.
2. There was serious punishment given to any form of sexual misconduct. This created fear and discipline in the sexual conduct of people.
3. Marriage was a communal affair. Therefore, anyone seeking divorce was required to consult all members involved in the marriage process. Such members provided guidance and counselling in the event of marital problems.
4. Marriage was compulsory in African tradition. This made the people to aim at keeping the marriages well in order to avoid being divorced.
5. Polygamy was a normal practice in African tradition. Therefore, instead divorcing a wife for any reason, the man was allowed to marry another wife as a way of disciplining the first or the other wife.
6. There were superstitions, taboos and customs that protected marriage. People feared to break these taboos because they associated with curses.
7. Careful choices were made for married partners. The parents helped their children with choices. This ensured that the best choices were made.
8. Women were brought up to feel submissive and inferior to men. This made the women to respect the men. This helped to rule out the possibility of quarreling between the husband and the wife.

9. The basic needs of the family like food and shelter were catered for by the whole community. The grandparents and other relatives were always there to assist the family in the times need.
10. Bride wealth legalized marriages and guaranteed its permanency. The people respected bride wealth and some feared to return it in the even of divorce.
11. Marriage was a religious duty which involved blessings from the ancestors. To maintain the good relationship with the ancestors, the people aimed at and did everything possible to make their marriages permanent.
12. Marriage was a social built on permanent basis. Everybody grew up to respect this idea in order to maintain social harmony.
13. Marriage was purposely for producing children. Once children were produced, the couple's love was cemented.
14. The elders served as living examples for their children. They lived in their marriages until natural causes like death could interfere. This was a source inspiration to the children.

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO DIVORCE IN TRADITION AFRICA

The following were the circumstances under which divorce was allowed in traditional Africa.

1. Barrenness or infertility of the woman led to divorce. To the Africans, children ensured continuity of family lifespan. Besides, they were important in providing wealth, labour and happiness in the family.
2. Loss of virginity especially on the side of the girl could later cause divorce. She was disrespected and considered immoral. Quite often the husband could use that excuse to insult his wife and her family.
3. Prolonged illness like bleeding of the woman could cause divorce. Such a partner seemed useless as he or she could prove to be costly to keep.
4. Evil practices including witchcraft and murder caused divorce. Having such a partner threatened the lives of the family members. Therefore, he or she was allowed to leave the marriage.
5. Failure to meet the requirement of bride wealth led to divorce. In some cultures couples were allowed to live together for a given period before effecting bride wealth.
6. Laziness could lead to divorce. A lazy partner became a burden to the family as feeding was concerned.
7. Failure to satisfy the sexual urge of a partner could lead to divorce. This was responsible for marital unfaithfulness like adultery with its associated problems like fighting.

8. Domestic violence like constant beating or fighting could lead to divorce. It caused body injuries and in some cases death. Before the situation could get out of hand, the two were allowed to part especially after all the alternative means of solving the disagreement could have failed.
9. Marital unfaithfulness especially adultery on the side of the woman caused divorce. This was an act of immorality which was never tolerated.
10. In some cases, giving birth a single sex could cause divorce. This was especially true if only girls were produced.
11. The intolerable behavior of some wives led to divorce. Such misconduct like quarrelsomeness and drinking among others caused continued fighting.
12. In some cases, if the woman became too old for the man, divorce could be initiated. The man was then encouraged to marry a young wife.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN CHURCH HISTORY

The Early Centuries of Christianity

- Monogamy was emphasized as the ideal type of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-2).
- Freedom of choice of marriage partner was emphasized.
- The rule of inheritance accepted.
- Christians put emphasis on where the married couple had to stay and live.
- There was no fixed marriage ceremony among the Christians.
- The period witnessed divorce becoming common.
- However, new standards of faithfulness and love between the husband and wife were later set.
- Prostitution became common. However, the Christians discouraged it.
- The couples were encouraged to live permanently and peacefully with one another with love and respect.
- Polygamy also became common among the Christians. However, the church and state came up in the open to condemn it.
- Christians questioned whether or not they could marry pagans.
- Saint Paul said that what mattered in marriage was love that each partner had for another. Therefore, religion was not to be a separating factor.
- Christians were also puzzled whether it was right for them to marry slaves. The church pointed out that the slaves were free to marry each other and live as husband and wife.
- Some believers questioned themselves whether they had to marry or not.

- Saint Paul advised those who could not control their sexual feelings to marry.
- However, Saint Paul said it was right for a believer to remain single for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Middle Ages and Reformation

- During this period, the church divided itself into two. The eastern church – the Anglicans and the western church (Catholics).
- The eastern church praised and encouraged believers particularly the religious leaders to marry.
- However, the western church praised celibacy (single life) for the sake of the gospel of Jesus.
- Marriage laws came to be written down in books and believers were encouraged to follow these laws strictly.
- The Christians also came up with a marriage ceremony to which everybody was expected to observe.
- Marriage was viewed as a sacrament and something important for the salvation of the believers.

The Missionaries in African churches (C19th – C20th)

- The missionaries emphasized equality between the husband and the wife. They said the two are created in God's image were therefore the same.
- The missionaries advised the parent to give freedom to their children to make choices for their partners.
- The missionaries introduced the idea of living single life (celibacy) for the sake of the gospel of Christ.
- The missionaries encouraged married couples to love each other and to give respect to one another.
- The missionaries the couples to stay permanently in their marriages.
- The missionaries discouraged inheritance of widows emphasizing that such women had the right to decide on their own.
- The missionaries discouraged bride wealth. They looked at it as exchanging women for marriage.
- The missionaries encouraged baptism of the children instead of initiation of rites like the circumcision of their male children.
- The missionaries recognized and gave respect to marriage between slaves.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. God willed and initiated marriage. He created human beings as male and female each with unique sexual feature (Genesis 1:27).
2. It was God's will that marriage had to be monogamous. He only created a man and a woman to start up marriage (Genesis 1:27). In Genesis 2:21, God created only a woman from the rib he took from the man.
3. Equality is emphasized in marriage; the man and the woman are equal. God created human beings both man and woman in his image (Genesis 1:26).
4. Sex is a divine gift in marriage for mutual love and comfort. This means that sex is only for the married.
5. Marriage is for pro-creation. God blessed human beings to have many children in order for their descendants to live all over the earth (Genesis 1:27).
6. God gave equal responsibility to man and woman to work as co-creators in order to bring the world under their control (Genesis 1:27).
7. In marriage, the man and the woman are companions. God created the woman from the man's rib after having realized that the man was lonely (Genesis 2:18-23).
8. In marriage, the man and the woman complement one another. Adam felt uneasy with himself and was sorrowful when he realized that he was the only kind. This was after he had finished naming other creatures (Genesis 2:18-21).
9. Marriage is an occasion of peace, joy and harmony. This was proved by the joy Adam felt when God presented the woman to him as his wife (Genesis 2:23).
10. God willed unity in marriage. He emphasized that a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife (Genesis 2:24).
11. Courtship was a step towards marriage. Jacob courted for Rachel for seven years before marrying her (Genesis 29:18-25).
12. In relation, bride wealth was acknowledged. Jacob offered his services for seven years to family of Laban (Genesis 29:18-25).
13. Faithfulness was encouraged in marriage relationship. The Israelites were forbidden from committing adultery (Exodus 20:14). In his marriage relationship, Hosea condemned his wife Gomer for her adulterous life (Hosea 2:1ff, 3:1ff).
14. Marriage was a covenant among the Israelites. It was meant to be permanent since it involved making promises.
15. Every young man was expected to marry before the age of twenty among the Israelites.
16. A newly married man was relieved of his duty of serving in the military among the Israelites. This was intended to make him stay at home with his wife so that he could make her happy (Deuteronomy 24:5).

17. A husband was expected to stand by his wife and give her comfort especially in difficult times. Elkanah assured his wife Hannah of his love when she was sorrowful about her inability to have a child (1 Samuel 1:1 ff).
18. A man was called upon to be happy with his wife and to find joy in her (proverbs 5:18-19).
19. The Israelites were forbidden from marrying from other nations. Intermarriages was therefore an act of disobedience.
20. The Israelites were warned against admiring another man's wife. They had to be contented with the wives they had.
21. A man was encouraged to enjoy life with the woman he loved. (Ecclesiastes 9:9).
22. The Israelites believed that finding a wife was something good. They believed that it reflected the goodness of the Lord to the man.
23. A man was encouraged to continue loving his wife even in times of disagreement like prophet Hosea continued loving his unfaithful wife Gomer (Hosea 2:1ff, 3:1ff).

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

1. Jesus looks at marriage as an occasion of joy. In the wedding at Cana, He changed water into wine in order to save the couple from shame. This was after the realization that the wine was over (John 2:1ff).
2. Jesus encouraged unity in marriage. He emphasized that a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife. Accordingly, the two become one (Mark 10:7).
3. Jesus encouraged marriage to be permanent. Accordingly, "no human being then must separate what God has joined together" (Mark 10:9).
4. Jesus emphasized that a man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her and so is a woman (Mark 10:11)
5. Jesus confirmed monogamy as the idea type of marriage when he said that a man leaves his parents and he gets united to his wife.
6. Jesus said that looking at a woman with desire to own her makes one guilty of committing adultery with her in hi heart.
7. Jesus encouraged faithfulness and forgiveness in marriage. He gave the woman caught in adultery and advised her never to again (John 8:1-11).
8. Jesus recognized celibacy for the sake of the good news and the kingdom of heaven (Matthew : 19:12).
9. Saint Paul encouraged every man to have his own wife and every woman to have her own husband (1 Corinthians 7:2).

10. Saint Paul encouraged married couples to fulfill their duties. He said that a man should fulfill his duty as a husband and a woman as a wife in order to satisfy the needs of the other (1 Corinthians 7:3).
11. Besides, Saint Paul encouraged total submission. He said that “a wife is not a master of her own body but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not a master of his own body but the wife is (1 Corinthians 7:4 and Ephesians 5:21-25)
12. Saint Paul encouraged married couples to abstain from sex in order for them to spend their time in prayer.
13. Saint Paul encouraged believers to marry instead of burning with desire. He said “it is better to marry than burn with passion.” (1 Corinthians 7:9).
14. According to Saint Paul, it is normal for a believer to marry a non-believer. What is important is for the two live together. He said that such a couple was made acceptable before God by being united (1 Corinthians 7:12).
15. Saint Paul encouraged a widow remarry any man she wishes but if only that man is a believer. Said this would make her happy (1 Corinthians 7:39).
16. Saint Paul encouraged husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church to the point of giving his life. They should love their wives just as they love their own bodies (Ephesians 5:25-28). 17. Saint Peter encouraged couple to show their beauty in the inner self to each other. He said that the inner beauty is of greatest value in God’s sight. Therefore, he disapproved outside beauty like hair style, jewelry and dresses (1 Peter 3:3-4).
18. Saint Peter advised husbands to live with their wives with proper understanding that they are weaker than them (1 Peter 3:7).
19. Besides, Saint Paul encouraged husbands to treat their wives with respect. He emphasized that this would make them together to receive God’s gift of life (1 Peter 3:9).