

Islamic Concept of Polygamy, its Benefits and Impact on Society

Janas Khanⁱ Muhammad Zahoorⁱⁱ

Abstract

Allah the creator of the whole universe made mats of everything in this universe. And created attraction for men in women and vice versa. He also revealed his laws for family which starts from a man and woman. If the relationship of this man and woman is legal, it brings happiness and prosperity to the family and society. But if violations are made in this relation, it brings disturbance and destruction not only to this family but also to the whole society. Islam has permitted a man and a woman to start a family life through the sacred social agreement of Nikah. But many times one wife cannot fulfill the needs of the husband in many aspects. Polygamy is the alternate option in this case. What are the benefits that polygamy brings or otherwise, this research paper discusses this issue in detail.

Allah created the whole of the Universe and created human beings is the best of all creations Allah gave him grace due to its intellect. Allah says in the Quran: We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation.¹ The human race started from the first two people in this world i.e. Prophet Adam (AS) and Eve (AS). Allah says: O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other))².

Similarly, for increasing human race a sexual relationship between a man and woman is essential. Now if this relationship is legal, it will benefit the humanity otherwise it will bring destruction.

The human history is witness that in each and every society, this legal relationship existed. Their shapes and style may be different but even then it has been present in a shape. Every society and religion encourages and values this legal relationship and tries to stop other illegal relationships between a man and woman.

i .Assistant Professor Department of Islamic Studies, UOM

ii .Ph.D research Scholar Department of Islamic Studies, AWKUM

Islam is a religion that gives facilities in every aspect of life. For protecting human dignity and honoring Islam has given a complete system for family life. This life starts from the sacred agreement of *Nikah*. Islamic Jurisprudence has given detailed rules and regulations under the "family laws".

What is Marriage or Nikah

The word marriage or Nikah means extensions between two things.³ Muslim jurists have defined marriage as:

"Nikah is a contract between a man and a woman, through which they can get sexual benefit from each other, if there is no any contraceptive⁴."

Allah and his prophet has urged and ordered the Muslims for marriage and also told us the goals of marriage. These goals are:

First It is a source of chastity. Allah says:

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ⁵

"Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among yourselves, male or female: if they are in poverty, Allah will give them means out of His grace: for Allah encompass the all, and he know the all things."

The Holy Prophet (SAW) said:

يَا مَعْشَرَ الشَّبَابِ مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ الْبَاءَةَ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ فَإِنَّهُ أَغْضُ لِلْبَصْرِ وَأَخْصَنُ لِلْفَرْجِ⁶

"Oh the group of young people! who would you be able to marry, should marry them. It bows the eyes and avoids people from sexual crimes."

The word: *أَغْضُ لِلْبَصْرِ وَأَخْصَنُ لِلْفَرْجِ*: It bows the eyes and avoids people from sexual crimes, are very important and it is clear that what is the marriage for⁷.

Second It is essential for the survival of the human race. Allah Almighty says:

وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً⁸

"And from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women."

The Holy Prophet said:

تزوجو الودود الولود⁹

"Marry a woman who is loving and gives birth to more children."

Third Marriage brings mutual kindness, affection, goodness and is a source of satisfaction and comfort. It changes hostility into friendship and bring people closer. Allah says:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ¹⁰

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect."

For obtaining these objectives, Islamic Law has permitted a man to marry four women at a time. This action of men (marrying four women at a time), is called polygamy. Islam has not only permitted this but also has given detail rules and regulation for it. Before we mention these rules, let us see the historical background of polygamy.

The historical background of Polygamy

Polygamy has a long history. Many societies and many old religions allowed polygamy. In Judaism it was common and there were no limitations for a men to have any number of wives at a time. Church and governments all not only allowed polygamy, rather it practiced it too¹¹. The French kings practiced polygamy too¹². Jews, Christians, Arabs unanimously and undisputedly believe and respect the Prophet Ibrahim (AS). According to Bible the Prophet Ibrahim had three wives i.e. 1.Sara, 2.Hajira and 3.Qatoora¹³. Similarly Prophet Jacob had four wives simultaneously¹⁴. According to Bible Prophet Solomon had a thousand women¹⁵. And the Prophet David married nineteen wives¹⁶. In Hinduism plural marriages are permitted and there is no restriction on having a number of women simultaneously¹⁷. So was the case with Arabs, they married many wives at a time¹⁸.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that Islam is not the inventor of polygamy but it was an old practice. But Islam restricted it to four wives at a time. As it allowed many marriages, Islam also put obligation on men to provide other wives the same things what he does to the first one. Allah says:

فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ¹⁹

"Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then

only one, but the same verse says: if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one."

When this order revealed, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stood up and declared that anybody, if have more than four wives, should keep four of them and leave (divorce) the rest²⁰.

Ghailan (RA one of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) had ten wives. The Prophet (SAW) ordered him to select four of them and divorce the rest. Another companion of the Prophet Qais bin Haris had eight wives²¹.

Similarly another companion of the Prophet Nofal bin Ma'awiya had five wives. All of them were ordered to keep four wives and divorce the rest²².

So we can say that before Islam came, polygamy was a common practice. Islam also allowed it but Islam put the restriction on the number four at a time and clearly said that you can marry more than one wives till four but if you fear that you may not make justice then have only one wife as Allah said: if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one²³.

According to Common Sense and Experience

In addition to human beings, animals and insects, it can be observed in daily life that they have many females and the semen of a male can fertilize many females at a time. So in human beings it is worth to be present. Apart from it the Allah has put the power of sex in men comparatively than women. And that is why the wet dreams come repeatedly to men than women.

Polygamy Benefits Whom?

Lets us analyze to whom polygamy provide benefits? man or woman ?

Polygamy provides benefits to both husband and wife while there is no harm for both of them. When a husband has many wives, he will have a taste of every wife any time but in case of one wife he will have nothing than the one. Someone said: Husband of one wife is in labor. when a disease come to wife, it comes to him too and if menses come to her, comes to him too. The husband of two wives is in two coals. The husband of three wives is a guest every night. And the husband of Four wives leads every night in new town²⁴.

According to medical sciences a fit husband has more sexual demand than the wife. The wife, having much reason, physical, psychological etc cannot afford a sexual intercourse consecutively and her demand is less than the husband. But if a man has four wives, he meets every wife on every fourth day, so he has a new taste every day, while a wife meets her husband every fourth night after a long rest of three days. And three days wait is not long enough. This makes life pleasant for all of them.

Other Reasons

Attaining piety and getting closer to Allah is the most important thing for a Muslim. It is also a fact that man has more sexual power than women. Woman faces menstrual periods and Pregnancy etc and during these times she has to protect the fetus, so she is unable for intercourse. Allah says:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَأَعْتَزِلُوا النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرُبُوهُنَّ حَتَّى
يَطْهُرْنَ²⁵

"They ask thee concerning women's courses. Say: They are a hurt and a pollution: So keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean."

If a man is not given permission for more marriages, a man cannot live with piety in this case and he may indulge in the sin of adultery. Another aim of marriage and nikah is to the procreation and survival of human race, and the semen of a man can fertilize many females and this aim can be achieved easily through polygamy.

Having more than one wife, is a matter of pride for men. Islam has given permission for increasing many legal things like, property, business, means of travelling, dress etc. Having many wives is one of these legal things which Islam encourages²⁶.

Polygamy as a need

In some cases polygamy becomes the dire need for a man. such cases are:

1. Sometimes a woman is infertile and is unable to produce children, even medical sciences cannot work while getting children is the need of every man. Children are the future of parents and their successors for which every parent's desire.
2. Sometimes a woman faces a lifelong disease (like infectious diseases) which stops a woman from pregnancy. In this case a man has to face two ways. In first case, he has to divorce

the first wife and marry the second one and this is a total lost for the first wife. In another case a man has to keep the first wife and marry another one too. The husband has to fulfil all the needs of both the wives, like: food, dressings and medical needs. And this case benefits both the wives and the husband.

3. Man has more sexual power and desire than woman. In this case a man has two ways for fulfilling his desire. He has to establish illegal relations with other ladies than his wife. This situation is strictly prohibited by Islam because a man cannot maintain his piety. Allah says:

لَا تَقْرُبُوا الزَّوَاجَ إِذَا كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا²⁷

"Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)."

4. It is natural and a common observation that chances of deaths are more in number for men than women. Men participate in wars, during work at different places and specially driving etc enhances this ratio for men. The ladies, as do not participate in such situations and if de, the ratio is very little. In this way the number of men decreases rapidly and the number of women remain the same.
5. It is on the record that after World War II. In Almanian when deaths of men occurred in great number, the women demanded for second and third marriages so that they could lead a satisfactory life and it was the need of the time. Similarly after World War II, The Young Council of Munich, permitted polygamy²⁸. A woman recorded her views as: I would prefer to be the 10th wife of a husband than to lead life with a handicap husband²⁹.
6. Modern medical sciences has proved that women has more powerful immune system than women. Their bodies have can fight many diseases easily than men. In this case too, the number of women increase and death of men occur mostly.

Demerits of Ban on Polygamy

From the above discussion, it is clear that polygamy covers the rights of women and do not harm them. Islamic Shariah has given the permission to a man the polygamy as it is the need. Marriage or Nikah is a social contract between a man and a woman through which man is bound to provide food,

dress and other basic needs to the woman (wife). In case of polygamy, the husband has to provide the same needs to the second, third and fourth wife which do not harm the rights of the other wives.

Once a lady doctor asked a male Muslim doctor about his family life. She said:

"What does your wife do (job) ? He said: she is housewife, she manage the home tasks and cares my children at home. The lady asked :who provide her needs of life? He said: I do. She asked: Who gives her clothing ? He said: I do. She asked: Who gives her medication? He said: I do. She said: Oh! she is queen then. She said: divorce her and marry me please. He said: sorry I cannot divorce her as she facilitates my whole life but I can marry you without divorcing her. (This is what Islam gives us this permission)³⁰."

Some obligations are put on Islam in the shed of Women Rights and it is considered as injustice against women. But the case is not so. For example: it is said that in financial matters, woman are awarded half of the men in inheritance and blood money (Diyat). But the case is not so. In case a woman is killed and she has only one male to take the inheritance. This man will get half of the blood money (Diyat) but if a man is killed and there is only one female to take the inheritance, the woman will get full.³¹ In this case the man gets half, why? but Islam has given this share so he will have to accept rather to protest. In the case of inheritance too, the share of the women is not always the same. It varies situation to situation. So saying that Islam ignores woman, is not justice.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that:

Polygamy is not invented by of Islam rather it has proves in the history in different societies. It has been a practice in Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and other religions of the world. Polygamy can be proved through medical science, Intellect and social practice. It has many merits and has no demerits. It is beneficial for society and not a crime. In many cases becomes mandatory.

References

- 1 . Bani Israel:70
- 2 .Sura Al-Hujurat:13

- 3 .1. *Ibne Humam, Kamal-ul-Din Muhammad bin Abdul Wahid, Fath-ul-Qadir, Maktaba Rashidiya, Sarkai Road, Quetta, 1993, Vol.3, p. 185.*
- Sa'adi Abu Jaib, Fiqh Dictionary, Dar ul Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 1988, Vol. 1, p. 360*
- 4.2. *Ibne Humam, Fath-ul-Qadir Vol 3, p. 158.*
- 5 . *Sura Al-Noor:32*
- 6 .3. *Al-Bukhari, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail, Al-Jami Al-Sahih, Dare Ibne Kathir, Beirut, Lebanon, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 6, Hadith No:1806.*
- 7 . 4. *Ibid, Vol. 5, p. 950, Hadith No:4779*
- 8.5. *Sura Al-Nisa:1*
- 9.6. *Abu Daud, Sulaiman bin Ash`ath Al-Sajstany, Al-Sunan, Dar ul Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 1989, Vol. 2, p. 172, Hadith No:2046*
- 10.7. *Sura Al-Room: 21*
- 11.8. *Dr. Juma Al-Khawli, Ta'adude Zaujati Wa Hikmatuhu Fil Islam, Dar ul Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 2000A. p. 2*
- 12.9. *Ibid, p. 3*
- 13.10. *Bible: The book of Birth, International Bible Society, London, UK, 1998, Vol. 4, p. 16*
- 14.11. *Ibid, Vol 24, p 29*
- 15.12. *Bible: The Book of Kings, Vol. 2, p. 11*
- 16.13. *Bible: The Book of Samuel, Vol 23, p 16*
- 17.14. *Rig Veda: 105:1:108*
18. 15. *Dr. Juma, Ta'adude Zaujati, p. 3*
- 19 . 16. *Sura Al-Nisa:3*
- 20 . 17. *Ibne Majah, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yazid Al-Qazweni, Al-Sunan, Dar ul Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 127*
- 21.18. *Ibid, Hadith No:1952*
- 22 . 19. *Baihaqi, Abu Bakar Ahmad bin Hussain, Al-Sunan, Maktaba Dar ul Baaz, Makka, Saudi Arabia, 1994, Vol. 7, p. 184, Hadith No:1383*
- 23.20. *Sura Al-Nisa:3*
- 24 .21. *Shah Wali ullah, Huja tullah el Baligha, Zamzam Publisher, Karachi, 2009, Vol 5, p. 98*
- 25 . *Sura Al-Baqar:222*
26. *Shah Wali ullah, Huja tullah el Baligha, Vol 5, p. 98*
- 27 . 23. *Sura Bani Israel:32*
- 28.24. *Dr Juma, Ta'adude Zaujati, p. 3*
- 29.25. *Ibid.*
- 30.26. *Arba'a Amaniyat Li Arba'a Nisa Arobiyat, p. 2*
- 31 . 27. *Al-Kasani, Ala uddin Abubakr bin Masood, Badai'a Al-Sanai'a, Dar ul Kutub Al'Ilmiya, Beirut, Lebanon, Vol. 7, p. 254*