

Socio-Religious Dimensions of Spinsterhood in Muslims Societies of Katsina, Nigeria

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Abstract: This is a study of spinsterhood. Spinsterhood represents a crucial period in the socio-cultural and reproductive development of a woman. It is an important period in that if not managed adequately and responsibly could destroy adulthood and what follows thereafter—marital life and family institution. Spinsterhood period is thus socio-culturally guided by certain societal norms and values in order to make life easier for women. However, the increasing dynamism of contemporary period is a cause for concern. This is why this study examines the religious aspects of spinsterhood in Muslims societies. The area is ironically neglected, even though Islam has provided guidelines for the life and activities of spinsters. The paper argues that spinsters in Katsina city, Nigeria are exposed to acute social, economic, cultural and psychological shocks, which if not handle adequately and responsibly could destroy the sanctity of marriage as well as family institutions. Various suggestions and recommendations are offered in this paper as to the best way to deal with this social stage in the development of females.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage being a natural phenomenon is encouraged by Islam and in some instances is mandatory. The Muslim Ummah seems to have forgotten its religious teachings on social system, thereby delving into numerous problems one of which is the phenomenon of spinsterhood, a phenomenon that emerges when parents and the society fail in discharging their duties towards offspring upbringing. Even though the role of marriage in producing an upright and decent individual is not farfetched, this has become one of the difficult tasks to carry out. Year by year the number of spinsters due to one reason or another keeps on rising, thereby giving way to a lot of social and religious problems. This paper aims at shedding light on the concept of spinsterhood, its causes, impacts and solutions to it from Islamic perspective.

II. PREAMBLE ON MARRIAGE

Allah the exalted had created human being in two opposite sexes (male and female) for proliferation of progeny. He says in His Glorious Book:

O mankind! Be dutiful to your lord, who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created wife {Hawwa (Eve)}, and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah through Whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is ever an All-watcher over you. **An-nisa 1**

Man and woman complement each other to produce a unified human race. The Prophet (may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him) said on this: "women are partners to men".¹ Islam encourages marriage due to the benefits derived from it. The Messenger, (may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him) also said "The world is (full of) joy, the best joy of the world is an upright woman (wife)".² He also said: "Four (attributes) are part of attributes of Messengers: Modesty, applying perfume, brushing teeth (Siwak) and marriage".³ The entire universe is characterized by pairing (opposite) as Allah created things in pairs: for living things male and female, for inanimate things, positive and negative, so also for atom we have electron and proton. Allah Almighty says in His book: And of everything We have created pairs, that you may remember (the grace of Allah)." Adh-Dhariyat 49.

"Glorified is He who has created all the pairs of that which the earth produces, as well as of their own (human) kind (male and female), and of that which they know not." **Ya-sin 36**

Man's need for woman and vice versa is in consonance with Allah's laws, for sustenance of human race, and neither of the sexes can do without the other at all cost. That was why when Adam (may Allah's peace be on him) was put in the paradise, he felt lonely until his partner Ha'uwa was created for him. This is the message contained in Allah's saying:

It is He Who has created you from a single person (Adam), and (then) He has created from him his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her. When he had sexual relation with her, she became pregnant and she carried it about lightly. Then when it became heavy, they both invoked Allah, their Lord (saying): "If You give us a Salih (good in every aspect) child, we shall indeed be among the grateful." **Al-A'araf 189**

Marriage is the only legal means of satisfying one's desire. Islam has not restrained this desire by outlawing it, or advocating monasticism or cut off (from taking wives). Sa'ad bin Abiwaqqas (a Prophet's companion) may Allah be pleased with him said: "The Messenger of Allah (may Allah's blessings and peace be with him) disapproved of Uthman bin Madh'un's cut off from people. If he had approved it, we would have adopted it".⁴

Doctors have identified three aims of marriage namely: Safeguarding progeny, expelling liquid which if retained will harm the body and deriving enjoyment.⁵ It is through marriage that offspring are traced to their origins. If contact (between male and female) is allowed unrestricted there would not have been any difference between human offspring and that of animal (i.e. cannot be traced to any parents). Therefore, names will have no relevance or will not be a source of entertainment and bliss.

III. DEFINITION OF SPINSTERHOOD AND ITS CATEGORIES

A spinster in Arabic language is an unmarried adolescent lady. The word is derived from a root applied to a lady that has stayed long with her family after attaining the age of puberty to the extent that she is no longer counted among the virgins. The term is applied to both male and female unmarried persons, but in recent times the term is restricted to a female. As for the age of attaining spinsterhood, there are divergent opinions. The Maliki School of law is of the opinion that spinster age ranges from thirty to thirty-five, forty or sixty years. Some scholars are of the opinion that the age of a spinster depends on the norms of a particular society. This group of scholars maintains that a spinster is that lady that has stayed long with her family after attaining the age of marriage (puberty), and has known what is good for her.⁶

It is worth noting that the concept of spinster differs from one society to another in both rural and urban areas. As such people of Katsina in the ancient time considered a spinster as any lady of twenty years of age, without a husband. That was so because girls were not used to continuing (western form of) education in those days. But as time went on the term was applied to a lady of thirty years of age and beyond outside wedlock.⁷

IV. SPINSTERHOOD: INCEPTION, SPREAD AND RATE IN KATSINA (CITY)

In the olden days the people of Katsina like other Hausa people used to marry out their girls at an early stage at about nine to twelve years or slightly above, Boys were also generally married at an early age even if they were not employed nor had any craft. The father used to cater for the need of the couple until they became independent.

It was considered a taboo for parents to allow their daughter to stay without getting married beyond the age of seventeen years. Such a lady would be a subject of discussion in any given gathering. Such a lady was called by several (unwanted) names, such as "a left over", "hated" etc. Some parents went to the extent of taking their daughters to a hole of ants and bathed them there, believing that such an act would clear them from the abominable situation they were witnessing. Some clever fathers gave their daughters in marriage to an unknown husband called "Muhammad" and few days after the wedding they handed the daughters over to someone without collecting a dowry from him, such a marriage was classified as a gifted marriage. This act was very common (in Hausa society) in the olden days. Late marriage began (in Hausa land) after Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, when people embraced western form of education, which was earlier on detested.

Since then parents developed interest in allowing their daughters to pursue western form of education up to secondary school level without getting married. This act became widespread when its material gain became manifest, coupled with the fear of fathers over the fate of their daughters when divorced by their husbands or in the event of the demise of the husbands, a situation in which a lady find herself in distress or poverty; and nobody to cater for her and her children, from both her relatives and former husband's relatives. She will remain deprived together with her children, while her colleagues that completed their studies will be enjoying themselves with the monthly stipend they collect from their employers.⁸

Among the factors responsible for late marriage by ladies in Northern Nigeria generally and Katsina city specifically is the emergence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which advocate women liberation from marital restrictions and men's domination. The main aims of these organizations include: equating woman with man in all facets of life. They have a common slogan "what a man can do, a woman can do better". These organizations made impact on individuals, especially when the programme "Better life programme for rural women" was introduced from 1986 to 1993 which called women to be independent and free themselves from societal aggression and men's domination.⁹ Later in 1995 a new

programmetermed“Family Support Programme” was introduced with the same aim as the previous one. In this manner series of programmes (non-governmental and governmental) followed, some were individually based, while some were collective which paved way for in-depth western form of education and detesting early marriage. That is why a spinster is referred to as a remnant of western form of education “KisanBoko”

According to Mayor of “GidanWaya”, “SararinKuka”, “Tudu”, “UnguwarYamma” and “UnguwarAlkali” areas (of Katsina city), there is no precise statistics concerning the number of spinsters in Katsina. This was so due to absence of register as against birth rate records. He, however, confirmed the existence of the phenomenon at alarming rate.¹⁰ The Mayors of “KofarKeke”, “FilinSamji ta Tsakiya”, “Tudun Wada ta RiminBadawa” and “Area Council” areas (of Katsina city) also confirmed the escalation of the phenomenon in their domains year after year. The spinsters in 2013 were estimated at 200.¹¹ MukhtarSalihuJino, Producer, Companion F.M.Katsina maintained that spinsterhood in Katsina is in the increase. However, repeated complaints from parents coupled with troubles posed by this phenomenon, forced government to arrange meetings on the problem. Part of that is the house-to-house programme in 2006, in “KofarYandaka”, RafinDadi”, “Unguwar Alkali”, “Saulawa” and “Inwala”. Different programmes were also designed on this issue, such as “DominIyali”, “Hantsilekagidankowa”, “How nadey”, “Tunyanadanye”, “DuniyarMatasa”, and “TsumagiyarKanhanya”. These programmes were aimed at educating citizens about the danger of spinsterhood and similar phenomena, their causes and consequences.¹²

However, the rate of spinsters ranging from twenty-five years and above in Katsina metropolis as at 2006 as confirmed by the 2006 population and housing census are two thousand seven hundred and eighty-one (2781) spinsters,¹³ and projected to be 3,986 (Three thousand seven hundred and eighty-one) Spinsters at 2018.¹⁴

V. FACTORS OF SPINSTERHOOD IN KATSINA CITY

There are many factors responsible for spinsterhood in Katsina city. These include economic, social, as well as physical and health.

Economic factors:

- 1- Marital goods (wares/properties). These include clothes, with which couples are proud of, most of which are not used by them, because they are often provided in excess. These overburden the (male) youths who often take loans from banks and other creditors.
- 2- Ceremonies conducted before and after marriage/ceremonies, in which a lot of animals are slaughtered most of which is misused and part dumped into dustbins.
- 3- High rate of rented or owned houses and furnishing them, which overburden the family of the bride.
- 4- Poverty, unemployment and limited job opportunities. This phenomenon renders most youths unemployed. Even the employed ones receive very meager salaries that cannot cater for their basic needs, let alone catering for their wives.
- 5- Orphan girls who lack sponsors for their marriage remain unmarried.¹⁴

Social factors:

- 1- The attitude of suitors of pretence, whereby a boy pretends to be well to do before a fiancé, which will be exposed to the lady at a later stage and result in separation of the couple.
- 2- High educational qualification of girls, which makes them feel above their male counterpart with lower educational qualifications. This renders the ladies unmarried for a longer period thereby rendering them spinsters.
- 3- Marrying out girls to sons of father’s relatives (uncle) despite non-acceptance of the offer by either party (boy/girl) which leads to non-cordial marital life between the spouses.
- 4- Insistence by either of the two parties on securing a matching partner before marriage, whereby a party makes it mandatory to have a partner from same social (higher) class or economic standing.¹⁵
- 5- Moral and ethical decadence on the part of some youths whereby some prefer using un-lawful means and tools for satisfying their desire, while some prefer committing adultery sodomy over marriage, thereby warrants the spread of this phenomenon.
- 6- Rejection of husband by girls for fear of molestation from earlier wife/wives of the husband or sheer jealousy on the part of the new wife or the earlier one(s).
- 7- Delay in marrying out the elder daughter. This warrants the younger one to wait more than necessary just because her elder sister has not secured suitor. This eventually leads to spinsterhood.

Physical and health factors

- 1- Deformity in physical appearance of a girl, or availability of an ailment in her such as sickle cell disease, or being disturbed by Jinn, which displaces her psychologically, such issues deter a girl from marriage, thereby rendering her a spinster.

- 2- Conniving with magicians to deter suitors from approaching a girl for marriage by previous rejected suitor.¹⁶

VI. EFFECTS OF SPINSTERHOOD ON A SPINSTER AND THE SOCIETY

Negative impactson a spinster: The long waiting by a spinster can result in negative effects on her, on varying degree ranging from one person to another.

Physical effects:

- 1- Frustration and deprivation: A Female psychologist maintains, “a spinster is a psychologically distressed person, especially when looked down upon. Undoubtedly, marriage coupled with the entertainment and satisfaction of sexual desire it avails, is one of the most important means of psychological satisfaction. We ladies find it difficult to stay without (associating ourselves) with men.”¹⁷ The feeling of motherhood and affection to marital life is coherent in the nature of every lady.”Let’s us listen to a testimony by another lady. “Depriving a lady affection is more dangerous to her than depriving her sexual desire. Satisfaction without affection has no effect on a lady. A tenderly expression and affectionate touch have greater impact on her, and even gives her sexual satisfaction.”¹⁸
- 2- Aggression: a spinster blames men of the society for neglecting her and feels jealous of the married women. As such she views the society with envy, and hatred.
- 3- Loneliness and inclination to associating with people (spinsters) of her like instead of relating to the public.
- 4- Psychological distress and fear that deter them from sleep, as they suffer from marriage deprivation and children.

Ethical effects

- 1- Discarding the veil and application of cosmetics (for attraction) and chasing male youths, thinking that may attract husband in the long run.
- 2- Immoral attitude such as resorting to irregular sex (sodomy/lesbianism), taking drugs and narcotics, resorting to illicit pair groups, outing to parties for recognition, which eventually lead to unlawful relationship.¹⁹

Social effects

- 1- Wealthy spinsters will be hunted (by male) so that their wealth is hijacked and enjoyed on the basis of marrying them.
- 2- Spinsters are vulnerable to tests due to numerous suitors who do not have regard for married ladies, let alone divorcées and spinsters.
- 3- Lack of social balance from fathers or brothers of spinsters on the basis that they (spinsters) need to be protected.²⁰

Religious Effects

- 1- Spinsters resort to quacks (soothsayers) on the belief that they are bewitched (charmed), thereby falling into associating Allah with partners without achieving their goals.
- 2- Spinsters involve themselves in adultery, killing (quashing illicit pregnancies) or hidden act (using hand or its equivalent to satisfy one’s desire). The educated (western form of education) among spinsters use “sex tools” available in the markets and special shops. Details of these tools are found in magazines and shameless dailies. Internet pages also carry such information accessed through mobile phones (and other means). Girls use these tools unknown to their parents. To make it worst some parents know of this atrocity by their daughters as attested by a spinster. She said such parents believe in the permissibility of such acts by their daughters saying “Do their daughters have any means other than this?”.
- 3- Spinsters are deprived of source of goodness and reward found in children upbringing and the supplication by good children.

Physical and health effects

- 1- Limited chance of birth. Ladies have specific age beyond which they do not give birth any longer.
- 2- Vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases that are often transmitted through illicit sexual relationship.²¹
- 3- Permanent nervous disorder which leads to diseases such as hypertension, shamelessness, gastric acidity.²²
- 4- Breast cancers, cancer of the virginal, sexual laxity²³, difficulties in sexual contact are witnessed when married. Psychological and physical disorders are also realized, such as headache, disrupted menstruation and loss of hair.²⁴
- 5- Death: it was stated in the United Nation’s report carried by Ash’sha’b newspaper of Saturday 6/6/1959 that married couples live longer than un-married people. This report was based on researches and statistics conducted worldwide in the whole of 1958.²⁵

Material effects

- 1- Spinster faces livelihood problem on the death of parents or at their poverty.
- 2- education in work force due to loss of workers as a result of reduction in birth rate (caused by spinsterhood).

This does not mean all spinsters face these problems, because some accept what has been predestined for them by Allah Almighty. They therefore concentrate on other issues such as work (employment), search for knowledge, public issues and upbringing of the children of their brothers and sisters.

VII. NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON THE SOCIETY

Social and ethical effects

- 1- Emergence of bad norms and attitudes as a result of illegal sexual relation, which give birth to illegitimate children, some of whose parents are not known.
- 2- Widespread of discarding the veil and application of extensive cosmetics by spinsters which entice young unmarried girls to emulate them, even though the goals of the two parties differ.
- 3- Widespread crimes and high rate of abortion.
- 4- Rendering families to destruction as a result of the crimes committed by spinsters, such as discarding the veil, intermingling between sexes to attract men.
- 5- Widespread of chronic and fatal diseases in the society and reduction in production of progeny.
- 6- Weakening social ties that are encouraged through marriage and relationship (parent and children relationship).
- 7- Proliferation of illegal marriages such as temporary marriage.
- 8- The act of spinsters being pushed to marrying non-matching husbands lead to divorce.

Material effects

- 1- Additional burden on the nation. This is caused by tackling diseases and deviations, which attract extra budgetary allocation to health and legal bills of the nation.

VIII. SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF SPINSTERHOOD FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Solutions to the problem of spinsterhood are not easy. The phenomenon requires joint efforts of parents, preachers, judges, teachers, Imams, media and the authorities. Strategies for tackling the problem of spinsterhood include the following:

- 1- Consolidating religious teachings in the light of the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). The Muslim Ummah in its long early history did not witness this phenomenon except few instances. But when religious teachings were abandoned catastrophes emerged. As such there is need to consolidate faith, sincerity and reliance on Allah in all affairs.
- 2- We need to consolidate our manners by emulating the guided predecessors, by ensuring the following:
 - i. Instilling correct concept (of religion) in the minds of the Muslims as well as the knowledge of how to handle such a calamity, by making it clear that the world is home of tests. Victims of such calamities need to be sympathized with.
 - ii. Fathers should seek the hands of pious people in marrying out their daughters, as done by early upright personalities such as Umar bn Alkhattab who offered his daughter Hafsa to Abubakar and Uthman when she lost her husband.²⁶ Sheikh Sa'id bn Al-musayyib also offered his daughter to his student for marriage.²⁷
- 3- Muslims should join hands in seeing that ladies get married. The Caliph Umar bn Abdul-azeez used to call on daily basis "where are needies, indebted, marriage desiring people?"²⁸ (to be assisted in their needs).
- 4- Early marriage should be encouraged as contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet. Sheikh As-sa'dy in his explanation of the verse talking on ladies that are yet to witness menstruation, described them as "young girls".²⁹ The Prophet's wife Aishah got married to the Prophet at the age of nine years.³⁰ Imam Ash-shafi'i said he saw a grandmother in Yemen who was between twenty-one and twenty-two years old.³¹
- 5- Polygamy should be encouraged. This is an honour for ladies in Islam. A man can marry up to four wives as long as he can do justice to them. Otherwise he should marry only one wife.
- 6- Norms and values at loggerhead with shari'ah, mistakenly considered as yardstick for civilization should be rejected (by the Muslims).
- 7- The issue of obtaining a higher academic qualification before marriage should be discouraged. It has been established that several wives with low academic qualifications live a happy marital life. A successful marriage is the one led by peace and rest of mind.
- 8- The issue of matching (equality) between couples is often misconstrued. It does not mean that a lady must not marry except a husband from her tribe or who matches her materially or her match in educational qualification etc. Rather as much as Islam allows considering matching between the spouses, the main yardstick is match in (religious) uprightness. It is wrong to give out a lady in marriage to an indecent person. Scholars are of the opinion that when a lady's guardian denies her marrying a person of her match in religion and (good) manners, his guardianship will be disregarded. If he repeats such an act, he loses his

credibility, and will be considered a sinner, whose testimony is not accepted. Such a lady will be married out by a fresh guardian next to the disqualified guardian.³²

- 9- Marriage procedure should be simplified, devoid of extravagance, and only necessities should be catered for. The Prophet may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him gave out a lady for marriage with metal ring as dowry.³³ UmmuSulaim (a female companion) was married to Abu-talha with his Islam as her dowry.³⁴

IX. RESEARCH FINDINGS

- 1- The (spinsterhood) problem has been established, and is widespread; and is an issue of concern, to the extent that some Northern states like Kano have embarked on programmes aimed at curbing it, such as "mass marriage of divorcees". In Katsina one UmaruAbdullahi popularly known as "Tata" embarked on mass marriage getting two hundred and fifty men married, and another two hundred and fifty women married as well. This programme involved divorcees, widows, virgins and spinsters. The famous business man DahiruMangal is embarking on similar programme in collaboration with Jama'atuZalatilBidi'ahwaIqamatisSunnah, Katsina branch, under the leadership of HarithIsa, whereby a thousand woman, comprising divorcees, widows, virgins and spinsters will be married out.
- 2- There are no marriage organizations in Katsina as found in other places (like Kano).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1- Muslims should be sensitized to injunctions, through holding trainings (Daurat).
- 2- Philanthropic organizations for assisting people that desire marriage as well as formation of strong marriage foundationsshould be formed.
- 3- Parents should be guided to give out their daughters in marriage to their match, as well as uniting male and female students in marriage, and their parents to shoulder their needs pending the time they become independent.
- 4- A spinster should not be married out to an unqualified person to dodge away from spinsterhood. This is a wrong notion.
- 5- People of ability should find out for girls suitable husband ethically and religiously even if his studies or employment need to be pursued for him pending the time he can stand on his own.
- 6- Government should direct the office of statistics to carry out researches on this problem.
- 7- Universities administration and students' unions should monitor any student noticed to commit crimes in university communities and bring an end to illicit activities such as unlawful ceremonies, indecent dressing that can trigger unguided desire and rape. Lecturers apprehending female students to give out their chastity or else fail them should be closely monitored and punished accordingly.

X. CONCLUSION

This research is not aimed at discouraging female education and taking employment or frowning at serving the community. It is not also a call to early marriage that could damage the young girls, or emphasizing polygamy. Rather it is aimed at alerting the authorities (stakeholders) to the trust on them, because when a lady attains the age of marriage, and is faced with these temptations, she would be like a bunch of ripe dates dangling on the palm tree, even if it is not removed it will fall on its own; as such if a virgin lady is refused marriage, parents cannot deter her from falling into the trap of answering the call of natural desire.

XI. END NOTES

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