

## THE HISTORY AND CULTURAL FESTIVALS OF BURA PEOPLE IN HAWUL

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the history and cultural festivals of the Bura people in Hawul Local Government area of Borno State-Nigeria. The aim is to examine the background, history, the socio-political and economic organization of the cultural festivals, and the significances of such festivals to the Bura people. The historical and analytical methods were used including the use of primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources were obtained through oral interviews, archival materials and manuscripts. While secondary sources used, include information from the media like; newspapers and magazines, text books, journals, published and unpublished materials and internet materials. The findings revealed that the geography and the history of Bura people has relevance in the history of the people of Hawul valley. The findings also revealed that the cultural festivals of the Bura people are very significant in the life of the people, and it also revealed that, the festivals are still in practice. The study contributes to the development of the history of Bura people in the area of Hawul valley. It is envisioned that through this article, the history and cultural festivals of Bura people will be brought to limelight.

**Key Words:** Bura, Culture, Festivals, History, Hawul

### Introduction

Bura people like their neighbouring ethnic groups have rich cultural festivals which are depicted in their arts and customs. However, most of these cultural festivals are observed at different seasons and are conditioned not only by the geographical environment in which they lived but by region.

Culture in general consists of a system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge and customs transmitted from generation to generation within a social group. The emphasis here is on the dynamism of a culture within cultures. Wolf (ND) for example, asserts that, "culture is an amalgam or a field of alternatives which individuals maneuvers either to maintain the status quo or to satisfy their inclinations". Culture in simple terms can be seen as the totality of the way of life of a people, their activities for self-propagation and reservation, their ideas, hopes and fears, and their various ways of self-expression. It is on these bases that a look at the geographical location of the *Bura* people, different aspects of their History, rich culture and festival heritage, socio-political and economic organization, and finally, significance of the Bura cultural festivals is based upon.

### Geographical Location of Bura People

According to Davies (1956), Bura or Biu Plateaus is located between latitudes  $10^{\circ}15'$  and longitudes  $11^{\circ}30'$  and  $13^{\circ}$ . Though, this area covers more than the actual homeland of the *Bura* people. The people of Bura are found virtually all over the place.

The climatic conditions, of Biu area in southern Borno are unique in terms of settlement. It is comparable to Jos, despite the usual harsh weather mainly experienced in the northern parts of Nigeria, compounded by limited rainfalls (Davies, 1956). The area is mostly covered by volcanic soil. In fact, there is really never a hot and dry season. Even when it is hot in Maiduguri, it is usually cold in the area and there is always a breeze which makes the weather bearable. The climatic condition is friendly except in the month of December and January when Harmattan season is at its peak. The hot period is between March to May, while May to October is the raining season while the cold weather is from November to February.

The vegetation of southern Borno is typically the Sudan Savannah. This aspect had been covered under the agriculture. The area had both cash and food crops farmers. About 95% of the people are farmers.

The soil is fertile though with some hard rocks and stones scattered all over the area which limits some farming activities. The area is regarded as the food basket of Biu emirate and the state at large due to its soil fertility. Crops such as Maize, Guinea corn, Groundnut, Pepper, Beans, Tomatoes, and Millet are from with an added livestock i.e. rearing and grazing. There are natural and mineral resources found around like Uranium, Potassium, Potash and volcanic cortex.

### Historical Background

Generally, the Bura are a pagan tribe inhabiting the independent district of Biu in the Gujba Division of Borno, where they numbered some 36,743. There are a few in Goneri District under the Shehu of Borno,

and some 1,375 over the Yola border, near the river Hawul. These later were incorporated with their neighbors; the Hona, under the hereditary Hona chief, Giyaiye in 1914 that is responsible to emir of Yola. They never suffered defeat at the war front by the marauding Fulani people. They belong to Chadic language group found in local government of Biu, Hawul Kwaya Kusar and Shani. But it has also been stated that all these tribes came from Cameroon hills to the east of their present location; statements that are not in comparable. The Bura claim to have reached their present location in Yola province long before the Fulani invasion of the nineteenth century, and stated that they are a branch of the same tribe that settled at Bulke in the song District. They speak the same language as the Hona, the numeral of which are identical with those used by Kilba. The Bura are distributed over large tract of dense uninhabited bush.

The Bura were driven out from their northern territories by the Babur ethnic group, but maintained their independence in the hills. Within a few years of the invasion, they succeeded in recapturing their lands to within six (6) miles of Biu. They had been placed under Mai Arri of Biu (Bubur), but are a truculent race of migratory habits that are unwilling to submit to any authority. They inter marry with the Bubur, However, observing similar marriage custom and speak a similar language. The Bura are stock breeders, owing dwarf cattle, horses, donkeys, sheep and goats. The soil is poor for agricultural purposes though, in the West a farm is nearly three times as valuable as in the southeast of Hawul.

Another version of the History of Bura says the word "Bura". Hickey (1984) is derived from aggressive army ants bearing the name. Such word might have been found appropriate to give the Bura race, which was described by early European colonial anthropologists as a truculent race which was unwilling to submit to any authority. The word refers to both the people and their language. They are found in Hawul, Kwaya Kusar local Government Areas as well as in parts of Biu and Shani local Government Areas of Borno state. Some also reside in Gombi Local Government Area of Adamawa state while others are found in southern Yobe State. The 1963 National Census put their population at 176,000 (Ekanem, 1963) although in 1923 the lieutenant Governor of the Northern Region gave the population of non-Muslims in Biu District (Division), most of whom were Bura, as over 200,000. It is the second largest ethnic group in Borno state after the Kanuri and is said to rank 23<sup>rd</sup> in population among the over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The people of Bura have no written history of their own, but Hickey (1965), on the basis of linguistic area analysis and known geographical and historical backgrounds classified them under the ancestral Chadic people of pre-Kanuri Borno. They along with Marghi, Kilba, Kibaku, and the Babur substratum are some of the Biu-mandara ancestral groups. Like the Hausa and Kanuri, Bura is a conglomerate; being contributed today by clans that trace their origins together with other ethnic group e.g Bdiya and Gali/Marya are from the Tera stock. Today, all these ethnic groups according to him are found where nature provides security-the swamps of Lake Chad, the Mandara Mountain, the Kilba and Adamawa uplands, and the Biu plateau. By looking at their present location, it is believed their forefathers were dislodged from their former homes by the major economic and political crises of the past 700 years; the drying of Lake Chad, the Kanuri domination of Borno, the Jukun invasion from the South and the Fulani Jihad of the early nineteenth century.

The land is in the savannah region of Nigeria characterised by shorter grasses than in the Guinea Savannah belt. It has scattered tall trees which shed their leaves during Harmattan season (December to February). Such trees include Acacia, Baobab, locust bean, shea-butter etc. It is also covered with rich shrubs and used to be a home to large wild animals such as lion, because each of them has a native name. Smaller animals include antelope, deer, monkey and baboon. There are also rodents like hare, squirrel, rat, grass cutter and varieties, monitor lizards, snakes as well diverse birds etc.

It is among these creatures that the people derive characters for stories which used to be told in those days as the most important and effective method of education. Narrative stories are meant to teach children morals, good memory, wisdom or life skills and the art of conversation. In such stories animals like squirrel, hyena, lion and elephant symbolize or stand for wisdom, foolishness and strength respectively as will soon be seen. The other kind of stories take the form of riddles and jokes and are meant to teach children wisdom and how to be good thinkers.

### **Socio-Political Organization of Bura**

A certain amount is known of the social organization of the Bura, even though; the Bura and the Babur have only been studied by C.K Meek and amount of material available.

According to Meek (1931), the Bura are composed of clans (gentes) which are in reality engaged patrilineal families of 15 to 500 biological families. These clans are exogamous and frequently totemic. Large clans are split into smaller clan marrying each. An example being the Bwala class now split into over six (6) clans which most are Babur and Bura but they were inter-related and they had no blood feuds. The clans are usually localized but most villages have two more clans. The civil and religious authority being vested in the senior member of the oldest established clans; some clan are associated with totems. But for the most

part, this association is vague and many clans disclaim it a number of instances of how the relationship between a clan and a totem has risen are given by Meek. Clan are exogamous except for the woviri of the Babur chief which married into it and practices cross-cousin marriages. The clan head is responsible for many region rite, example is given in Meek's book.

The Bura, thus, have a clan organization. An excellent description of this type of organization is given in Davies 1956 report on the Gwoza pagan which can be found in the Dikwa, Gwoza and Maiduguri files. A lineage is those men with a common ancestor and about seven (7) generations back the true genealogical structure. A maximal lineage is those who knew that they are related to each other and who possibly do not intermarry and who worship at a common shrine. A minimal lineage is a biological family of father wives, and children. Between these two extremes come segment of varying order with each segment being itself a lineage. In different situation, different lineage emerged, in any particular situation. The lineage involved tends to be determined by the genealogical relationships of the participants. The smallest and the suitable lineage covering both participants and being used in the first place, and larger lineage coming in if only the gravity of the situation demanded it. The head in the lineage is the senior person, senior by generation and within his generation by age, so that he is not necessarily the oldest man. The lineage head has authority over his lineage and also responsibility towards them. The less the relationship the less direct the responsibility and the more the authority is moral and rituals.

In addition, to the lineage (or clan) organization there is a second principle affecting the social organization, namely the principle of locality. People who live together naturally work and fight together and have bonds of association. Early localities or villages, almost certainly contained only one clan. But new locality tends to contain many clans and the forces of lineage are less for bonds of common locality tends across lineage ties. The locality has a head, that is a village or hamlet head and he is the person with the largest backing in the Bura area. This is normally the senior member of the clan that founded the village.

In the Bura area, the principle of locality may be more important than the clan organization for a large extent each village was separated and even a group of village might not come to each other's rescue. The unit is the family among whom each hamlet is independent of its neighbors and co-operation is only possible in the events of grave tribal danger. It is to be particularly, noted that the sense of clan kinship is weakening (partly as a result of the abolition of blood feud) and it is no longer the way it was.

### **Political Organization**

The Bura however, were devoid of any cultural government. Each village area constituted an independent political unit under the headship of the senior member of common occurrence. The Bura have no tradition of loyalty or subservience to any chief or status higher than hamlet or village head. The only man with authority is the head of a family and his authority is only recognized as long as he is able to back it up by force: patricide is one of the commonest aims among the Bura. The Bura disputes are openly say that they will obey no Bura put over them.

Underneath this dissimilarity between the central government of the Babur and the local unconsolidated groups of the clans are found among the Babur and the Bura, and this together with the fact that the Babur were not provided from Biu but were merely the village heads who were selected in the same way as the Bura village head shows that the basic stock of the Babur and Bura is the same. In fact, there is no doubt that the Babur are merely Bura who followed Biu and took over many customs from the Biu ruling clan, the Woviri, who came from Yam-ra-Wala and who are not Bura.

The Bura political organization was based on village unit; villages were independent of each other. Each village had its *Olirdur* (a village head), a village head. A village consisted of several (Dur) or clan. All clans live in *Zara* ward separately, that is, each clan had its ward. Each clan had its *olirdur*, clan head. The *olirdur* (the village head), was usually the *olirdur* in a clan of the first clan to settle on the land, the clan heads of new or late comer were incorporated into the village council. The late comers were to observed the rites and religions practices of the late comers and obeyed its laws. The village head was the person with political and religious authority.

However, this was not always the case as the new or latecomers would have more powerful shrine or haptu (idol). The *olirdi* controls the land and treated all matters related to it. He prayed at the village *Imilini*, sacred grove. Each village head as it has already been indicated had his regalia: a symbol of authority. The inheritance of *Olirdi* was a close system. A senior member of the ruling clan could inherit the *Olirdu* if he died. The clan head settle disputes between their members. If the dispute was between two or more, would try to mediate and resolve it.

### **Economic Organization**

By economic activities here, it refers to ways of generating wealth or means of production and reproduction for human survival. The principal occupation of the Bura people is farming and gardening. Apart from these,

there are other occupations which are also considered important. Among them are blacksmithing, hunting, fishing and crafts.

Davies (1956) revealed that, about 99.5% of Bura people are farmers particularly those living in Bura land. Here, farming *Tsunuwa* is the king of all occupations. Land has never been a problem as there was always abundance of it. In case of any rearing on a particular land, a group can always break away and find a new settlement somewhere else. This has been an age long solution to overpopulation problem for security purpose. As we have seen earlier Bura people live on hilly area. These hilly areas are dependent on volcano lava which forms out to be fertile for the production of variety of crops. The main crop among the people of Bura is the guinea corn. Other crops include: maize, groundnut, beans, pepper, tomatoes and millet.

No mineral has been found in Biu division that is commercially workable, in spite of a great deal of investigation. Not only have officers of the geographical survey, but mining prospectors have not been idle. In 1912 a prospector found no tin around the Bularaba-Buratai area, adding that the stuff the natives call tin is in fact iron. In 1914 two prospectors went into the closed Bura district and were fine.

In addition, to the economic activities of the Bura people, they also involve themselves in some mineral resources like Uranium, Potassium, Potash and Volcanic Cortex. All these economic activities are practiced in Bura land for the purpose of generating income, and for this commercial reason, any Bura people live in an area which is fertile and also resides in communities with access to water supply for the purpose of gardening.

Trade forms another important aspect of the occupation activity of the people in the area. Apart from agriculture, people participate actively in local trade. The major was essentially on farm produces like; sorghum, millet, maize, groundnut among others. The industrial products that are traded locally among the people include; hoe, cutlass, bow and arrows, fishing implements such as net hugs, wooden implements such as spoons stock, calabash also serve as items of trade. This level of trade was conducted within individual village or among groups of village usually in small market in other word known as short distance trade.

#### **Bura Cultural Festivals.**

Bura had many local festivals that date back to the time before the arrival of the major religions, and which are still occasioned by masquerades and dances. The local festival covered an enormous range of events from festivals and betrothal festivals, to the installation of a new chief and funeral as something to be celebrated. But for many of the tribes, death means joining the ancestors and the deceased must get a good rite of passage. The dances that were once performed by members of each village have now been taken over by professional troupes, who tour villages and performing at each local festival.

#### **A) Death (*Mthe*)**

When people die, they are buried in accordance with their customs and tradition. All these vary from tribe to tribe even within such a small area of Bura.

Death in Bura is known as "*Mthe*". Davies (1954) explains that, the death of an elderly person or man, who attained the age of 80 – 90 years and above, is very significant to be observed as a culture. When an elderly man died in Bura land before now, some traditional rites were observed or carried out. The elderly man was entitled to what is known as *Batha Bura Bura* or *Rawan garjajiya* or traditional dance. People play drums and dance while digging the grave. The strong among the youths would run to the top of the hut where he was laid and shoot an arrow. It would take about seven days singing and dancing. Two months, fifteen days later it would call for another big celebration which *bal* or local beer would be served. It involved drinking of *bal* or beer or local beer and eating while dancing and singing. The dancing involves or consist both men and women using drums.

In relation to death, the Bura now bury their dead in common burial ground (or cemeteries) close to others inside the village. In the past, they used to bury their dead in the compound but this practice stopped around 1920. In 1915, burial was in the compound. In 1923, (Edger, 1923) wrote that Bura used to bury their dead inside the compound but now buried outside the village. A good example of people who were formerly buried in the compound and now buried outside are the; Kanakuru who now bury their dead in cemeteries like the Bura.

#### **B) Marriage Ceremonies (*Kilzi Bura Bura*)**

Generally, Bura marriage, has close affinity to those of the Babur and are described by Meek (1931) posited by Bittinger (1928) as follow:

When a Bura girl is born, the suitor indicates interest by tossing a chump of leaves from a particular tree into the mother's hut. If accepted, he gives a bracelet and later a necklace to the girl as soon as she is weaned. Then when she is between seven and nine years old he gives gifts at times, such as one cloth, three "kuntu" four kuntu, five kuntu four bracket. Then 14 kuntu are given to the girl's parents. As the time for marriage draws near that is; then the girl is aged between 10- 14 years, further presents of two kuntu four Bura shirts

(bull) and five (bull) are successively given to the girl's father. Finally, on a single day a girdle ring, 14 brass amulets, 12 brass bracelets and ten kuntu are given to the girl's father while a gift of salt and two kuntu are given to the girl's mother and finally the groom takes the bride away to his house.

### **C) Tuwa Sal Mola**

Another significant and important cultural festival marked in the Bura land is known as *Tuwa Sal Mola*. When a father in-law is dead, a cultural festival is organized and observed by the son in-law. The son in-law organized people from his village and move to his father in law's house, where he presents a dance. While coming in and dancing and going out of the house. The number of the people could number about a hundred (100). The dancing and singing could last from 4pm- 8pm. It involves eating and drinking *bal* or local beer. The instrument used is known as *tsinza*.

### **D) Festival of Harvest (Lip'lata Batha)**

Harvesting is another important cultural activity or festival of Bura known as *Lip lata Batha*. An elder with a very big farm after harvesting his guinea corn, would invite people to help him convey the produce home. About 20 young men carried the bunch of guinea corn on their head and move in line down to the home or house of the farmer while they move it involves playing of drums and singing a song. It also called for eating and drinking while dancing continued. Two people played the drum, one with big and the other with a small one

The best crop for the Bura is guinea corn from which is made much is eaten morning and evening. With this, much porridge or *tuwo* is made from grounded guinea corn cooked in water and it is staple food. It is often added, at the time of serving a broth made up of beans or a meat stew though the broth with leaves added, can be eaten alone and will satisfy hunger.

### **E) Kidi Yimi**

Bura, also marked another significant cultural festival known as *kidi-yimi* that is seeking or begging for water or rain. It served as a belief that when it was planting period and there was no rainfall it is a tradition or a custom for everybody to cook food (*Jungull*); *wake da masara* or beans and maize in front of every house and put it on a broken calabash i.e. the *janguli* and take it to the road. The food would be kept in the middle or by the roadside for the god to come and consume or eat. This is believed that God would descend and consume the whole food.

The Bura, alike in many ways and propose to take them together. Both like the Kilba and Marghi, have a supreme deity called Hyel who is thought of as a far- off god who does not often directly affect life and who possibly is equated with the sky. Davies (1954) notes in Bura in the temples book about the God Pasha at Dingari does not refer to the Bura in Biu Division but possibly to some Hawul Bura who used to follow the Fulani. There are also innumerable lesser gods who are near at hand and can control fertility in women, locusts and drought and who therefore, always need placating. Apart from these gods, there were two main parts to the super natural ancestors and spirits in things. Subsequently, ancestral worship existed among the Bura. The Bura believe that the older a man is the nearer he is to being a god (Davies, 1954).

### **F) SU'U or Planting**

Owing to the festival of Bura, Su'u or first planting is observed as a culture and tradition which exists till date. This is another important festival which is considered in the history of Bura people. It is known as the first planting season. This is organized and done by the Bulamas of the area. They come together and elect the senior among the older to climb a tree and and say; "it is another period of planting get ready for planting by tomorrow". The senior Bulama of the area would be the one on the following day to start the planting by saying; "everybody should witness, I have declared planting by sowing this seed and everybody should commence planting from now henceforth".

The following cultural activities prominently depend on the environment and season.

Music is regarded in high esteem with environment such as the drum which is central at almost all Bura traditional music. Xylophone, *Gagakwala*, *Giaraya*, *Gulum*, *Molo* and *Humbutu* also played as musical instruments to match. Different dancing steps exist depending on the tune played.

Some common dance today in Bura land include the *Bansuwai*, *Banjuli*, *Waksha waksha* and *Chami* that are usually feature in traditional wedding and Christmas occasion. Some of the religious festivals commonly practiced in Bura land include Sallah, Christmas and death which are still in practice today.

### **Significance of the Bura Festivals**

#### **Socio-Cultural Significance:**

Bura festival helps to bring the society together and strengthen the security circular and spiritual fabric of the community. The festival is also celebrated by non-Bura which everybody alike can be part of such a colourful and joyful festival. As a result of the tradition of Bura, even the enemies turned out to be friends during the festival and forget any feeling of differences. Moreover, on that day, people do not differentiate

between the rich and the poor and everybody celebrates the festival together with a spirit of bonhomie and brotherhood. It also helped in revitalizing relationship and strengthening emotional bonds between people. Culturally, it is a bond or means that ties different people of different religion or community together. It is that one custom and tradition that the people follow, the festival they celebrate, the food they eat and most importantly the cultural values they adhere to bring them together. Culture is seen as a system of social control where people shape their standard and behaviours. Culture influences one's way of living and thus, impact social life. It also links between people and their value system.

### **Economic Significance**

Subsequently, the Bura festival which was practiced before now had significant effect on the lives of people in the community in terms of cherished local autonomy, which at best, can only be beneficial for, because it is irreversible economy. The economic importance reflects in the festival of planting and harvesting which was observed seasonally. Majority of the Bura are farmers. As a result, it served in process of crops production and productive methods.

Moreover, the king crop among the people is the guinea corn. The business on the farm starts in April with *tsara* clearing of the farm. This follows by *thiuka* planting anytime there is enough rainfall between end of April and middle May.

Finally, because of their economic engagement, their source of income is mainly on agricultural produce. All food stuffs like maize, groundnut, beans, pepper, tomatoes and millet are sold in the market. In particular, groundnut is sold to firms for export, and red pepper and sugar cane are sold outside the village. No mineral of economic importance have been found in the community. In 1921 market stalls were built at Kwajjaffa, Kwaya Tera and Kwaya Bura. In 1923 the Akira market was established and by 1925 the Biu market was doing well with about 450 people attending each week during the raining season. While, now at present there are many markets and their markets days.

### **Political Significance**

From the findings, before the imposition of colonial rule on the Bura, they were known for a degenerated system of administration. The festival had greater effect on their political administration or scale; it also helped to link the gap between, the community political leadership and the people. The study of Bura cultural festival had shown the effect of political administration within the ward who would organize planting period. The Bulama's are elected based on the political organization of the community. They are in charge of the ward within the community of Bura people. The culture and festival of planting during the rainy season has remained the oldest and one of the festivals still practiced till now.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, from the foregoing, an attempt had been made in this paper to trace the origin of culture and festival of the Bura people in the area of Hawul valley. Notwithstanding, the paper had laid through analysis of available materials to fit in the Bura tradition through the cultural festivals of Bura people before the coming and after the coming of the European to the Bura land. A Bura festival just like any other festivals is an event, usually and ordinarily staged by a local community which centres on and celebrates some unique aspect of their community and their festivals. All the festivals celebrated or discussed have some profound meaning in them and they have some pragmatic purpose also. If we take the example of Christmas and Sallah, we all know the religious reason for their celebration. They are forces to enjoy life. Thus, they can improve the quality of their life.

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