Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

Posted on September 21, 2018

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Introduction

Bride kidnapping is one of the internationally known traditions in Kyrgyzstan and its surroundings. It is considered to be against the internationally recognized feminist rules as well as it is also considered as an inhuman activity. On official grounds, Bride kidnapping is considered a crime, but still, because of a number of factors, the officials mostly don't react against the kidnappers as the common public, as well as the officials, have accepted it in the name of culture, tradition, and heritage. In the cases where the bride doesn't accept her husband, the officials are only able to help the women get freedom from their husbands. The bride kidnapping is illegal in Kyrgyzstan, and according to the figure, one-third of the bride kidnappings are without mutual clearance and consensual. It is rarely seen that the kidnappers could be prosecuted for the act. The main aim of the paper is to discuss Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, its history, effects on the feminist world and human nature, as well as the social and political consequences on the new generation.

Discussion

Bride kidnapping is a part of Manas culture. The history of bride kidnapping goes back to the 19th century, but it didn't become much popular because of the Soviet Union. The tradition strengthened its roots among the native communities after the end of Russian control, which was after the 1940s and 1950s. Bride kidnapping is one of the main causes of child and forceful marriages, which result in an unsatisfactory lifestyle (Nixon & Owusu, 2017). According to an international survey, only because of the acceptance of the bride kidnapping culture, Kyrgyzstan has faced a lot many incidents of kidnapping without the bride's will. Almost 40 girls are kidnapped every minute, which counts to be more than eleven thousand females being kidnapped for the purpose of ostensive marriage. Countless women have claimed that they are forced to live a life that they didn't deserve or didn't want at all. In Kyrgyzstan, more than half of the marriages were observed to be stolen. More than 90% of the women ended up kidnapping and marrying the kidnapper as they were not left with any choice (Werner, 2009).

The start of this tradition's causes included poverty as a main factor. There is a practice of dowry all over Asian countries, and due to the bride's kidnapping, the boy's family gets unnecessary wealth exchange as well while kidnapping the girl. 22% of the people have responded to the surveys that the major factor behind the bride kidnapping is the economic gain. There are more than 50% of the

people who have discussed that they have to perform the bride kidnapping because of the “love at first sight”, fear of rejection, or a bet among the friends. An old couple explained the tradition in a positive way, saying that before the kidnapping, they knew each other and had exchanged love letters. The current way of bride kidnapping is different and unacceptable (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). The young people aggressively and violently kidnap the women, and it is against tradition.

In Kyrgyzstan, bridal kidnapping is known as Ala Kachuu, and it is highly practiced in rural areas because of a lack of law enforcement and proper, timely prosecution. There are a number of local NGOs as well as government departments that are acting against this tradition. They have gained a good influence among the native families, and the concept of bride kidnapping has been reduced in the new generation through education and proper schooling. The teachers explain the disadvantages to the young generation of the bride kidnapping concept and its disadvantages, which causes positive grooming against the bride kidnapping concept so that in the future, this issue could be resolved completely (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). There are outnumbered cases discussed in which females, young adults, and teenagers are living their lives happily, but suddenly, because of the kidnapping and lack of confidence in society’s acceptance after the incident, they have to accept the new life by marrying the kidnapper. In many urban areas as well as some rural villages, Ala Kachuu is completely banned, and the girls are protected from it so that they would be able to safely complete their education, grow in their careers, and make their lives according to their choices.

There is a recent example of a girl who suffered from Ala Kachuu (bride kidnapping) when she and her two friends at the age of twenty-one were returning back home (Handrahan, 2004). They were unable to recognize the three adults chasing them. As they were separated, the three men dragged them into the car and drove them to their residences. Nobody was there at that moment, and the girls were screaming, crying, cursing, and even hitting them, but they didn’t step back for a moment. Officially, this practice has been illegal since 1994, but still, there are thousands of girls who are suffering from this problem. It is true that many marriages continue among happy couples, but there are many cases in which the conditions of the women are miserable. They are not comfortable with their husbands and are psychologically not feeling well. There are several cases in which if a girl faces a kidnapping incident, her family doesn’t accept her in any case as she is now treated in a wrong way and has spent time with a stranger.

The laws are against the bride kidnapping, and in detail, the country has confirmed that the bride kidnapping is not allowed at all. Almost more than 5000 bride kidnapping incidents suffered a huge female population. There is no loyalty considered in this approach to the woman, and she is forcefully agreed to the marriage. The cultural traditions of the area are highly strong, and they do not allow the victims to reach the officials in a number of ways. The parents, after the incident, don’t support their young child and leave her in the hands of the kidnapper. The people and the relatives were offended by this act, but it didn’t stop their boys from acting as kidnappers (Handrahan, 2000). The marriage of girls aged sixteen to seventeen is considered legally approved with the consent of the local authorities as well as the government, but if the girl is under the age of 16 and is kidnapped for the

purpose of marriage, it is considered as the law offense and serious consequences would be faced to the kidnappers, parents or the people involved in this marriage.

The government, since 1994, hasn't planned to finally end the practice of bride kidnapping acts in serious problematic areas where the effects are severe (Molchanova et al., 2017). The authorities handle the bride kidnapping cases by understanding its seriousness and the cases in which the problem could be minimized by mutual discussion of the partners, the government, and officials trying to stay away from them. The UN Population Fund recently published that only 14% of the women were married in the past at a very young age.

The police officials didn't accept many reports, which resulted in the loss of confidence of victims from the authorities. The number of incidents has increased all over the country, and even young boys have started to practice bride kidnapping, which resulted in strict law enforcement (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999). The kidnappers would have to face ten years of imprisonment for the act of kidnapping a girl for marriage. Since the law is strict, the reporting and complaining have not increased either, and the practice of kidnapping is still the same. There are many social strengths that help the groom to perform the kidnapping act. Mostly, the families use this act as a tradition after the wedding arrangements in which the groom is provided with all the facilities, including a car, passage, and time to escape with the bride. The groom's home is decorated for the new bride. The groom's parents arrange dinner and celebrations and pray for the good future of the couple. The tradition of bride kidnapping is considered an essential norm of society, which is misused and mistreated in many different ways by strangers and other people in society (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999).

It is very rarely observed that the men who were engaged in the kidnapping were punished or convicted because of their crime (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999). The girls have no confidence in getting back their parent's support after the kidnapping, which results in the acceptance of the man who kidnapped them. This tradition is also used as a way to rape the girls of different ages. If the numbers could be studied, there were only 15 convictions in 2006, and after the strictness of the law, only 25 convictions were observed among more than 11000 attempts of bride kidnapping (Werner, 2009). The problems created because of the kidnapping and rape were the increase in the suicide attempts. Among the three kidnapping and suicide cases, only one man was sentenced to just six years of imprisonment since there is no exemption to the punishment if the victim points out the kidnappers.

There are outnumbered examples of bride kidnapping in which the cases that became popular after several years included the woman photographed by a photographer while she was being kidnapped (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). Farida was a girl at that time, and after the kidnapping, she was kept in the home of a man, where an old woman tried to convince her to accept the marriage proposal. She refuses the proposal by explaining that she has a boyfriend. She calls her brother, who, after a successful debate with the kidnapper's family, takes his sister home. After a couple of days, she gets married to her original boyfriend.

Another example is a girl named Aitilek, who was a student and was living her life happily (Werner,

2009). At the time of her marriage, she was wearing a white scarf and sitting behind curtains as a symbol of marriage. After the kidnapping, she was convinced to marry Baktiyaf, and with him, she traveled out of the city. She didn't know her destiny as there was no landline, and it was a completely remote area that was rarely occupied (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). There are many examples of the bride kidnapping in which the kidnapping resulted in the divorce as well. The UN and local NGOs have analyzed that there were outnumbered women who ended the kidnapping on getting a divorce. Almost 60% of the forceful kidnapping cases ended in divorce, some in suicide, and very few in happy marriage life. One student who just started her medical education was kidnapped on her way from school to home (Nixon & Owusu, 2017). She was married to the kidnapper. After some days of marriage and kidnapping, she left her husband's home and continued her medical education. She aims to become a doctor rather than a prisoner of her husband.

In the discussion of the bride kidnapping in the context of feminism, the feminists inside as well as outside the country are completely against this action and want the government to act strictly against these actions. Feminists believe that women are as free as men and have equal rights to freely make choices in their lives instead of being pushed or forced by men (Handrahan, 2004). Due to the rise of feminism all over the world, women were liberalized, and the world happily accepted it. Western women, for the first time at the start of the 20th century, started working in the industry. They gained positive freedom, which helped them grow in different fields of life. They were given equal rights as the men secured in the industry and job sector. Kyrgyzstan, before that time, very recently developed a culture of bride kidnapping, which is now a problematic issue all over the country because of the lack of knowledge about the original practice of the tradition and lack of education among the young men. The women of the country are highly educated, and their lifestyle is quite modernized in the urban areas, but still, in many parts of the country, bride kidnapping is practiced highly, which snatches the right of the women to choose their husband or the lifestyle they have dreamed (Ilkkaracan, 2002). Bride kidnapping is considered a crime, but still, it is highly practiced all over the country.

The ancient beliefs say that this tradition is highly precious and should be understood before practicing. Currently, the violent way of practicing this tradition has caused suffrage to a large number of women and some men as well. The men have to face imprisonment, and the women have to start a new life with a disturbed style (Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007). The best way of practicing is after mutual understanding. In this way, both would be able to start their life happily. This practice could not be implemented purely, so it's better for the people to remove it completely from their traditions and to use the internationally approved social ways to marry. In this way, the women would have the freedom to live happily, and the men would also have a good way to convince the women, as is happening all over the world, to achieve the purpose of marriage.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it can be explained that bride kidnapping is a tradition practiced in the central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan. This tradition was started in the 19th century. The main practice includes a man picking his selected bride from her home and taking her to his own home, where the family awaits the new member of their family. The misuse of the tradition is highly practiced in the country as well as in some outside areas of the country. The men are practicing this tradition in a violent way. They grab the girls in the cars, keep them, and convince them to marry so that there would be no chance for the girls to refuse. The law enforcement is not actively implementing the law against the tradition. It caused a great problem of the lack of trust and inability to defend the women from this practice. This topic is highly discussed in the feminist approaches, where the feminists are highly against the bride kidnapping. The women are unable to complain about their rights against this tradition. The violent behavior of men is appreciated by society, which causes women to secure themselves inside their homes rather than to work outside.

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