

Kalagan Wedding Customs

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Abstract

This study on Kalagan wedding customs was based on: texts by Kalagan themselves; recording of a speech at a wedding; an interview; and personal observations at three weddings. The paper outlines the complete procedure that leads up to the wedding starting with the presentation of the man's request to the girl's family (presental), on the engagement (kagon) and the actual wedding (kawin). Several aspects of Kalagan wedding customs can be considered outdated, such as pre-arranged marriages and the *daut* (the chanting of advices for the young couple). Other aspects have changed considerably over the last decade or two, such as how high, or what should be the bride price, and who pays for the wedding expenses. But many other aspects are still practiced to varying degrees. Specifically, the three steps presental, kagon, kawin are still observed.

Keywords: wedding customs, engagement customs

Introduction

The *Kalagans* are a Muslim people group living along the coastal areas of Davao Oriental, along the Davao Gulf, as well as in Muslim clusters within Cebuano towns such as Mati or Lupon. Their wedding practices have a long tradition, but nowadays aspects are changing due to a wider experience of the younger generation, outside influences from the Cebuano community as well as their own attitudes towards expenses and how their wedding should be conducted.

Methodology

The study on Kalagan wedding customs was based on seven texts written by Kalagans themselves during a time span of seven years (1983-1990). Most of these texts came out of a writers' workshop conducted by Ritsuko Yamani in Lucatan, Tarragona. Furthermore, it was based on a text that was a recording of a speech at a wedding, as well as an interview that was conducted in Mati in 1992. Apart from the texts, personal observations at three weddings held in Mati in 1990 and 1991 form the basis for this study.

Discussion

Presental. A young man comes to like a girl. One day he goes to her parents' home and tells them that he likes to talk to their daughter. The young man will tell the girl that he would like to get engaged (*kagon*) to her. The traditional answer of the girl is "If my parents agree, then I will agree as well. If they don't, then I won't either."

After the young man has left, the parents ask their daughter what they have been talking about. The girl tells them that the young man would like to get engaged to her and that his parents and relatives will come on a specific day to present (*presental*) their request.

This procedure may already be outdated for many Nowadays the young people get to know each other at school or in gatherings, and they may have already started a relationship before the man approaches the girl's parents. However, the day will come when the girl will tell her parente that a particular man's family will come for the presental and ask for an engagement

For the presental, the young man's father, some relatives and the young man will go to the girl's house in order to talk to the girl's parents. If, for some reason the father cannot go, a close relative such as the grandfather or uncle can take his place. They will take some rice and food with them, because after they will be responsible for providing a meal for the girl's family after the presental.

After some informal talking, the man's father (or relative) will talk to the girl's father and tell him of his son's interest in his daughter, and that they have come to arrange a date for their engagement (*kagon*). The girl's father will then ask his daughter whether she is willing to get engaged. The man's father will also ask his son. If the two young people are willing and the parents agree, they will agree on a date for the engagement (*kagon*). The time span between the presental and the *kagon* can vary from a few days to a couple of months.

Kagon (Engagement). The engagement is probably the most important part in the arrangement of the wedding. It is binding. Two people who are engaged are already considered married with the exception that they are not yet living together.

The engagement meeting is usually in the morning and, depending on how long it takes to settle the requirements, may last till the afternoon. The object of the engagement is twofold: 1.) agreement on the requests of the girl's family (such as bride price and expenses for the wedding); and 2.) date of the wedding.

The man's family, some relatives and friends go to the girl's house on the day of the engagement. Once again, they take along some rice and food since they will provide for the meal. There may be a "blockage" (*lupun*) at the bottom of the staircase

or the front door as they approach the house. This “blockage” is usually a white cloth with a note (or real money) attached to it asking for the payment of some money. The man’s family cannot go beyond this point until they have paid the requested amount. It is; however, possible to negotiate. The request for money is put there by some of the girl’s relatives who will receive the money.

Once the man’s family is inside the house, they face the girl’s parents and relatives. It is at this point that the man’s father sets down the boka in front of them. The boka consists of a plate with folded handkerchief which contains some money, for example P20.00 in each corner. The father unfolds it and says, “This is our boka and we have placed it here in order to make known to you that our son would like to marry your daughter.”

After the girl’s parents have talked with their daughter and they are in favor of the wedding, they present their requirements for the bride price. Nowadays the bride price is quite reasonable, but in certain cases it can still be quite high. One way of telling the man’s family that they are not in favor of their daughter getting married to the young man is by asking for a bride price that is unaffordable for the man’s family.

There are three Kalagan terms for the bride price (*saud ng gatas*, *saoo sang kaoowa*, and *sarilin sang kowangan*) that reflect an old tradition. Even though the meaning of these terms is hard to define, they are still being used for the *saud ng gatas* they usually ask for a cup or bowl. For the *saoo sang kaoowa* they ask for a *dagmay* (tubular skirt). For the *sarilin sang kowangan* they ask for livestock or money. It is not only the girl’s family that benefits from the bride price. Other relatives can ask for specific things.

After the bride price has been negotiated, they will talk about the wedding particulars such as: what day, where it will be held, who will decorate the place, who will be responsible for the wedding meal and whether the man’s family will have to pay all the expenses or whether the two families will share the cost.

The time between the engagement (*kagon*) and the wedding (*kawin*) can vary quite a bit: from some months up to a year or even longer. This depends sometimes on how long it takes for the man’s family to come up with enough money for the bride price and the wedding expenses.

Kawin (Wedding). The wedding can take place once the man’s family has completed the bride price. The requested bride price is given to the girl’s family on the day of the wedding before the ceremony.

Generally speaking, the wedding takes two days. The man’s family and relatives arrive on the afternoon of the set date. They celebrate in the evening. The wedding ceremony takes place the following morning at around 10 or 11 a.m.

In the afternoon, when the man's family arrives at the girl's house, they will find a "blockage" (lupun) at the house which requires them to pay some money. This can be as much as P500.00 or P 1,000.00. They can only enter the house when they pay the said amount.

Decorating. The rest of the afternoon will be spent decorating the room or the stage, depending on where the wedding will be held. Relatives and friends of the girl are involved in decorating. The decoration includes wall hangings with Muslim patterns and colorful curtains or cloths with tassels. All of these things are called pangondama. The bride and groom will sit on a big mattress (lomba) which will be covered with a white sheet. There will be some pillows or cushions at the back end, and either to the back or to the side of the mattress will be the presents that have been given to the couple by relatives and friends.

Evening celebration (likod-likod, kombite, katiponan, bispiras). Many people will go and take part in this celebration and enjoy the food. If the families can afford it, they will slaughter a cow. If not, they will serve goat meat or chicken. The bride is usually hidden inside the house. She is not to be seen during the evening celebration. Sometimes even the groom is hidden inside another house.

Preparing the couple. The following morning the bride and groom have to be bathed (sogbo) by the imam (Muslim prayer leader). The bride and groom sit next to each other while the imam pours water on their heads. After that the bride and groom go to different houses to change into their wedding attires. The groom usually wears a long white robe (, ioba) and an Arabic head cover. The bride wears a white outfit. This can be her graduation dress or any other white dress. She wears a colorful shawl or dagmay around her waist. It is not customary for Kalagan ladies to wear a wedding gown and veil. It is the man's relatives that will attend to the bride, and the girl's relatives that will attend to the groom. At this point, the wedding guests will already be in the house or near the stage waiting for the couple.

The *dato ustadz* (teacher at the arabic school) or imam will lead through the wedding. He will now ask the man's side (relative) to get the bride. Once they get to the room where the bride is being kept, there will be another lupun. This time it may only be P 100.00. Getting the bride out of the room is called limbon. Now the bride will be escorted to the lomba (mattress). Someone will hold an umbrella over her.

After that, the girl's side (relative) will get the groom. A small child may accompany the groom, carrying the ring on a plate, which is covered with a nice piece of cloth.

Now, both the bride and the groom are seated on the lomba. The bride's face, however, may not be seen yet. A girl is sitting next to her covering her face with a fan

to which another lupun is attached. Once this lupun is paid the fan will be removed.

The wedding ceremony. Once all the lupuns have been paid the ceremony can start. The parents and witnesses (saksi) are already present in front of the mattress or the stage. Now the imam will be called to perform the ceremony. The official paper for the municipality will be signed by the couple before the ceremony starts.

The parents and witnesses are now standing around the couple and they are holding lit candles. These candles serve as a sign between heaven and earth that the couple will not go against anything that the imam will say.

The imam will then greet everyone and asks the parents and witnesses whether the two young people should get married. They answer, “Yes, we give our consent with all our heart that they should get married.”

Then the imam asks the groom’s parents to give the plate with the ring (basingan) to the bride’s father. The bride’s father then hands it over to the groom, and he puts the ring on the bride’s finger.

After that, the groom has to stand up, and either he and the imam, or he and the father-in-law, will hold each other’s right hand as if in a handshake, and a piece of cloth will be put over their hands. Also, they will put their right foot together, and they will be covered with a pillow. Now the marriage contract will be made between the groom and the bride’s father, or the groom and the imam. The bride, sitting on the lomba, is not involved.

The actual marriage rite consists of the imam ‘s reciting of some verses from the Quran. This is called pagbatya ng hotbatolnika, the reciting of the appropriate verses for a wedding. This recitation is in Arabic. But sometimes the imam may explain in Kalagan what it is all about. The recitation mentions the five pillars of Islam: worshipping God, praying five times a day, giving alms (zakat), fasting one month a year, and if financially possible, going on pilgrimage (hajj).

Advices. After this prayer the wedding ceremony as such is over. However, some of the guests may stand up and give advises to the young couple in the form of a story or in the form of direct admonition. They will stress important cultural rules such as respect towards their parents; being faithful to each other so as not-to cause problems for the community; and the man’s responsibility to feed his family.

After this, the couple will kiss their parents and they may shake hands with friends and relatives. Everybody is now invited to eat. The couple and their families may be in a special room separate from the rest of the guests. During the meal, money may be collected from the guests which will be given as a gift to the couple (isabwagan).

After the wedding. After the wedding is over, the couple along with the man's relatives will stay in the girl's house for three days. During these three days they teach their children about marriage and family life. On the third day they will hold a *kandori*. A *kandori* is a meal with religious significance. It can be given at specific times in life (birthday, wedding, when someone dies, when someone is sick, when acquiring a new boat or house) with the purpose of either making a request to God or giving thanks. In this case the couple and their families ask God for good health and his blessings for the newly-wed couple.

After this the couple and the man's parents go to the man's place. There they may hold another *kandori*, and the people there may still give presents to the couple (*pabalongan*).

The couple may now live in the man's parents' home, or if they are fortunate, they will have a home of their own.

Conclusion

Several aspects of Kalagan wedding customs can be considered outdated, such as pre-arranged marriages and the *daut* (the chanting of advices for the young couple). Other aspects have changed considerably over the last decade or two, such as how high, or what should be the bride price, and who pays for the wedding expenses. But many other aspects are still practiced to varying degrees. Specifically, the three steps *presental*, *kagon*, *kawin* are still observed.