

## **PART TWO**

### ***CHAPTER III***

#### ***SOCIETY AND EDUCATION IN PRE-COLONIAL KENYA***

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This Chapter briefly elucidates the relationship between the social structure and education in pre-colonial Kenyan society. It observes that this society consisted of migrant, loosely organized, and stateless tribes which were further stratified into clans, age-sets, age-groups, social groups and the family.

The education that began soon after birth can be conveniently viewed along some predetermined stages namely: infancy, childhood, puberty, and adulthood. This involved a life-long process which is appropriately termed as socialization. It is concluded that, the aim of education in pre-colonial Kenya was to socialize the members of a tribe on the basis of ascribed criteria while equipping them with certain skills, values, and attitudes necessary for social integration and environmental adaptation. However, this kind of informal education remained largely static due to: (i) conservative socializers (agents) and (ii) physical and social barriers that hindered cultural contact and spread of education in the ancient world.

### The Social Structure

Pre-Colonial social structure of Kenya consisted of different tribes. The term tribe refers to a social unit that consists of families and clans who shared kinship ties, culture, and occupy a definite locality having homogeneous culture, language, and creed. Each tribe was further stratified into three main groups such as; (i) the clan, (ii) the age-set, and age-grade, (iii) the social group, and the family.

(i) A clan was a sort of a big family. Its members claimed to have descended from a common ancestor. Each clan also identified itself by believing in a common totem. The totem could be a creature or an object in nature. It was venerated and used as the name as well as the symbol of the clan.

(ii) An age-set consisted of all individuals initiated within a particular year. Thus, they had a close relation to each other. The senior age-set in terms of years forms an age-grade. Thus the senior age-set or elder age-grade always took precedence over a junior age-set or younger age-grade as a mark of respect.

(iii) A family in Kenya was either polyneous or monogamous in nature. Therefore, the family consisted of the husband and his one or more wives, young unmarried children, and married sons with their children. This in many instances constituted a social group that could be in dozens, in a compound. These groups could then have kinship ties between similar groups in the neighbourhood. Hence, a village or a section of a country-side could be in all respects a big kinship group constituted by social groups that in all forms an extended family keeping in mind that marriage was entirely exo-gamous.

The above groups overlapped and cross-cut each other. For instance, a member of any clan could be a member of any age-set or age-grade or social group. Even members of the same family could be of different age-sets or social groups. Thus, the social configuration of this society is not easy to delineate. However, the first distinguishing feature is the ascribed status system. A person was born into a more or less rigidly defined status which inhibited individually-oriented mobility and achievement.

Occupations and work-roles were, to a large degree, ascribed. The relationships, both social and economic, tended to be of a personalized order. That is to say,

they were particularistic rather than universalistic, to use Parsonian terminology. Economic roles were not sharply differentiated from other social roles. Hence various roles often merged and created status-set based on age and sex. For instance, one could be the Chief elder, then a medicine-man, and a master of rituals. Moreover, a woman could be a midwife as well as an herbalist.

Family and kin, or such larger extensions of kinship groups such as clan, claimed prime attention of an individual's loyalty in society. The level of interest articulation was diffused and as a result, other interest-oriented and functionally specific associations were limited.

Traditional claims of family and Kinship regulated the system of distribution. Collective-orientation rather than the self-orientation was the accepted norm. Groups rather than individuals, or in a precise sense, individuals representing groups, controlled resources, land-use, and power, prestige etc., essential for decision-making processes. The society, therefore, was essentially a series of loosely-organized autonomous communities. Thus, particularistic-tribal, ethnic, religious, regional and linguistic loyalties were

predominant. This weakened the larger cohesive bonds of universal societal integration.

Another significant feature of pre-colonial society was its cultural emphasis on religious sacredness. Thus, ritual consideration not only dictated individual affective actions but also at times tended to dominate social, economic as well as political affairs.

The psychological consequence of such a society was evident in the fact that individuals were oriented to collective attitudes, and values which, in turn sustained social integration of particular tribes. Thus, individual's education, within the frame-work of pre-colonial society, began in the family.

#### The Family and Education

A family as a unit of society is a process of living together, cooperating, sharing interests or aims in life and paying particular attention to procreation. (Peristiany, 1939:93; Brown and Forde, 1950: 46).

The form of marriage in pre-colonial Kenya was either polygynous or monogamous as in many other parts of Africa (Moumouni, 1968:16). Therefore, the typical Kenyan family was extended. It consisted of a husband and one or more wives; their children and other relations that collectively lived in the same compound.

Although the size of each family, living in a compound, varied from village to village, it was generally surrounded by a Kinship neighborhood (Coughlan, 1965:33-35). However, the survival of a family depended upon its ability to raise children (Moumouni, 1968:16).

It was out of the above expectation that children occupied a central place in the Kenyan society. They not only received special care and attention but also attained correct and ideal education (Moumouni, 1968:16).

Traditional education involved a life-long process of socialization. It consisted of some predetermined stages through which an individual passed from birth to death. (Bogonko, 1992:1, Otiende et al., 1992:7). Thus pre-colonial education was a system defined for every status in life. Parents were responsible for infant education before the Kinship group and society took over respectively.

At birth, an infant's entry into the family was marked by rituals and ceremonies. These events symbolized the significance of sex differentiation of a child. For example, in the case of the Kikuyu tribe, a mother screamed five times if she gave birth to a boy, and four times in the case of a girl. Whereas among the Kipsigis, the women who assisted in birth delivery laughed four

times if the baby was a boy, and three times if a girl. In both cases, the mother stayed under seclusion for some time according to ritual norms. (Middleton, 1953:59-60, Orchardson, 1961:45, Peristiany, 1939:77) This event initiated the life-long process of socialization. Thus, for analytical convenience, this span can be examined under four phases, namely, (i) infant-hood, (ii) childhood, (iii) puberty, and (iv) adulthood.

#### (i) The Infant-hood

At the early phase of infancy, much attention was paid to the basic needs of a child. (Levine and Levine 1963:137) It was a mother's duty to feed and care for the child with love and affection, and reward the child in such a way that the infant developed as an integral part of her personality. This early attachment internalized love as a value as well as affectional attitude as an orientation. This mother-infant relationship was sanctioned by norms concerning evil forces and diseases. For instance, no stranger or ritually unclean person was allowed to hold or see a baby (Levine, and Levine, 1963:137, Moumouni, 1968:16, Peristiany, 1939:77). This precaution was not only a way of maintaining hygienic conditions but also, it emphasised the consequences of disobedience and the existence of invisible evil forces which bring harmony or disharmony. Thus, the essence of

the methods of socialization was pleasure and reward vis-a-vis fear and punishment.

The first phase of socialization began with the naming ceremony. The child was named after grand parents and according to seasons, time or circumstance (Kipkorir and Welbourn, 1973; 54-55, Middleton, 1953:59-60, Orchardson, 1961:45, Peristiany, 1939; 77-79). At this stage the mother was the main agent of socialization. Initially she interacted with the infant through touch and gestures. These were reinforced by sleeping beside each other. (Moumouni, 1968:17).

An example of child naming from the Marakwet tribe is presented in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Time And Circumstantial Child Naming By The Marakwet Tribe.

(I) Time of day	Male Name	Female Name
night (Kemoi)	Kipkemoi	Chepkemoi
dawn (Korire Kore)	Kipkorir	Chepkorir
early morning (Yekat)	Kipkoech	Chepkoech
late morning (Limo)	Kiplimo	Chelimo
mid-afternoon (bet)	Kibet	Chebet
evening, when goats return from grazing (Kurotu no)	Kiprono	Cherono
(II) Circumstance	Male Name	Female Name
mother on a visit (rutoi)	Ruto	Cheruto
visitors (too) at home	Kiptoo	Cheptoo
mother journeying along road	Kibor	Chebor
rainy season	Kibiwot	Chebiwot
during wedding ceremony	Kitum	Chetum

Source: Kipkorir, B.E. and Welbourn, F.B., The Marakwet of Kenya: A Preliminary Study, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1973, pp. 54-55.

Apart from time or circumstantial naming, indicated in table 3.1 above, a child was also named after grand parents or any dead relatives of the right sex. The names were limited to those who in life were considered good.

Moreover, their ancestors must have had children and not barren. In addition to these names, each boy acquired a nick name early in life, while all girls were named after their clan. The birth of the first child was also significant. The society began to address both parents formally by the name of their child, the choice being a matter of their preference. Thus, if a child is Kilimo, the father became " Kwombo Kilimo", that is Kilimo's father and the mother was addressed as "Kopot Kilimo" that is the mother of Kilimo. (Kipkorir and Welbourn, 1973: 55).

However, whenever the mother was away or engaged in household activities, a child-nurse, who was usually a sister or a brother, took care of the infant. The role of the child nurse was to train the infant to sit properly and the child-nurse also used to sing pleasurable lullabies when the infant cried. But when this failed, fear was used as a punishment to the infant. (Levine and Levine, 1963:143) Even mothers frightened their infants by making a false mention of the arrival of some fearful animals or strangers in order to control them. Thus, infant internalized, through this kind of socialization, love and affection for the family members, and fear towards strangers and animals.

Toilet training at this stage was rather permissive. The infant was not only dieting on liquid foods but was still too young to learn the toilet norms. However, as the infant reached teething stage, that is, when the first teeth appeared, the diet not only included a variety of foods, but also became increasingly solid. Simultaneously at this stage the infant started to walk by its own. Hence toilet behaviour was also restricted. The infant was not only admonished but was also given examples of the other siblings to go out of the house for toilet. (Sangree, 1965;59-62).

Within the family, the mother and the siblings dominated an infant's socialization. Apart from food, and hygienic care, they looked after the first movements, heard the first words uttered by the infant, and helped the infant in naming the surrounding objects. (Moumouni, 1968:16) At this stage, of active discovery and identification of different objects or the sounding world by the infant, the father actively joined the family in the process of socialization.

#### (ii) The Childhood

However, infant stage usually ended as soon as a second child was born. This began with the carrying of food to the mother, or carrying other items from one adult to another. (Levine and Levine, 1963:155) These

errands, therefore, brought forth role-training which was to be intensified in later phases.

In the early stages of childhood, a child underwent a rigorous and painful training. The child learnt to do away with infantile dependencies and behaviour, while at the same time the child learnt new facts of life through simple tasks and orientations provided by other children through interactions (Levine and Levine, 1963:155, Moumouni, 1968:18).

Physical development in early childhood was not only a family concern, but was that of everyone in society. Thus, a child was taught how to sit and walk properly so as to develop an admirable physique. (Kenyatta, 1971:61). Nevertheless, as soon as a child walked around comfortably, the sphere of socialization was also extended.

Ability to walk not only emancipates a child from parental restrictions, but also provides opportunities on how to use their hands and in deciding the kinds of games to be played. However, until the age of six, a child was confined to the homestead. While the elder children or adults went about their multiple activities. (Orchardson, 1961:49).

As the child became older, domestic and economic activities were increasingly assigned. These included looking after Kittens and Lambs or Calves. In the course of this, physical capabilities and language proficiency were attained. This was followed by the first meaningful contacts with a kinship group and grandparents.

As soon as enough acquaintance was built between the child and these social groups, the parents gradually encouraged the child to sleep elsewhere (Sangree, 1965:59-60). This was done to avoid any kind of sexual embarrassment and a code of language that was restricted only to the adults. Moreover, as the child developed an inquisitive mind, grand-parents not only provided an elaborate language code, but gave entertainment and an ideal setting for inquisitive freedom.

Sex-role differentiation began at the age of eight. At this stage socialization became rigorous both in practice and theory. From a practical point of view, the males were introduced to day-to-day activities related to men. They accompanied male adults to live-stock grazing, hunting expeditions, or to collect medicinal herbs. In that phase, the classification and importance of animal and plants were learnt which was necessary for adapting to the environment, whereas, females concentrated on

household or domestic activities assigned to women. (Leaky, 1952:21).

Both sexes received codes of behaviour, tradition, folklore, and religion mostly from their grand- parents. This was imparted informally. However, in-attentiveness and ignorance was checked through peer-pressure in form of mockery, criticism or satires, and laughter. Hence peer-group also played a supportive role in the process of socialization (Leaky, 1952:21-22).

### (iii) The Puberty Stage

Toward puberty stage, a child was required to develop satisfactory aptitudes and skills, modest sanitary habits, and precautions against undesirable elements in society.

Further, a child was expected to have a proficiency in values and appropriate attitudes towards relatives and other members in society. While at the same time he/she was expected to be able to use an elaborate code of language and inquisitive freedom correctly. Clearly, maturity and responsibility were attained at puberty.

Puberty- socialization generally began at the age of twelve. It was noticed at once when a child acted responsibly with behaviour admissible to the rite of initiation. For instance, the child must have learnt

steps and tunes of the various traditional dances and songs. This was necessary in order to be declared as to have satisfactorily attained both mental and physical maturity pre-requisite for initiation rites (Leaky, 1952:22, Bogonko, 1992:9). These rites constituted a formal system of traditional education. Its content included surgical operations, rituals, ceremonies, rigorous physical exercise, and instruction on secret customs of the society. The ultimate objective of puberty-socialization was to socialize a child into adulthood.

#### (iv) The Adulthood

Initiation period was a crucial phase of personality transformation from childhood to adult status. Through it, females graduated from childish activities to that of womanhood and a boy became a man. Thus, this newly acquired status puts to an end the childish interactions. For instance, on becoming women, girls ceased from certain interactions, like sexual harassment and ostracism by age-mates or un-initiated boys. Whereas, boys on becoming men were expected to discontinue misconduct, aggression, and over-dependence on their mothers. Hence this phase was viewed as transitional stage whereby individuals left the past and emerged as new beings with new names, experience, and

responsibilities. (Levine and Levine, 1963:183:202, Bogonko, 1992:5).

Socialization at this phase was planned to inculcate cultural knowledge which was intended to shift and initiate social reference from primary family loyalty to that of larger groups in society. This was the essence of life-long values and attitudinal orientations. The content of socialization included taboos and prohibitions, modes of action, social solidarity, and features of an ideal personality (Sangree, 1965:69, Thurnwald, 1935:233-237). For a better understanding of these orientations, the content of socialization at this stage is briefly stated below which is abstracted from folklore, customary songs, and oral history.

**(A) Taboos and Prohibitions :**

1. Close relations were not allowed to marry nor was early marriage encouraged in society.
2. Incest was strictly prohibited.
3. Pollution of food, water, and homestead was not allowed.
4. Consumption of a carcass whose death was unknown, or excessive eating and drinking was a taboo.
5. Spitting on another's face was a grave insult except on a ceremonial occasion.

(B) Norms for day-to-day behaviour

1. A hungry orphan was not <sup>to</sup> be turned away.
2. No one was allowed to quarrel with a mourning person.
3. No one was permitted to ridicule a deformed person.
4. At war, killing a woman was prohibited.
5. Villagers were not encouraged to fight or harm each other.

(C) Norms regarding property

1. Stealing was punishable by death.
2. Plunder and destruction of property was a taboo.
3. Exploitation of the under-privileged and the handicapped persons was prohibited.
4. Mishandling of weapons was strictly discouraged.

(D) Norms for social manners and conduct.

1. One was not allowed to hurt or fight with an age-mate.
2. Uninitiated person was expected to treat the initiated with respect.
3. No one was encouraged to approach elders when they were in a meeting.
4. Men were not allowed to enter where a woman was giving birth.
5. Every one was expected to respect parents and elders.

6. Relatives were not permitted to fight or hurt each other.
7. One could not remove a cap on another's head.
8. Children were not allowed to watch the elders while eating.
9. An old man had a right to ask for something.
10. An old man's chair was usually reserved. In the presence of elderly persons, others were expected to stand or sit on the floor.

(E) Important values of life.

1. It was a taboo to give a child hot food.
2. It was wrong to attack another tribe when there was peace.
3. An enemy who sought refuge in a house and held a child must not be killed.
4. Nobody was allowed to kill or harm another's cow.
5. Sacrifices were made to ensure purity and protection of lives in society.

(F) Norms for social solidarity.

1. Parents' consent was necessary for marriage.
2. Non-adherence to family duties was treated as contempt, and severely dealt with.

3. Widows had to be provided with food, clothing, and shelter.
4. Orphans were to be taken care of until they got married.
5. Building a defense for a village and the tribe was a duty.
6. It was an obligation to assist a woman in labour.
7. Fire-fighting and redemption of lost property was a social task.
8. It was a duty to help and teach the ignorant and share burdens.

(G) Orientations of an ideal personality.

An ideal person was the one who :

1. Honoured parents and elders as well as all those who were in authority.
2. Helped others without pay.
3. Was trustworthy both in speech and in handling property.
4. Was clean, tidy, and generous.
5. Was brave, careful, and apologetic as situation demanded.

The above classification of norms and values is, of course, arbitrary but useful to understand the context or the process of socialization prevalent in pre-colonial Kenya. The objective of the process was to promote

harmonious adjustment within the society and its adaptation to the external environment.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the system of socialization was rigid and had narrow curriculum. Moreover, the socializing agents were mainly conservative elders who found it difficult to accept new ideas and methods. Thus, they hindered creative thinking that transcended ascriptive, particularistic, diffuse, and affective orientations, to use Parsonian terminology.

#### Social Stratification and Education

An age-set consisted of all individuals initiated within a particular year. Whereas age-grade was a status hierarchy based on age, wealth, and personal wisdom within a particular age-set.

Generally, an age-set system stratified the traditional Kenyan society into youths, warriors, married people and the elders. This implied the existence of an elaborate division of labour. This social order facilitated the socialization of an individual into efficient role-taking in society. However, before examining adult role socialization, it is necessary to explain how age-set and age-grade evolved and fit into the traditional system of education.

The existence of age-sets among the major tribes that constituted the traditional Kenyan Society was widespread. Scholars argue that it was a phenomenon brought about by inter-tribal or cross-ethnic borrowings. Evidence shows that the Kuria tribe borrowed from the Kalenjin who in turn might have borrowed from a third source. This is corroborated by the fact that these two tribes shared three main age-sets namely: Maina, Chuma and Sawe in spite of being Bantu and Nilotic ethnic origins. Moreover, other major tribes (excluding the Luo), like Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, Bukusu, Luhya etc., practiced age-set system. (Mwanzi, 1977:109, Lambert, 1956: 41, Middleton, 1953:34).

To illustrate an age-set system the Kipsigis case (which is a sub-tribe of the Kalenjin ethnic group) will serve the purpose (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Chronology of Kipsigis Age Sets/ Generation-Sets

* 1999-2007	KIPNYIGE	1754-1775	NYONGI
* 1988-1998	KAPLELACH	1733-1754	KIPNYIGE
* 1970-1982	KIPKOIMET/ KORONGORO	1712-1733	KAPLELACH
1951-1969	SAWE	1691-1712	KIPKOIMET/ KORONGORO
1930-1950	CHUMA	1670-1691	SAWE
1922-1930	MAINA	1649-1670	CHUMA
1902-1923	NYONGI	1628-1649	MAINA
1880-1902	KIPNYIGE	1607-1628	NYONGI
1856-1881	KAPLELACH	1586-1607	KIPNYIGE
1838-1856	KIPKOIMET/ KORONGORO	1565-1586	KAPLELACH
1817-1838	SAWE	1544-1565	KIPKOIMET/ KORONGORO
1796-1817	CHUMA		
1775-1796	MAINA		

Source: Langat, S.C. "Some Aspects of Kipsigis History Before 1914" in Historical Studies I, McIntosh B.G. Nairobi East Africa Publishing House, Nairobi, 1969, p.75

\* Updated by the author of the present study who is also a Kipsigis.

These generation-sets seem to indicate a decreasing life expectancy. This also affects the rational sequence from 21 years, through 18, 13, 12, 10, and 8 years respectively.

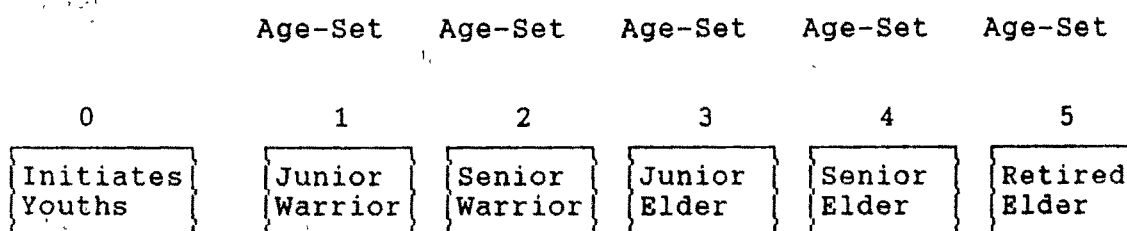
According to table 3.2, the Kipsigis had generation-sets, or in other words, age-sets which were recalled in

rotation. These were : Kaplelach, Kipnyige, Nyongi, Maina, Chuma, Sawe and Kipkoimet.

Age-set system was a cyclical phenomenon. For instance, if Kaplelach (See Table 3.2) was the first to be named, then the practice was that it cannot be recalled until all the age-mates including their wives were dead. Each generation-set therefore, covered a period of twenty one years. Hence it was until after a hundred and forty-seven years that all the seven age-sets were to be recalled just before the cycle began again. (Langat, 1969:74, Peristiany, 1939:42-45).

However, due to a decreasing trend in life-expectancy, which cannot be fully addressed to here, it is evident that the cycle of recalling any age-set is now becoming shorter in modern times. An age-set system was not only the base on which the society was stratified, but it also provided a forum for military and economic organization. It regulated the recruitment of junior members, their activities and subsequent retirements. This was the essence of an age-grade system. A glimpse of the Maasai tribe will throw more light to this social phenomenon. (See figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Age-grade And Role Shifting In Age- sets system of The Maasai.



Modified Version of Gulliver P.H. "Models to Illustrate the Developmental process in the age-set system and divergence between formal and actual age grade distribution" in Social Control in African Society , Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1963 p.43

Figure 3.1 shows the gradual nature of shifting roles from one age-set to its successor as its members became old, both physically and socially. It follows, therefore, that as soon as the oldest age-set had ceased to exist or had retired, successive shifts in age-grade systems rotated the moment puberty rites began and the initiates subsequently assumed new roles. However, the new initiate was yet to be fully socialized into adulthood. Educational content at this phase included practical knowledge on the potentialities and weaknesses of the economic, social, political, and religious aspects of society. This was only achieved through informal socialization that was relevant to the social setting.

Adult socialization began soon after puberty rites. The fresh initiates who fell within the youth strata were

not only considered ritually unclean but were also undifferentiated, for they were yet to be ascribed roles based on sex. However, at this stage they went about in society establishing contacts and building new relationships as well as modes of interactions based on customary laws taught at initiation (Leaky, 1952:24, Lambert, 1956:37). Moreover, they kept on visiting friends and relatives. However, they didn't have a special role to take in public life, except herding or serving the elder members of their families. After some time, the adolescent state was brought to an end by purification ceremonies. Thus, the initiates were declared full members of an age-set which was not only the youngest age-wise, but comprised the junior-most age-grade in society (Wagner, 1940:234, Gulliver, 1963:43).

**Junior Warrior Age-grade :** It comprised of individuals initiated at the same time. Thus, they maintained very close relation to each other; they helped one another in work, in pooling payments for fines, avenging insults or disciplining a fellow age-mate. (Seligman, 1939:199, Middleton, 1953:34). However, they didn't participate in ritual or politico-jury discussion. They merely acted as servants in tasks requiring little judgment or skill (e.g. conveying messages, fetching fire-wood etc.). Moreover, as fresh initiates, with little roles in family

affairs, they only supervised cattle but did not participate in herding nor did they assist in agricultural work. They were under dietary restrictions on the consumption of meat, milk, and beer. At the same time they led celibate lives until they naturally shifted to the next age-grade (Gulliver, 1963:43). The above restrictions, therefore, ensured the development of endurance and courage required by an individual to face day-to-day practical aspects of life.

Senior Warrior : He was actively involved in police duties and executing the orders of the elders such as, conveying messages, summoning witnesses or seizing animals as fine or for sacrifice. The individuals at this stage were not considered mature enough to participate (or officiate) in ritual or politico-jury affairs, nor were they knowledgeable enough to assume any public office. However, it was in this stage that an individual earned a lasting reputation. This was based on exemplary courage, leadership, and fortune gained in the military service. Thus, with fortune and leadership qualities, an individual at a senior stage of warrior-ship was eligible for counsellor-ship as soon as he was married. This subsequently confined the warrior activities to that of caring for his family and parents. Hence he eventually became an elder.

Junior Elder : Adult socialization began to take shape the moment an individual became the head of a family. He began to get concerned about family needs and welfare. He took trouble to raise livestock and develop his farm. He did all these because the society expected him to accumulate wealth, have a successful family, and be active in political, religious, and legal affairs of the society. Therefore, a junior elder had to learn the art of public speaking, the craft of cross-examining witnesses, and ritual procedures. Thus, on the attainment of the above attributes and administrative skills, a junior elder was expected to gain promotion in the next higher grade.

Senior Elder: He officiated in the main events that marked a life cycle : birth, initiation, marriage, sickness, and death. In other words, senior elders performed religious rites that were intimately linked with social institutions.

As a family head, an elder was expected to gradually learn how to conduct religious functions ; first as a spectator, then as an associate. Thus, when his turn reached, he was able to officiate in his family and also in tribal worship service.

The family was responsible for adapting children to the physical and social environment. For instance, they

needed to know the values and dangers associated with streams, forests, pastures; or mutual obligations to ancestors. These values were inculcated through the offerings and prayers made at the family shrine by the head of the family.

Religion also permeated other aspects of life through leadership. For instance, a religious personality could gain prominence as a military and political advisor. He could also combine religious and political qualities and assume leadership. Religious personalities were known to be influential in that, they were looked upon as : rain makers, the authority that blessed and sanctioned cattle raids or war sorties as well as determined the initiation dates (Arapmagut, 1969: 96, Ochieng, 1969: 58-59). Thus senior elders were at the helm of leadership in society.

As key agents of socialization, the senior elders were repositories of experience, knowledgeable of past affairs. They specialised in diplomacy essential to delicate matters of inter-tribal conflict as well as handling stubborn disputants within the tribe.

Ritually, senior elders were also acknowledged as experts and excellent ritual performers. In their private life they were busy consolidating resources as their

elder sons approached adulthood or as daughters got married. This was followed by a distribution of land and livestock among sons as inheritance. These activities gradually confined the senior elders in their homes, hence reducing their public service. Eventually they were forced to retire. (Gulliver, 1963: 43).

**Retired Elders:** Due to old age and family responsibilities, they ceased attending public services. However, according to the maturation cycle, they were not a liability to junior age-grades; even though they led a life of almost irresponsibility in both public and private life (Gulliver, 1963: 43).

In spite of being considered as inactive, retired elders retained total control over their sons, property, and consultancy services in ritual as well as in religious affairs. However, day-to-day management was left to sons, some of whom were already elders. Thus, a retired elder demanded respect without responsibilities. He also demanded care, food, and beer without obligation to administer resources or services. This was an end of a socialization that spanned through a life cycle in Kenyan society.

### Social Setting and Education

However, it is interesting to note that society and education in pre-colonial Kenya maintained a particularistic relation. It was a unique product of social history and environmental adaptation. Thus, the society demanded limited form and content of education that enabled its members to acquire adequate knowledge of the physical and social setting.

Environmental setting played an important role towards cultural development. A look at the population distribution matrix shows both ethnic as well as cultural regions. The Nilotic group settled on three distinct localities: lake shores, along river sides, highlands and the plains. Whereas, the Bantus occupy highlands, some parts of the lake, and coastal regions. The Cushites occupy the drier parts of North and North-Eastern parts of the country.

Historians have indicated that the above settlements owe their origin to human ability in harnessing the environment (Ochieng, 1990:13). This is attributed to the development of iron tools and weapons. These equipments not only transformed the society in the course of environmental adaptation but also ensured social security. This is the essence of contacts. However, it is

disease, famine, and conflict that led people to migrate to safer regions. Thus, in the process new techniques, values, and attitudes spread over the country. Hence, adaptation through borrowing and exchange with immigrants is the essence of the diffused role-sets that evolved endogeneously.

Ancient Egypt is said to be the cradle of civilization in Africa. However, it is paradoxical to note that the wisdom of the Egyptians spread to the North, East and West, but the South, including what is now Kenya, had no impact. (Macmillan, 1938:28).

The source of River Nile remained a mystery for a long time, even though it had a few navigable tributaries. Thus, it is interesting to note that the people upstream, for centuries, missed civilization worth boasting for. This was accessible through travel and mutual contact. But, this awaited the advent of British imperialists who colonized the two countries.

The other centres of ancient civilization in proximity to Kenya were the Euphrates and the Ganges. The agents of these sources were the Arabs and the Indians respectively. Though the Arabs made a sustained foothold on the Kenyan Coast, their mainstream of expansionism was across Syria, Spain, and North Africa sidelining all the countries South of the Sahara.

However, the arid area beyond the Kenyan Coast discouraged foreigners from entering the hinterland (Macmillan, 1938:131). But in spite of this, the Arabs maintained contact with the hinterland society on limited trading ties. Resourceful interaction such as scientific, religious, and economic enterprises did not develop (Coupland, 1938:30). Therefore, the Arabs did not attempt to launch a systematic exploration and colonization of the hinterland of Kenya. Hence, the coastal part of the country attained a high level of Arabic civilization by the end of the 15th Century.

Although the Arabs successfully settled on coastal Kenya, the educational heritage was scanty. Except some architectural ruins, carvings, bits of pottery, and one historical manuscript in Arabic, Kenya has no antiquated literature, art, or science. Thus, Arabic education had negligible impact upon the mainstream of Kenyan society.

Geographical factors further still proved to be a hindrance to social contacts. For instance, the main rivers in the country are known to be non-navigable. Their valleys are steep and are not evenly spread to facilitate settlements open to external contacts. Thus, for centuries the hinterland people of Kenya missed the Euphrates civilization. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

that these geographical barriers were bridged by traders, explorers, and political expansionists.

Commerce in pre-colonial Kenya, emanated from economic inter-dependence among Kenyan tribes (Sindiga, 1990:118-132). For example, some tribes were hunters and gatherers, others were either pastoralists, cultivators, and those who specialized in crafts or industry. Hence, these social relationships were sustained by a disproportionate distribution of human skills and natural resources. However, as regional and cross-ethnic trade developed, cultural diffusion increased.

Furthermore, exchange of items, such as live-stock products, agricultural implements, weapons, and consumer goods facilitated a transfer of material culture. However, the trading contact was limited. It was characterized by sporadic meetings, irregular, and inadequate supplies. The Arab slave-trade, though it did not have much impact in Kenya as compared to other parts of Africa, held back the hinterland people at their primitive level. Thus, limited contact discouraged external agents needed to stimulate cultural development (Coupland, 1938: 4).

The fear of the Maasai warriors, who proved a deterrent to slave-traders also restricted explorers,

missionaries, and legitimate traders from entering Kenya. Thus, the mainland society could not be brought in a normal network of relationship with the outside world. Therefore, the Kenyan society could not become acquainted with skills, values, and attitudes of other societies. Hence it could not even be explored scientifically.

As for the political factor, centrally organized systems of government existed in the wanga Chiefdom in Western Kenya (Nedege, 1990:92-98) and the coastal sultanates. However, the rest of the country was occupied by loosely-organised and stateless tribes. They consisted of a council of elders who formed a supreme authority and an organ of administration. The society was, therefore, regulated by traditional norms perpetuated by elders through the induction of age-sets and age-grades as a means of political control prior to the advent of British.

However, it is important to note that apart from the limited organized section of the Kenyan society, the rest of the country was in conflict. Tribes fought and conquered each other, but no polity emerged to restore the social order. Instead, the formidable Maasai tribe plundered and confiscated cattle from their weaker neighbors. But they failed to establish their rule. Hence

an endogeneously evolved polity and culture never emerged in the hinterland of Kenya.

Another institution that is closely connected with polity is religion. At large, it involved institutionalized skills, values, and attitudes. Thus, it is by and large responsible for the formulation of an educational system whose form and content perpetuates the society. There are three major religious groups in Kenya such as: indigenous ethnic religious traditions, extended missionary religions, and foreign ethnic religions (Olumwullah, 1990:83). All these, reflect the heterogeneity of society in Kenya.

Indigenous ethnic religious traditions were as diverse as the tribes of Kenya. This is evident from the linguistic settlement pattern, namely, Bantu, Nilote and Cushites. However, in these settlements, it has been found that where interaction took place, religion was a major feature for the co-existence between the Luo and Luhya people of Western Kenya; who were inter-culturally linked (Olumwullah, 1990:84).

In general, the evolution of a homogeneous religion has been hindered by a number of factors. These include, multi-lingual and multi-cultural contacts as well as lack of geographical uniformity. Thus, pre-colonial education was inculcated by conservative elders that lacked

literacy elements. They denied both the society and youth any external ideas other than their own. Hence, the closed nature of the pre-colonial society perpetuated ascriptive roles as well as parochial values and attitudes. All these gradually disintegrated with the emergence of the colonial school-class.

In short, the process of socialization in pre-colonial Kenya appears to have been guided by four objectives. One, the transmission of traditional skills, attitudes, and values. Two, adaptation of children to the immediate environment. Three, allocation of ascriptive roles based on age and sex. And fourthly, inculcation of collective conscience through group tasks. Thus, the degree of socialization depended on sanctions and emphasis given by elders in a tribe and its inference of an ideal personality expected to emerge in a social setting.

### Summary

Society in pre-colonial Kenya mainly consisted of migrant, loosely organized, and stateless tribes. And each tribe was stratified on the basis of ascribed criteria like age and sex. Internal integration and external adaptation of these tribes demanded a form and content of education that enabled their members to acquire adequate knowledge of the physical and social setting.

Hence, education which began soon after the birth of a person consisted of predetermined stages namely; childhood, puberty, adolescence, and adulthood involving a life-long process. This can be appropriately termed as socialization.

It was essentially an informal process and was carried out by socializing agents such as, parents and other relatives.

The aim of this kind of education, imparted in pre-colonial Kenyan society, was to socialize the members of a tribe on the basis of ascribed criteria which equipped them with certain skills and attitudinal orientations necessary for: (a) their adaptation to their external environment, and (b) integration within the tribe. Affectivity, particularism, collective-orientation and diffused expectations were some of the other core values emphasised in the process.