

## **Culturally arranged marriage in Kurdish society**

Abdulwahid Khandarash

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I am neither a priest nor a cleric, but I am a person with strong religious ties to Islam and its traditions. Also I am practicing my religious rules as much as I see it spiritually, physically and socially beneficial for me and my family.

Furthermore, I am against all kinds of religious extremism but I believe all religions and faiths have both advantages and disadvantages; so in order to overcome the life obstacles; one must differentiate between these two. In my culture some religious and tribal traditions have been mixed up, so many people misunderstand those traditions and they cannot differentiate or they are not used to do so.

Cultural marriage is regarded as one of those religious-tribal traditions in Kurdish culture which its practice dates back to thousands of years. Marriage is one of the most important events in a girl/ boy's life. Most Kurdish parents prefer early marriage arrangements for their children. Many strict Kurdish Muslims view age of 14 as perfect age for marriage and they do not allow their children turn 16 years before marriage. It is clear teenagers under 16 years cannot determine their fate and are not able to make a decision independently; they are usually under hegemony of their parents' ideas.

Culturally arranged marriage in Kurdish culture constitutes from several important purposes. The most important is keeping on with family traditions; then, following parents, grandparents and older siblings' ideas and advices. A boy or a girl, who obeys their parents' desire, is the most respected and praised by every one. Hence girls and boys mostly following their traditions and accept culturally arranged marriage. Here it is very interesting example to proof what I am saying.

Nechirvan Barzani the Prime minister of Kurdistan Regional Government was not allowed to marry outside Kurdish cultural rules. His uncle Massoud Barzani the president of KRG forced his nephew to marry his daughter. After a long time discussions and interfamily problems finally Nechirvan accepted his uncle's idea.

The first step to start the process of culturally arranged marriage begins with exchanging a message between the boy and the girl. One of very close relatives plays the role of a messenger. This message sometimes could be indirect; the boy is not aware but the messenger carrying out his/her duty by talking to a girl on behalf of the boy; once the girl or the girl's parent responded positively, the messenger publicizes the quest to the boy and his parents. Also sometimes the first step is taken by parents in an absolute secret condition, after they agreed on the main points, and then explain everything for the boy and the girl. Both of above mentioned ways are common and acceptable in Kurdish community. Lets not forget that about 90% of the Kurds are Muslim; it is not something strange that after 1400 years Islam has effects on Kurdish culture and traditions. According to Islam sexual relations before marriage is Haraam and not allowed. That is why parents need to think about all preparations for marriage before their children fall into difficulties and commit a mistake. Once after 90s decade when a flood of Kurds headed to Europe and overseas, these traditions been transferred to Kurdish communities in diaspora too. They encourage their adult children to visit Kurdistan to have more intercommunication with Kurdish society and seek for their right person there to get married with.

The Kurdish communities in the diaspora, who are not a big population comparing with other migrated ethnics, trying their best to keep going with their own traditions and culture. The biggest Kurdish migrant community living in Germany, who number between 400,000 to 600,000; according to unofficial censuses. Most of Kurdish first generation migrants still alive, because Kurdish ethnic possibly is the newest migrant ethnic in the world. This generation has maintained strong ties with Kurdistan and Kurdish culture, although they have accepted the authenticity of living in the west world. The next generation has differences with the first but still proud of their ethnic culture and trying to have chance to choose the bests of both cultures. Many of the next generation prefer culturally arrange marriage because they believe this could be the best way to keep their traditions and maintain their ties constantly with their parental homeland and culture.

I personally witnessed almost a dozen of cases of such arranged marriages since been to New Zealand on 2001. The first case was my brother's marriage. My mother discussed the issue with her brother and asked his daughters hand to my brother. Once my uncle and his daughter agreed, my mother explained everything within our family, all supported mum's idea and my brother agreed too. Later the marriage ceremony was took place in Kurdistan; the girls family (my uncle's family) invited their friends and relatives to take part in a party. Then sent us the film and we appreciate what they done for the girl. After the girl arrived here in New Zealand we made a big wedding

party... Now, after nine years they are very happy; they have two sons and very close relations with Kurdistan.

Another example is my neighbor's daughter whose father is an Arab origin but the mother is Kurdish and has the most influence of her children. She is a linguist and well educated person who is holding PhD, meanwhile she is committed to keep going with her Kurdish traditions. Hence, she arranged a cultural marriage for her daughter on 2005. The boy was from her hometown. He was a physician. They arranged a meeting in Malaysia. The boy flew to their and my neighbor flew too alongside with her daughter. They conducted a small marriage ceremony in there hosting hotel and spent 10 days there. After a while the boy came to New Zealand and they made their wedding party immediately here in Hamilton.