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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE VALUE OF CHILDREN AMONG THE NANDI

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Key words:

Value: the importance of something
Children: off springs that one has sired
whether big or small.
Nandi: It is a Nilotic sub group that
belongs to the larger ethnic group
commonly known as the Kalenjin.
Besides it are other sub communities like,
Kipsigis, Marakwet, Ogiek, Pokot,
Sabaot, Sengwer, Terik, and Tugen.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a report of a study carried out among the Nandi of Kilibwoni Division in Nandi District. The paper sought to establish the importance of children among the Nandi. It has been found out that the Nandi community value and desire children for reasons, which range from socio-cultural, political and economic reasons. From the value placed on children, it was found out that every aspect of a Nandi life dwells in, and centred on children. Purposive sampling was used to come up with the old men and women, those with children, the childless, and the clergy who were interviewed. Use of interview schedules and observation methods were applied to get Primary data. Secondary data collected from libraries supported primary data. Parson's functionalism theory was adopted. Society is seen as a complex system of inter-related parts, each of which has consequences for the operation of the system, children included. This study adopted deterministic design to determine why the traditional Nandi hold high value for children. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to arrive at the respondents desired for the study. Interview schedules were used where oral interviews were done on all correspondents. This allowed probing and discussion. Pilot testing of research instrument was done on a small sample of respondents. This was aimed at testing the reliability and validity of the research instruments. Descriptive method was applied to analyse data that had been collected.

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INTRODUCTION

Africans love children such that pregnancy and childbirth are crucial events in the life cycle of every couple. This is true of a Nandi family whether Christian or adherents of Traditional Religion. Children are valued for reasons ranging from socio-cultural, economic, to political. The Nandi attaches great importance to children, who in turn play a vital role in the community like passing on life from one generation to another. This ensures continuation of life from the past, to the present, and to the future. As such, children act as a link of the eternal chain of existence that stretches from the known past into the unknown future (Maillu, 1988). This and other reasons make a child not merely a child but a great event of the Nandi. Among the Nandi, marriage is the fulfilment of the sacred duty and the divine command to pass on life from one generation to another. Everybody in the community is expected to marry so as to get children. Anyone who avoids marriage is looked upon with contempt. Married life is therefore centered on and around children. At times, marriage is not blessed with children resulting in childlessness. The community has a network of in built mechanism to rectify this anomaly.

Literature Review

Literature reviewed is about the Nandi community's value of children. Childlessness among the Nandi is detested hence the community goes to any length to overcome it. The Kalenjin share a common language, culture, and practices. Literature on any of the sub community of the Kalinin is relevant to the present study because of the common traditions shared. A. C Hollis in *The Nandi: Their Language and the Folklore* notes that among the traditional Nandi, barrenness is overcome by letting the barren to bring up her stepchildren. Alternatively she may also be allowed to attend some of the most secretive ritual of boy's circumcision with the hope that she will conceive afterwards. J.A Massam discusses that the purpose of marriage is procreation in *The Cliff Dwellers of Kenya*. If not the couples are free to find another partner with whom he/she will live with, and sire children with. The children will enable their parents to acquire new name. For example, if a child is called *Kipkorir*, the father and mother will be called *Kwombo Kipkorir* and *Bot Kipkorir* respectively. Otherwise, a couple will continue being called by their names, which obviously tell about their childlessness. G.S Snell asserts that the prime purpose of marriage among the Nandi is procreation in *Nandi Customary Law*. A marriage is nullified through divorce if it fails to bear fruits because the Nandi attaches great value to children. Ian Q. Orchardson discusses the importance of

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children among the Kipsigis community. In *The Kipsigis* he asserts that children take care of their parents in old age, inherit property, and ensure the reincarnation of spirits of relatives. These considerations are so strong that a person who dies without a child is said to be *kome koninda*, that is, dies to eternity. To avoid such a situation, the Kipsigis solve the problem by allowing the expedience of 'woman-to-woman marriage'. E.B. Kipkorir and F.A. Willbourn in the work, *The Marakwet of Kenya* asserts that to alleviate childlessness, the barren may consult a traditional gynaecological specialist. If this fails, she may present the problem to a *chepng'orei* (diviner). If it does not bear fruits, the woman can return to her parents giving room for her husband to take another wife. These are solutions that Nandi adopt in case of barrenness. Langley discusses that children are expected in every marriage. In *The Nandi of Kenya. Life Crisis Rituals in a Period of Change*, he asserts that if a marriage fails to be fruitful, two questions arise. One, who will inherit land and property? Two, who will perpetuate the lineage? To overcome the dilemma, the community resorts to allowing the man to remarry, polygamy, the practice of 'woman-to-woman marriage' or the woman may be allowed to participate in boy's ritual of circumcision which is upheld to be very secretive with the hope that she will conceive afterwards. Reginah Smith Oboler with Hollis, explains that children, especially boys perpetuate the patrilineal descent in the work *Women, Power and Economic Change: The Nandi of Kenya*³² This is important to the Nandi community such that, if a woman fails to get boys, she seeks alternative ways of achieving this expectation. Dinah Jerotich Changwony in her unpublished work "The Role of Women in Keiyo Traditional Religious Rites" asserts that procreation is highly valued in African Societies. She says that the Keiyo consider children as a blessing from *Asis*, God. Their role in the community is to ensure continuity of the family, clan, and the community at large. She notes that a man who has many children is considered to be wealthy and blessed. Changwony says that procreation is very essential among the Keiyo. The study aimed at finding out what the Nandi people consider to be the greatest value of children.

Theoretical frame work

The theoretical framework of this study is based on functionalism theory. It is a theory that is derived from the social analytical approach in which society is seen as a complex system of inter-related parts, which have consequences for the operation of the system (Levin, 1984). Each part in some way affects every other part and the system as a whole. Society is compared to a human body which has a heart, lungs, skeleton, blood vessels, kidneys, and so on that interact to create the overall system stability. To functionalism theorists, of primary importance is the contribution of the single parts to the operation of the system to which it belongs. Each element within the system has a duty, to contribute positively to the continued existence of that system. This study has adopted Parson's functionalism theory. It states that every element in society is expected to contribute to the stability of the overall system. This is referred to as eufunction. This study views society as a system made up of several components. Each of the components contributes to its functioning. This includes children. This study attempts to locate the position

held by children in the society that warrants childlessness to be a stigma.

RESULTS

This study found out that children hold a special place among the Nandi people. Their value ranges from social to political. Their value is as explained below.

Social Value of Children

In the Nandi community, children help, care, and provide for their parents especially in old age and in sickness when they are not able to cater for themselves. The only unquestionable help comes from one's own sons. It is the last-born son who takes the full responsibility of taking care of parents at old age, while the other siblings give support whenever required. Besides this, children are expected to do certain duties to their families as part of their contribution to the day-to-day living. Girls help in the work around the house, in baby-sitting and in going on errands. Boys while in the field help to look after cattle, hunt, build houses, learn the trade or skills of their parents, and many other activities (Mbiti, 1973). Sons and daughters are believed to add to the social stature of their family for both boys and girls have their social usefulness in the eyes of their families. They bring fame to the family, especially to their parents. For example when they achieve a high status like prospering economically or becoming social figures to reckon with, their stature extends to their parents. The more sons and daughters a man has, the higher is his status in society (Oware, 1998). A home with many sons has more prestige and honour. Sons enlarge the family and the descendant group when they marry. From their families which have roots in him they add prestige and owe allegiance and respect to him. Children seal, crown, and strengthen the marriage bond of their parents. It is believed that once marriage has sired children, it is very rare to see it break. There is a common responsibility of both father and mother to the children. It is therefore the wish of every married person to have children. Boys keep the name of the family tree through their marriages. In case girls only are sired, the youngest girl takes up this role by remaining married under some customary law called *Kitunchi Toloch* literally meaning to be married to the pole post of the house. The clan identifies a genitor to procreate with the girl for a fee. These children will then carry and keep the name of their mother's family. Every parent wishes and blesses his/her children to procreate in multiples. The aim is to ensure the continuity of the clan, and the community in general (Theological Advisory Group, 1994). The worst curse a parent can pronounce to a child is *mein ma* (Changwony, 1996), which means "be un-procreative". The social status of a married couple with children is of greater significance and dignity than that of the unmarried. The status of the parents is promoted in that a mother acquires new names with the birth of children. If for example, the child is *Cheruiyot*, the parents will be called *Kwomba Cheruiyot* and *Bot Cheruiyot*, that is, father and mother to *Cheruiyot* respectively. Their real names will stop being used and this is respect accorded to them. The Nandi are concerned about inheritance of property. Heirs are the ones who inherit property. Inheritance becomes complex when there are no sons

and even when there are no children at all. To overcome this situation, a person either retains one daughter at home under a customary law *Kitunchi Toloch*. On the death of the parents she inherits the property. On the other hand the childless, may adopt a child or children who later on will inherit their property and keep the name of the family living. The purpose of naming children after the dead is to keep the departed alive in the family. Ancestors are believed to be re-born through children and dwell in them. Four days after a Nandi child is born, a name of the *oindet*, spirit is given to it. In so doing naming relates the child to a particular ancestor and the spirits of his/her ancestors in general. The ancestor is thus brought back to the living. For this reason alone, it is important for a man to have children so that the spirits of ancestors may not stay trapped in the ground where they would remain deceased until liberated (Snell, 1954). Through children, the dreams, hopes and wishes of parents are fulfilled. A person who may not have accomplished his/her dreams may accomplish through his/her children, in this regard, achievement is made for the parent through the child. For example, if a parent did not get the best basic needs, he ensures that his/her children get. In so doing, the child achieves and the parent gets satisfaction indirectly. Children present psychological satisfaction to their parents. One, children are an assurance to parents that they can procreate. They are sign that there is a *sintariet* [placenta] a sign of fertility. The presence of *sintariet* presents psychological satisfaction to the parents that there is fertility. The majority of the informants expressed a feeling that without procreation, they would rather die than live. Two, the resemblance of children to their parents brings some psychological satisfaction. Children are mirrors whereby parents can see themselves over and over again as Maillu observes:

... to have a child is to have a mirror for looking at your back, over and over. Your child is a reflection of yourself in whom, you see, study, understand, and realize yourself. Your child is a parable of your own self. Having a child makes you take leave out of yourself in order to have an outside view of yourself which should by itself is an exciting experience.

This expresses the psychological satisfaction a parent derives from having a child. Children give parents reason to live. Parents get encouraged to live a worthy life and work in order to provide for their children of which, without them, their effort¹ would be futile. The presence of children makes the parents to live a life that is more realized, more rewarding, and richer in terms of human experiences than one who chooses to have no children. The presence of children is generally good by virtue of their presence. They make a home good and lively. Some informants express the view that, a compound without children looks deserted and not appealing to stay. This means that there is neither happiness nor joy when children are absent. Among the Nandi, a childless person indirectly prays that *kona ng'o lakwa kotuiywo tugun*, who can give me a child to break utensils for me. This means that children are valued however destructive they may be. As such, a person with children has more joy for children are the glory of marriage and the more a person has, the bigger is one's glory (Mbiti, 1973). The value of children is felt in the sense that through them, the family enlarges and becomes wide. As the family enlarges, relatives

increase in number through acquisition of in-laws. A Nandi becomes happy when he acquires more relatives. Acquisition of relatives will in the long run result in the extension of the clan. Where problems occur, it is the responsibility of the whole clan to see that they are solved. A bigger clan easily solves its problems, while a small clan may not easily solve. Lastly, there was a social stigma associated with barrenness. As a result of this, a person ensured that he or she had children so as to avoid "social blame". In social meetings, those with children were accorded more respect and recognition than those who did not have children. More respect and recognition was accorded a person whose first child was male. Such couples became sponsors at male or female initiation ceremonies (Oboler, 1985). Contrary to this, they are not given any responsibilities as far as socio-cultural matters were concerned. For this reason, every person strove to have children of both sexes and if the first-born happened to be a boy it was an added advantage. There are also religious reasons as to why children are desired.

Procreation is seen to be a religious act. God gave both man and woman the ability to bring forth children through marriage. In so doing, the married couple ensures that the Nandi community continues existing. Mbiti describes the continuity of life as a link of the eternal chain of existence that stretches from the known past to the unknown future (Maillu, 1988). It is expected that man should continue life and not break the chain by a deliberate refusal to have children. The desire to have children is deeply rooted in the hearts of both men and women. On entering into matrimonial union, they regard procreation of children as their first and more sacred duty. It is then the wish of every traditional Nandi couple to practice the divine law of procreation. When children become forthcoming, parents are happy to receive the fruits of their sacred duty, procreation. The traditional Nandi believe that *Asis* (God) blesses them and provides them with their needs. Blessings are seen as gifts from God. God is believed to give a married couple children as a supreme gift of marriage (Oware, 1998). This gift is received with joy and celebration. Children become a medium of blessings, which parents receive from God; hence they contribute very substantially to the welfare of the parents. The traditional Nandi respond negatively towards any type of disability. Disability is associated to wrong done and not rectified. While on the other hand, a person without any form of disability is considered to be right before *Asis* the creator. Barrenness and sterility are forms of disability and are viewed negatively. The barren or the sterile are made to feel that *Asis* is passing some retributive punishment on them for some evil that was done by either the concerned person or one member in their family. When children are born, they act as an assurance to their parents that they are right before God. Children prepare parents to proceed to the next destination of life having accomplished their sacred duty of procreation. Children act as a sign to them that they can continue and proceed to the next destination without fear. Once assured that they have accomplished their duty of procreation, parents do not fear to die. On the other hand, a childless person has the fear of getting old without a child. This is the fear of extinction of the name of the concerned. Maillu compares the fear to the fear of going to war without weapons, the fear of falling sick without a child, the fear of dying without a child, the fear of extinction. This is a traumatic experience of the childless informants. A couple

desires to have children so as to accomplish responsibilities. The traditional Nandi value the practice of religious activities. Religious leaders perform religious activities on behalf of the entire community. Children are desired so that they can carry on these religious activities when the older religious leaders retire or pass on. Among the Christian community children are valued in that they form the church of the future. The church composes of the adults, the youth, and the Sunday school group who are the children. A church cannot be complete without any one of the mentioned groups. This is because the church promotes members from one group to the next in relation to age. The Sunday school group forms the base of the church. They are the churches of the future. For the same reason, children in the traditional Nandi are the builders of religion in future. Besides these socio-cultural values of children, they are also valued for political purposes.

Political Value of Children

Children play a role in the political set up of the Nandi people. In times of cattle raids and enemy attack, warriors who are mainly men offer protection. Nandi boys are taught and trained from childhood to be warriors so as to protect their people and families from external attacks. Boys ensure that they provide enough security to their people. A man with sons feels more protected from outside invasions. Children bring people together through marriage and friendship. There is a cordial understanding between circumcision mates called *bakulei*. The *bakulei* form a strong bond. Families have close ties with those families whose children are *bakulei*, or whose sons and daughters marry. The bond is very strong such that when one is in trouble, the others are more than ready to help. Sons and daughters create harmonious relationships.

Summary

Children among the traditional Nandi are highly valued. They play a major role socio-culturally, politically, and economically. Both sexes have roles to play in the society. However, boys are preferred to girls. The Nandi stigmatize childlessness.

Conclusion

From the study conducted among Nandi of Kilibwoni Division, Nandi District, it was found out that children are held valuable in the community. Their value ranges from social to political. Their place in the community brings stability.

Recommendations

The report recommends that children should be taken care of so as to bring the desired equilibrium in the community. Incidences like child abuse, abortions, infanticide, and child neglect should be a thing of the past. It is the duty of everyone to ensure that children are given their rightful position as children so as to meet the societal expectations of them.

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