

## WIDOWHOOD AMONG MUSLIMS IN DEKINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

Traditional and Muslim widowhood in Dekina have suffered documentation. The Muslim widows during widowhood are still bedeviled with some of the traditional widowhood practices, the case of which should not be. Widows, especially those above the age of forty, find it difficult to get men to marry them. The men on their own part appear to be dogging the responsibility of the widows' children for the deceased. The widows, though not in all cases, are deprived of the bequest that the deceased left behind. This research aimed at investigating how Muslims in Dekina local government area of Kogi State, practice widowhood. Relying on qualitative method of research, the paper used interview as its major tool for data collection, as descriptive analysis was used for explaining the gathered information. The paper found out that the continuous mixture of traditional ways of widowhood with Islamic ways in Dekina local government is not entirely because of ignorance, but also because people still find the practices of traditionalism necessary and worthy. The consequence of this is that widows, especially of younger generation who are not comfortable with the practices are found in depression. The paper therefore concluded that the practices would continue till eternity because, young ladies who are unfortunate to lose their husbands are consistently subjected to the traditional practices of widowhood. Equally, young people who are yet to marry also see the practice as the right thing to do if they eventually become widows. It was then recommended that. To avoid or reduce depression, widows should allow and accept to remarry after completing their mourning period.

**Keywords:** Muslims, Igala, *Talaq*, Traditional, Widows

## Introduction

Widowhood is not a trivial aspect of life that cannot be seen or perceived, it is rather an aspect that befalls man as an unavoidable phenomenon, which attracts the attention of man and God in various religions and beliefs, especially Islam. If Islam has addressed issues that are trivially seeming, how much more widowhood which brings about a complete change in the status of the family life? The religion that seems to have a comprehensive code addressing the plight of the widows is Islam; it did not stop at their activities and life within the period of the loss of their husband and the waiting period, but extends to even after the expiration of her waiting period, whether to remarry or stay put.

It is on this note that this research examines the widows in Dekina Local Government Area. For it is observed that they have faced, and are still facing challenges and depression, ranging from general to personal, the end of which is not imminently envisaged, and as a result may print a permanent scar on the mental frequency of the widows in the region. Every member of the council should make a mark towards how these problems and challenges faced by the widows can be alleviated or reduced to a minimum level since it is a status unchangeable as a result of increase in death toll of men which though is a calculated attempt towards the nearness of the day of resurrection. The messenger of Allah while accounting for the signs of the last hour, on the authority of Anas bn Maalik said that men shall reduce in population while women shall be on the increase (Isma'eel 2004).

## Brief History of Dekina Local Government Area

Michael, Rundell (2004:886) stated that Local Government means the organization that provides public services in a particular town or area, controlled by officials chosen in local election. Dekina Local Government Area is boarded on the East by Ankpa, on the West by Ajaokuta, Omala and part of Ankpa, on the North by Bassa and on the South by Ofu Local Government Area. The geographical location of Dekina is shown in the map of Kogi State. Okwoli (1973:4) said that Dekina is one of the largest local governments in Nigeria and the largest of the 21 local government areas in Kogi State, Nigeria. Okwoli properly positioned the local government when he said it was the capital of former Bassa province when the protectorate of North and southern Nigeria were proclaimed in 1900. Ademu (2010:36) outlining the border towns of Ankpa agree with Michael and Rundell. He added that Ankpa is divided into 12 political wards, over 185 villages, 199 settlements with about 148 numbers of public health facilities, and 202 schools as well as over 33 markets. The Dekina main markets are located at Anyigba, Ejule, Dekina, Abocho, Iyale, Adoji, Okura, Agada, Egume, and others. Ademu (55) further claimed that prior to the advent of Islam

and Christianity in the local government; the people were predominantly African Traditional worshippers.

Ademu (37) mentioned the economic activities of the people of the local government when he said that farming was and is still the major occupation of the people. They trade mostly in palm oil and the people of Okuns and Yorubas from Kogi West and Ebiras from Kogi Central and the people of other states come to some of the markets, particularly that of Anyigba and Ejule. Prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam, Ademu (55) said the people of Dekina were predominantly African Traditional worshippers. They were so religious to the point that their religion deeply influenced their culture. According to him, Islam came in contact with the land after the Uthman Dan Fodio lead Jihad in 1804 while Christianity first came in contact with it in 1857 through the CMS (the Anglican Church) and the RCM (Roman Catholic Mission) in 1900.

### **Advent and Growth of Islam in Dekina**

In one of the works of Okwoli (1973:111), he confirms that the Jukuns contacted with the Hausa states in the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Bornu State in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Fulani Jihad of the century were the main causes of the spread of Islam along the Niger – Benue basin. Apart from the military contacts, other influences as trade and commerce, nomadic Muslim group of preachers helped to spread Islam in Jukun, Tiv, Idoma, Nupe and Igala areas. Ademu (91) asserted that personal communication with P. Okolo on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008 reveals that the type of Islam introduced to the Igala people spread like wild fire because unlike Christianity, it tolerated many pagan practices and was later purified by Uthman dan Fodio. The role of trade and commerce in no small measure contributed to the growth of Islam among Igala people and Dekina local government. The Hausas, Arabs, Yorubas, Nupe, Igala and Idoma traders transacted business together at Niger – Benue confluence and used Hausa as a language of communication.

Another factor worthy of note, which contributed to the advent and growth of Islam, was the outburst and strife between the Igalas and the Jukuns. During the period, the then Attah of Igala known as Ayegba Om' Idoko sought for the assistance for the Muslim preachers who told him to offer his most beautiful daughter (Inikpi) as a sacrifice to avert the disaster of losing the Igala kingdom to the hands of the Jukuns. The Muslim preachers were said to have prepared a strong charm which they cast into river Inachalo near the Jukun camp. That led to a mysterious rise of fish in the river and when the Jukuns ate the fish, they suddenly became weakened and poisoned. Ayegba thereafter fell upon the Jukun soldiers and defeated them in the battle that followed; Ayegba thus gave official recognition to Islamic Religion (Okwoli 1973:112). The Fulani Jihad in 1854 was

a real threat to the Igala Kingdom. The Nupes and the fulanis had seized Lokoja and raided the Northern Igala districts and along the Benue river. This led to the mass conversion of the people in Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Itobe, Gbobe, Shintaku, Gboloko, Bagana and Dekina to Islamic religion. In line with this, Okwoli (114) said 'so strong was the Islamic faith in Dekina that apart from a few slaves, Bishop Shanahan failed to get a single convert after many years and was compelled to withdraw from the area'.

### **Concept of Iddah in Islam**

The Islamic concept of widowhood cannot be understood and appreciated except a glimpse is taken at the pre – Islamic concept of widowhood in Europe and especially in Arabia. It is not hidden that inhumane treatment of women is part of the abolition made by Islam in the lives of the pre – Islamic Arabs, where the birth of a girl would be greeted with either a sigh or a curse. They even sanctioned the burial of female infants alive (Lemu 2013:160). On the part of the conduct of pre – Islamic widowhood in Arabia, the property or estate of the deceased is confiscated by his brothers or relatives at the detriment of his nuclear or immediate family. Instead of inheriting the deceased husband, the widows are rather inherited forcefully by the eldest son of her husband, or the brothers of the deceased, and are usually cohabited with; consequently, this brought about the revelation of Qur'an chapter four, verses 19 – 22 (Umar 2005 Volume 1:421).

Often, the denial of the widows' access to the inheritance of their deceased husbands had inflicted harshness and recession on them. They hardly sustain primarily, let alone fulfill their secondary needs. It was on this note that the wife of Sa'd bn Rabi, one of the companions of the messenger who died or martyred in the battle of Uhud (the second battle fought by the prophet Muhammad), came to the messenger with a complaint that the relative, especially the brother of her deceased husband, had confiscated his estate or wealth, and the two daughters had been hindered from getting married as a result; a verse of the Qur'an was revealed to that effect (Qur'an 4:11) and the new law states that 2/6 of the deceased husband's wealth be bequeathed to the two daughters while 1/8 be bequeathed to the wife of Sa'd.

Since the English dictionary defines widowhood as 'a state or period of being a widow or widower' (Hornby 2015:1784), it is therefore assumed that the Islamic concept of widowhood should cover the legal activities of the widow and widower within the confines of Islamic framework and the mundane activities of life. However, after rigorous study, there seem to be no much rules binding upon the widower in Islam, and for the purpose of research balance, there is need for the question 'why?'. This is because such may open door for criticism and allegation of gender inequality in Islam from the liberal minded Muslims and non-

Muslim, as they have always done by launching campaigns against it, and advocating for women freedom and empowerment through their writings; as evident in the work 'unveiling Islam' (Ergun, M.C. and Emir, F.C. 2002). If Islam actually reverses the female gender as it has claimed, why did it prescribe mourning for the widow and there is little or nothing binding upon the widower?

### **Iddah Period**

There is no unique or generally accepted method of widowhood in Nigeria. The dynamism in its practice is dictated by the norms of the community concerned. Hence, it is dependent on cultural orientation (Kamaldeen 2012:56). However, in the Igbo Community, the mourning generally takes the period of a year and one week, in the west where there are Yoruba speaking people, an employed widow is expected to wait for three weeks before resuming office, while for unemployed widow, it is forty days (Kamaldeen 58), the northern region seems to conform with the Islamic mode of mourning since the inhabitants of the area are predominantly Muslims. These periods that cut across various cultures and communities both home and abroad in which a woman is expected to wait after the death of her husband, with a series of activities which differ according to cultures respectively is what Islam calls the 'Iddah' period.

As soon as a woman loses her husband, she automatically becomes a widow from being a wife. This change in status brings about certain divine obligations, the most important of which is the mourning period imposed on her by Allah for four months and ten days (Qur'an 2: 234). This period should be spent in her husband's house except when it becomes difficult to do so due to some circumstances. Neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith is categorical about where a woman should observe the widowhood mourning or waiting period (Sayyid 2009:273), hence, the matter is open to a jurisprudential analogy amongst scholars, past and present; however what is generally known of a mourning or waiting period without specification on whether it is the waiting period of a divorcee or a widow among the orthodox and early generation Muslims is that it is observed in the husband's house, in accordance with the Qur'an (Qur'an 65:1), except if circumstance beyond control arises.

The four months and ten days waiting or mourning period as stated above may be more or less if the widow is pregnant by the time her husband died. It may extend beyond four months and ten days, if the widow's pregnancy is just few days or months old, and it may be less if the pregnancy is at advanced stage, perhaps four months or less to the delivery before the death of her husband; since the waiting period of a pregnant widow is until delivery (Qur'an 65:4). By implication, this means that if a widow puts to bed or delivers a baby few days after the death of her husband, she is free to remarry and is free from the burden

of waiting until after four months and ten days. The above disposition is supported by Imam ash – Shaafi, backing it up with the decree of the messenger on Subay'ah, daughter of al-Haarith to get married having given birth few days after her husband's death (Abdur Rahman 200). The few days was specified to be half a month which may be the equivalence of fourteen or fifteen days (Ahmad 77), and forty days according to Ummu Salamah's narration (Isma'eel 274). The 'Iddah' as an Arabic word is taken from the word 'al-Adad,' meaning the number. It is what a woman counts of the days and monthly periods (Sayyid 284).

### **Types of Iddah**

They are two types of Iddah in the Islamic Law; one being observed by a divorcee, called 'Iddah at-Talaaq' (the waiting period of a divorced woman), and the other being observed by the widow, called Iddah al-wafat (the waiting period observed by a woman whose husband has passed away). Since the concentration is on the Iddatul Wafat, one must know that by standard definition, Iddatul wafat refers to the waiting period of a woman after the death of her husband or after a qaadi (judge) has passed judgment of separation between a wife and a missing husband (Kamaldeen 2012:60 Op cit).

### **Duration of Iddah**

The Iddah of the various women are summed up as follows:

1. The Iddah of a menstruating woman who is divorced is three menstrual cycle (Qur'an 2:228).
2. The Iddah of a woman who is not menstruating, either because she has not started, or as a result of old age (menopause) she has stopped, or she has a problem that needs medical solution, when divorced, her Iddah is three months (Qur'an 65:4).
3. In the case of a pregnant woman (when divorced), her Iddah is until delivery i.e. her Iddah expires after she delivers a child (Qur'an 65:4)
4. For a woman whose marriage is not yet consummated there is no Iddah for her (Qur'an 33:49)
5. The Iddah of a woman whose husband has died (a widow) is four months and ten days (Qur'an 2:234, Lemu 2013:172, Abdur-Rahman 1984:200).

### **Rules Guiding the Women in Iddah of Wafaat (Widowhood)**

Since Iddah has been identified to be the waiting period of a woman as a result of separation from her husband either caused by death or divorce, before remarriage, there is need to know the divine duties and obligation upon her as specified in the Qur'an and authentic traditions of the prophet. The obligation begins first with where the widow should observe her Iddah period, and the learned among the companions (Sahaabah) and the Taabi'oon (followers) alike have differed as to where the widow should observe the period. This is because

there is no textual evidence whether Qur'an or authentic tradition of the prophet specifying where the period is to be observed (Sayyid 298), thus, the Sahaabas and the Taabi'oon (followers) have differed, some specifying that it should be observed in the late husband's house and others asserting that it can be observed anywhere, depending on the decision of the widow and her comfort as well.

In Islamic law, it is for a widow to abstain from adornment and marriage for the period of four months and ten days. According to Ibn Jibreen, it is abstinence from wearing adornments, decorative, etc and confinement of the widow in her house except for necessities or unavoidable circumstances (Abdur-Rahman16), and it is obligatory upon the widows in the consensus of the scholars or jurists (Ahmad 100). The compulsion of the waiting period of a widow extends or includes a minor, even at infancy and an insane (Ahmad 345) in the thoughts of Malik and Shafi'i. This proposition however may be subjected to criticism since the Islamic legal framework has shown through the prophetic tradition that the law is not binding upon three categories of persons, amongst whom are:

- (i) The one asleep until he is awake
- (ii) The infant or minor until she is matured or major
- (iii) The insane until he is sane (Isma'eel 251)

As for the minor, especially if her marriage is yet to be consummated, although at the age of tamyeez (sense of determination), it is for her guardian to direct her in order to prevent her from flouting the Islamic mourning ethics as exemplified by the woman who came asking the messenger whether she should or not apply the Kohl, i.e. the black coloring of the edges of the eye for her daughter, and he replied: 'No' (Sayyid 298).

The summary of the prohibitions for the widow are as follows:

**Don'ts:**

1. She should compulsorily abstain from application of Kohl (eyeliner or black coloring of the edges of the eye) (Ahmad 346), even if it is aimed at curbing eye problem. This is on the ground that a woman whose son-in-law passed away came to the messenger to seek permission to apply the Kohl (eyeliner) for her daughter who had eye problem, the messenger declined, upon the woman emphasizing that the daughter's eye may go, the messenger replied: 'even if;' neither during the day nor night.
2. She should refrain from wearing any kind of colored garment (Isma'eel 5341), including head cover.
3. She should not wear perfume except during purification from her monthly period (menstruation), but she is permitted to take a small quantity to be applied in her private parts in order to prevent unpleasant smell (Saabiq 372).
4. She should not comb (for adornment)

5. She should not apply Henna
6. She should neither paint nor make up
7. She should not wear rings and jewelries
8. She should not accept marriage proposal or remarry until after the expiration of the Iddah of four months and ten days
9. She should wear loose and free garment
10. She should not rub or oil her body
11. She should not follow the deceased to the grave.

It is worthy of note that in the phase of these prohibitions, the law has granted them some concessions which could be perceived as exceptions from the general prohibitions; and such is summarized as follows:

**Dos:**

1. She can dress a wound (whether as a victim or a practitioner)
2. She may go for pilgrimage (hajj).
3. She may cut her nails, shave the pubic and bath with soap.
4. She may oil her hair provided that beautification is not intended.
5. She can apply small quantity of scent after menstruation to prevent unpleasant smell.
6. Ibn Umar says she may apply Kohl in the case of eye problem.
7. She may go out during the day, but should not spend the night out. Ibn Umar's daughter, whose husband passed away, during her mourning used to visit them in the day, and he will order her to return home during night fall. The reason for this concession may be that because she does not have right to maintenance, unlike the divorcee who has right to maintenance in the law.
8. She may wear black colored garment, as it is not a flamboyant color, rather, it is a color of mourning in the thought of Malik and Shafi'.

**Changes in Iddah**

It must be mentioned that certain stages of life can bring about or are associated with certain changes. In a situation where a woman in her Iddah encounters any of these situations then the law should also make provision in such cases. It was earlier discussed that the Iddah period of some women is three menstrual cycles while for some others who for one reason or the other does not menstruate, it is three months; a turn of event or an eventuality may bring about unavoidable changes in the determinants of the specified time, whereby, the woman to observe in months will now have to observe in three menstrual cycle and the one observing in menstrual cycle will now have to observe in months.

The likely changes are summed as follows:

1. **Change from months to menstrual cycle:** It is a consensus that a minor or a major who is yet to begin menstruation observes Iddah in months as a



divorcee, implying that she will spend three months Iddah period. If in any case, she begins to menstruate before the expiration of the period (3 months), even if it's an hour to the time, her Iddah becomes invalid, thereby she begins counting with menstrual cycle and she waits for a period of three menstrual cycle or purity. (Sayyid 293)

2. **Change from Menstruation to Months:** The Iddah changes from menstruation to months in the case of a women who had menstruated once or twice and then the menstrual flow stops as a result of old age, menopause, medical problem or by any circumstance, her counting changes from menstrual cycle to months as spelled in Qur'an 65:4. In the same vein, it is mentioned that if in any case, the menstrual flow resurfaced having spent one or two months in her Iddah period, her Iddah changes to counting with menstrual cycle from months, reason being that she could not have reached menopause, it could have being a medical problem or a miscalculation.
3. **Change from Iddah of divorce (three months or three menstrual cycles) to Iddah of widowhood (four months and ten days).** If a man divorces his wife such that is revocable, and then dies while she is observing her Iddah of divorce, she puts a stop to the Iddah of divorce and commences the Iddah of widowhood, but if the divorce was irrevocable, she will only complete her Iddah of a divorcee without a change to the Iddah of widowhood.
4. **Change from three months or three menstrual cycles to until delivery:** In this case, a divorcee observing her Iddah in months or menstrual cycle, if observed or detected to be pregnant during or after the completion of her Iddah period, she automatically changes to the Iddah of a pregnant woman which in any case lasts until after delivery.

In a case where a judgment has been passed upon a missing person by the qaadi (Judiciary), having waited for the stipulated period of four years, the wife commences the Iddah of widowhood but if in the process the husband re – appears or resurfaces before the expiration of four months and ten days, then the Iddah terminates automatically without recourse to any text. However, the husband may have resurfaced with the news of divorce to the wife, and then she changes from Iddah of widowhood (four months and ten days) to the Iddah of a divorcee (three months or three menstrual cycles).

#### **Widowhood in Dekina Local Government**

There are several accounts on the traditional widowhood collected through oral sources, each of them; despite their similarities have area of differences. According to Mrs. Rabi Atabo (oral interview), a woman whose husband has passed on is obliged to mourn for the period of a year. It is assumed that after three months, the spirit of the deceased visits his people and the wife of the

deceased gives him water to quench his thirst. After six months, the deceased female relatives in an attempt to prepare the widow for cooking, directs the widow to touch the stones or rocks used for supporting cooking pots. She continues her cooking until the expiration of her mourning period. After the expiration of the mourning in one year, the widow informed the deceased relative about it and all the weeds (clothes) are collected. Her hair is unbraided, her nails clipped and the earrings are collected, and the widow prepared food for the deceased relative to mark her departure.

The widow may choose to remarry or stay put, but if however, she chooses to remarry, she would inform the deceased's relatives and they pour water on her palm. The widow brings a kola – nut and live chicken. After remarriage, tradition demands that the woman who just terminated her mourning period would not be allowed to bring food and water for the deceased husband's children, or if she has to do so, she would convey the food to the deceased husband's house with the permission of the relatives; failure to do so culminate into the death of the children and caused the woman swollen legs, protruding belly. In order to appease the spirit of the deceased, the woman slaughters chicken to suppress the swollen legs and protruding belly. This practice of total separation between the widow and the children is called 'akoje'. In line with tradition, the eldest son in collaboration with other male children of the deceased organized a ceremony called 'Ubi' held in honor of the deceased father and masquerades are brought to dance. The organizer of the Ubi, depending on his financial ability slaughters chicken, goat, cow etc. should the son of the deceased failed to organize the ceremony in his father's honor, but attends or participate in another person's Ubi, and probably ate or drank, he dies.

In a personal conversation with one of the widows –Aladi Omonu, in Ajiolo – Ojaji along Dekina town, she stated that the widow remains indoor for three months, the period during which she does not cook, afterwards, a locally made alcohol (Burukutu) is prepared and poured in the grave of the deceased to drink and to appease his spirit for wherever he was wronged before his departure. Afterwards, the female relatives of the deceased hold the widow to touch the fire stones in order to prepare her for cooking. The relatives of the deceased then decide the longevity of the widow's stay, whether a year or more. In the final days of the mourning period of the widow, she prepares a meal called 'Oje – Ane' (evening food) in two plates for the deceased's relatives and neighbors to mark and announce the expiration of her waiting period. Water is provided for the widow to bath, and then her clothes, lingerie and jewelries are weeded. Her hair would be loosened; her nails clipped and new clothes were given to her. Within the family, a man may be suggested to her for remarriage, the choice of which is

hers to accept or reject. If the choice of the new husband is accepted, then the widow leaves for his house that day or otherwise stays to cater for her children.

Mrs. Rukayat Isa, while stating her account mentioned that the mourning period of the widow is six months, during which she dressed in black attires preferably that is wide enough. The mode of the widow's counting after Morning Prayer was that of stone counting. According to her, she may take a stroll within the compound but cannot go to the farm or market place. While marking the widow's departure, 'Takaba' is done before she leaves. Responding to what 'takaba' is, the widow discussed that it involves singing traditional songs with the widow by other women in the house in the eve of the expiration of her waiting period till dawn. The widow is bathed, weaved, the compound is swept before sunrise, and kept tidy. The widow goes round to greet everyone and well wishers, prepares food for the villagers. While she leaves, the husband's people buys cloth for the widow and according to some other sources, the clothes are bought by her age groups.

In an interview with Mrs. Egbunu Usman, she agreed with all the previous accounts stated, except that she added that in the time past, the widow mourned for three years which today has been reduced to one and a half year. During the said period, her hair is shaved and wears black head cover or tie. She may attend to basic necessities at any time within the compound; she goes undressed folding or crossing her arms. Another account states that for the first fourteen days of widowhood, the widow is completely covered, and to be removed afterwards. She is followed by one of the deceased relatives whenever she wants to use the restroom until after three months. A locally made alcohol (Burukutu) is poured on the deceased's grave as earlier stated. This act is called 'adarane'. The widow is expected to cry every morning and late in the evening for the first three months. The respondent added that those weeded clothes mentioned in the previous accounts are thrown away. A razor is used to shave her forehead. A local hen and 'emi' is used to prepare 'Oje Ane (the evening food). The female relative of the deceased would support her to and from the bathroom to take a bath that marks the end of her widowhood.

#### **Muslims and Widowhood in Dekina Local Government Area**

Speaking with Mrs. Fatima Muhammed Musa in an interview, one of the widows in Anyigba on Muslim widowhood among Muslim women in Anyigba, she stated that when a man dies, the widow is confined within the room and does not go out in order to avoid enticing people. If she must go out, her dress code would signify widowhood and she holds a white subha (rosary), dressed in black garment and coverlet or hijab. According to her, the iddah period is five months (Oshu melu), its purpose of which is to determine pregnancy for the deceased.

After the period, some local Malams were called to recite the Qur'an and 'dalailu' (one of the prayer books usually used by local malam for prayer for the deceased); afterwards, a ram was slaughtered and shared to the people. She would go out to greet the people by a way of informing them of the expiration of her mourning period. For the widow who intends to remarry, she prepares Oje – Ane like it is obtainable in the tradition for the people and then retires to her family house.

Speaking with Mrs. Marietu Jibrin within the same neighborhood, while stating some of the requirements of the Muslim widows says that during their mourning period, which lasts for four months and ten days, she would refrain from adornments and would not go for functions except farm and market places if there is none to provide or cater for her needs. But in a community where the people provide her food stuffs, then she must be within the confines of the house. In some of the localities, the widows are prohibited from going out after maghrib (sunset) salat. Common among Muslim widows is that on the final day of their mourning period, the widow's relatives would come to assist and prepare her for her departure. A congregational supplication is organized after which a meal is prepared and distributed as charity on behalf of the deceased and his relatives. Like it is observed in the traditional widowhood, the Muslim widows stay awake in the eve of the expiration of her mourning period, because it is believed that if the widow should fall asleep, the deceased could take her away. While the tradition demands that the widows wear black garments during widowhood, the Muslim widows wear dull colors. In some families and localities, a separate ablution kettle, bathing bucket, dishes, subha (rosary) are bought for the widows. She mentioned that the custom of eating and remaining a part of it for the deceased husband is still prevalent among the Muslims women. While preparing Oje – Ane, the goat that is used is preferably bought by the widow, unlike in Ankpa where the goat must be compulsorily bought by widow.

#### **Attitude of People towards Widows in Dekina Local Government Area**

This depends on the family in question. In some places, some persons bring food stuffs from the market every five days, some from the farm and some others assist financially. In some families, especially where the deceased is wealthy, relatives of the deceased were fond of labeling the widows and point accusing fingers on her of having hand in her husband death, involving in adultery during mourning period, consequently chasing her away without the completion of her mourning so that they could sit on their wealth. They inflict the children of the deceased with charm should they make attempts or be perceived to be threats. Inheritance is not given to the wife, but the children. If there are five children to inherit five rooms or five plots for instance, the females are given little or nothing,

while the males take the majority. In some cases, the deceased would have written a will and that will is executed.

#### **Comparing Traditional and Muslim Widowhood in Dekina**

One commonest thing with widowhood across the globe, whether in pre and post Islamic era is the waiting period wherein a woman waits before remarriage. It was observed in Europe and Africa even before the advent of Islam, in some parts of the world, while the period is extended beyond the perseverance of the widow, in some others, the period is moderate. In Dekina, whether the widow observes traditional or Muslim widowhood, she is expected to inform the deceased's relatives about the nearness of the expiration of her mourning period. Both traditional and Muslim widowhood gives the liberty to widows to remarry after widowhood. It is common to organize an occasion in honor of the deceased in the local government, however, while that of the tradition is Ubi, that of the Muslims may take the form of three-, eight- and fortieth-day congregational prayer for the deceased. The tradition of dressing in black attires during mourning period in Dekina, if the earliest Muslim scholars who have proposed it are correct would be another area of similarity between the widowhood. The tradition of preparing the Oje – Ane (evening food) by the widow is still prevalent in the Muslim widowhood.

#### **Conflicts between Traditional and Muslim Widowhood in Dekina**

There are several areas wherein the traditional and Muslim widowhood in Dekina disagree. Firstly, the Muslim widowhood does not agree that there is a connection between the living and the dead, hence, the resurrection or incarnation of the ghost or spirit to the house is a mere myth and should not be revered. The Muslim widowhood also does not agree with some of the final rites observed by the widow during mourning before her departure. These rites include pouring water on the palm and breaking of kola nuts. It does not also agree with the tradition of the female relatives of the deceased preparing the widow for cooking since she was never contaminated in any way. The Muslim widowhood does not prevent the widow from bringing food for her deceased husband children and does not need any permission to do so, and it is inconsequential, the case of which is not, in traditional widowhood. Unlike the traditional widowhood, the Muslim widowhood does not compel the widow to shave her hair during mourning; in fact, never would such need arise, except in a special medical case.

#### **Impacts of Islam on traditional widowhood in Dekina**

The advent of Islam in any setting brought about modifications in their traditions, socially, economically and spiritually. For some traditions it abrogates completely and some others it modifies. Taking the pre-Islamic Arabs for instance, they bury female children alive, the men married as many wives as they

could and divorced and revoked the divorce as many times as they could. The advent of Islam brought about the stoppage of the burial of female children alive, it modified polygyny by limiting it to four women at a time (Qur'an 4:4) as well as limited revocable divorce to twice (Qur'an 2:229). Speaking with Mrs. Aladi Omonu, one of the respondents, she mentioned that some of the traditional widowhood rites were no longer obtainable because of the advent of religion. Abdulwahab Aminu, an undergraduate student of Islamic studies, Kogi State University observed that despite the influence of Islam on traditional widowhood, there is still much gap between the Muslim widowhood in Dekina and the Islamic widowhood rites that are to be observed as taught by the pristine Islam.

Mentioning some of those traditional rites that have become obsolete either by the wave of religion or modernization, Abdulwahab stated that the people do not give much credit to the roaming of the deceased's spirit around his home as the case was in the time past, the body and soul of the dead has no connection with the living. The beliefs associated with 'Ubi' (traditional burial rites) ceremony is gradually fading away as well, and of course have been substituted with the three-, eight- and fortieth-day congregational prayer organized by some Muslims during widowhood. The stringent tradition that a widow should and must not go out until the expiration of her mourning period has been softened by Islam. She may go out for her basic necessities if there is none to do that on her behalf. Mrs. Egbunu Usman argued that her account of the traditional widowhood has been waived by religion particularly Islam. The shaving of her hair, dressing in black garments has all been abolished. Furthermore, the tradition of pouring burukutu (a locally made alcohol) over the deceased's grave to appease his spirit; the widow's wailing for the first three months of her widowhood and disposing the weeded clothes of the widow all have been forgotten especially in the urban areas of Dekina local government.

It is observed from Mrs. Fatimah Muhammed's report, a widow within the neighborhood of Anyigba market that the Iddah period which traditionally was a year according to some accounts and six months according to some others has been reduced to five months (Oshu melu). With the expansion of Islamic Knowledge, Mrs. Marietu Jibrin, a tailor widow within the same neighborhood says that it was reduced to four months and ten days according to the Qur'anic injunctions. Despite the influence of Islam, there seem to be some of the cultures or traditional rites of widowhood that are still practicable by the Muslims because of the strong influence of tradition. Example of some of those traditional widowhood rites that are still prevalent amongst the Muslim widows include the preparation of Oje – ane (the evening meal), keeping the widow awake in the eve

of the expiration of her mourning period believing that should she fall asleep, the spirit of her deceased husband would take her away.

### **Plight and Welfare of Widows in Dekina**

*The plight and welfare of the widows in Dekina does not seem to be any different from the widows in the cities. If the federal and state governments have not showcased any provision to cater for the widows constitutionally or otherwise, such should not be expected from the Local governments. The wife of Lagos State Governor, Mrs. Bolanle Ambode, has lamented the plights of widows in the country, calling for concerted efforts among individuals and corporate bodies to life them up. She spoke during an empowerment programme organized by her pet project; Hope for Women in Nigeria Initiative (HOFOWEM) in Ikeja, Lagos (Adebayo 2017). According to her, the circumstances women usually found themselves in after losing their darling husbands are agonizing, worrisome and unbearable. Her words: "The life of a young widow is never an enviable one, once widowed; women in many countries, including Nigeria often confront a denial of inheritance, degrading and life-threatening mourning and burial rites and other forms of widow abuse". She added: "the children of widows are often affected, both emotionally and economically. Widowed mothers, now supporting their families alone, are forced to withdraw children from school and to rely on their labor". According to her, the daughters of widows may suffer multiple deprivations, increasing their vulnerability to abuse and others". Ambode said the overall objective of HOFOWEM is to ensure that the women are able to live happily, depending more on themselves, upon the departure of their husbands. She assured that HOFOWEM would continue to work for the overriding interest of the vulnerable women.*

Her in-laws further compound her problem as they have not been helpful to her and the children in any form. "My in-laws came soon after my husband died and asked me to relocate to the village with my children for reasons I could not comprehend. I refused but they insisted for some time and later got tired," Toyyo recalls. In an attempt to improve the welfare of the widows, especially in the area of remarriage, aside empowerments of different kinds, the Kano State government in April, 2012 have spent millions of naira to arrange marriages for divorcees and widows. Whether this step taken would be a permanent solution is another issue, but the most important is that the government has given the widows the sense of feeling that they are important and are not neglected in the society.

### **Recommendations**

Firstly, the writers of Igalaland should do as much as they can to write a compendium on the entire Igalaland traditions and cultures that cover almost every aspect of life, to which reference could always be made. Secondly, there should

be an Islamic platform that brings the widows together so as to be educated on the pristine Islamic widowhood to avoid mixing it with traditional widowhood.

Moreover, the depressions of the widows should be eased by ensuring their remarriage after mourning period, and the people should be educated on the virtues of kindness to widows and orphans, and the consequence of embezzling their bequest.

Finally, it is pertinent to device a means to reach out to the local and state government so as to call their attention to states like Kano and Lagos who have assisted in salvaging the plight of the widows and how they could be managed out of their psychological imbalance.

### **Conclusion**

The Islamic widowhood stands out in moderating and modifying the excesses of the pre – Islamic traditions that were harshly imposed on a widow who's thought of her deceased husband is enough oppression. It revealed verses which could be considered respite for the widows compared to the agony they had suffered, and in clear terms addressing the mourning periods of the widows. It reduced their mourning period to four months and ten days, gave them the right to inheritance, right to freedom to remarry their choice of man without having to force her against her will. However, the widower has little or nothing binding upon him in the Islamic law, but he is expected to use his discretion, at least to feel sober for the departure of his wife. The iddah period is a very important process stipulated for the widows and divorcees that they must observe preferably in their husband's house according to Qur'an 2:234, 65:1 and 65:4 amongst others. It is a period determined basically with menstruation and months, if the menstrual cycle is absent for a reason, and some times, its expiration of which is determined by birth in a case where the widow or divorcee is pregnant. A change may also occur depending on change in situation.

Therein, there are basic rules that she must abide by, some things she must observe and some others she must refrain from. Such period is primarily meant to detect pregnancy, express condolence, sympathy and respect for the departed soul. The advent and growth of Islam, modernization to a large extent has shaped the cultural and traditional lives of the people, even though there are still aspects of Muslim widowhood influenced by the tradition. The Dekina traditional widowhood, though in contrast with the Islamic widowhood does not seem to be too stringent to the widows. The people's attitude towards the widows in Dekina is not in all fairness; consequently, the better part of this research extols kindness to widows and orphans. There were not going to be much similarity between the



Muslim and traditional widowhood except that some of the Muslim widows adopted the traditional practices that Islam abhors.

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**INTERVIEWEES**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Date</b>
Rabi Atabo	Ajiolo Ojaji	Widow	60 years	15/11/2023
Aladi Omonu	Ajiolo Ojaji	Widow	70 years	21/11/ 2023
Rukayat Isa	Ajiolo Ojaji	Widow	75 years	22/11/2023
Egbunu Usman	Ajikipome	Widow	68 years	21/11/20123
Fatima Muhammed	Anyigba	Widow	55 years	8/2/2023
Marietu Jibrin	Anyigba	Widow	47 years	8/2/2023