POLYGAMY
AND THE
MARRIAGES
OF THE
PROPHET

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Polygamy

& Marriages

of the Prophet

(SAWW)

The Concept of Polygamy

&

the Marriages of the Prophet Muhammad

Introduction

Since 9/11, we have observed that certain groups have tried to capitalize on that tragedy, by attacking Islam from all sides.

Unfortunately, even some Christian TV channels have joined in the hate-mongering, trying to tarnish the image of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny).

One of the most common themes in their attack against Islam is regarding the Prophet Muhammad's many wives.

This booklet will discuss the concept of polygamy in Islam, followed by the marriages of the Prophet.

Marriage

Marriage in Islam is a sign of God's power and glory. The Qur'ãn says:

"From His signs is that He has created for you spouses from yourselves so that you may get peace [and tranquility] through them; and He placed between you love and mercy. In these are signs for the people who reflect." (30:21)

Monogamy & Polygyny [1]

Generally speaking, there are two types of marriages in Islam: • Monogamy: one man married to one woman;

• Limited polygyny (a kind of polygamy): one man married to two, three or at the most four wives.

In Islam, the ideal marriage is the monogamous form of marriage. Limited polygyny is a provision approved by Islam only for exceptional circumstances; and that also, with many stringent conditions.[2]

The vast majority of Muslim men are monogamous in their marriage relationships; those who have more than one wife are very few, likely less than 0.1% of the Muslim world.

Polygamy in History

Islam did not invent the system of polygamy. It existed long before Islam entered the global scene. The Bible says that Lamech, the grandson of Adam, "took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah."[3] So polygamy has existed from the earliest days of human history.

Many holy personalities of the Bible had many wives or concubines at the same time. Abraham had Sarah and Hajar.

Abraham was first blessed with a son through Hajar whom he named Ishmael, and then he was blessed with another son through Sarah whom he named Isaac.

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1 The term "polygyny" is preferred because polygamy means multiple spouses (one husband and multiple wives or one wife and multiple husbands), whereas polygyny refers only to the marriage of one man to multiple women.

2 For more on this subject, see Murtaza Mutahhari, *The Rights of Women in Islam* published by WOFIS, Tehran.

3 *The Book of Genesis* 4:19.

Look at the example of Jacob; he had four wives and concubines: Leah and Rachel (both were Jacob's cousins), and he also had Bilhah and Zilpah (both were slave-girls gifted to Jacob by his wives). It is from these four ladies that Jacob had twelve sons, who became ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

David, known in Arabic as Prophet Dawūd, had at least eight wives whose names are known; he had many others whose names were not recorded. The Second Book of Samuel (in the Bible) talks about "the wives" of David in Hebron and also in Jerusalem.[4]

Lamech, the grandson of Adam, had two wives.

Abraham had two wives: Sarah & Hajar.

Jacob had two wives & two concubines:

The Twelve of Tribes of Israel are from these four ladies.

David had many wives.

Islam & Polygyny

And so let it be known that Islam did not initiate the system of polygamy; it existed from the early dawn of human history. When Islam came about in the seventh century of the Common Era, it inherited the existing marriage system. The condoning of polygamy should not be seen as a piece of pure male chauvinism.

In the words of Karen Armstrong, "polygamy was not designed to improve the sex life of the boys — it was a piece of social legislation."[5]

It is to the credit of Islam that it modified and reformed the system in existence at the time.

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4 *2 Samuel* 3:2-5, 13-16; 5:13-16.

5 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad,* p. 190.

Firstly, Islam put a limit to the numbers of wives that a person can have at one time — a maximum of four wives at one time.

Secondly, Islam put stringent conditions on a person who wanted to marry a second wife. He must be able to provide and maintain the family, and also deal with both on basis of justice and fairness. In Chapter 4, verse 3, after allowing the Muslim men to marry two, three or four wives, the Qur'ãn immediately says:

"but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one…"

Looking at the psychology of humans, only exceptional people carry that true quality of justice and fairness. The Qur'ãn itself, in the same Chapter 4, verse 129, says:

"And you do not have the ability to do justice between the wives, even though you may wish (to do so)…"

Based on such verses, certain Muslim governments (like Iran and Egypt) regulate the provision of polygyny: a person who intends to marry a second wife has to seek approval from family court by proving the need for a second wife, and displaying the ability to provide for both wives in an adequate manner.

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Islam is a practical religion; its laws are in line with human nature. It does not deny the natural forces present in humans, rather it confronts them and provides guidance to control them without disrupting the peace in society.

Almost all Western governments have forbidden polygamy; but adultery is most rampant in these very countries. In spite of all attempts to promote monogamous relationships, many married men have mistresses or are involved in extra-marital affairs resulting in higher divorce rates, broken families, and children growing up without fathers. This kind of behaviour has also touched the highest offices —religious as well as secular— of the United States of America.

If a man wants to 'fool around', Islam will hold him responsible and tie him down to duties towards that 'second wife' and her children. Ira Lurvey, of the Family Law section of the American Bar Association said:

"We are going from monogamy to something called serial monogamy and we have no rules and guidelines; we're groping in the dark for how to conduct our lives."[6]

In Islam, you do not need to grope in the dark; Islam has given clear guidelines on all kinds of relationships: from monogamy to polygamy.

The Prophet 's Marriages

One of the examples of Islam-bashing that we see in the media is the one liner statement:

"Muhammad was a womanizer; he had nine wives."

For Muslims who have studied the books of the Orientalists and the Crusade-minded missionaries, such statements are not new.

It is the same product with a new label!

Study the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) and you will see that the Prophet was a man of the highest character, long before he started preaching Islam.

At the age of twenty-five, Prophet Muhammad married a famous and a highly respected lady of Mecca, by the name of

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6 *USA Today,* June 6, 1997.

Khadija bint Khuwaylid, who was older than him in age.

(According to popular opinion, she was 15 years older than the Prophet, but based on further research into this matter, we can say that she was only two years older than the Prophet.[7]) The important point is that he remained married to her for twenty-five years until she passed away in Mecca. Two years after her death, the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina where he founded the first Islamic society.

So for the first 50 years of his life, the Prophet had only one wife, Lady Khadīja, whom he loved dearly and who was one of the strongest pillars of

support in promoting his cause. During the last 13 years of his life, he married other wives.

Prophet Muhammad:

• **From birth to age 25:** *single.*

• **From age 25 to age 50: married to** *one wife, Khadija.*

• **From age 50 to age 63: married t***en wives*.

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7 Ibn Kathīr in *al-Bidãyah wa an-Nihãyah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: *Dar Ihyã' Turathi 'l- 'Arabi*, 1408) p. 360 as well as in his *as-Sīrah an-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1396) p. 265 states that Khadījah was twenty five years old at the time of her marriage to the Prophet of Islam, while 'Ali bin '*Isa al-Irbilī in Kashfu 'l-Ghumma,* vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Adwã', 1985) p. 133 and Ibn al-'Imãd al-Hanbali in *Shadharãtu 'dh-Dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 14 (Egyptian edition) say that she was twenty-eight years old at that time.

Ahmad al-Bulãdhurī and Abu 'l-Qãsim al-Kufī in their books as well as Sayyid al-Murtada in *ash-Shãfī* and Abu Ja'far in *at-Talkhīs* say that at the time of her marriage to the Prophet, Khadījah was a virgin; this is further collaborated by the report in *al-Anwãr wa al-Bida'* that Ruqayya and Zaynab were the daughters of Hãlah, the sister of Khadījah. See *Manãqib Ãl-I Abi Tãlib,* vol. 1, p. 159.

Those interested in studying more on the question whether Ruqayya, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthûm were real daughters or adopted daughters of the Prophet, see Sayyid Ja'far Murtaza al-'Ãmili, "Banãtu 'n-Nabí am Rabã'ibuhu?" in the quarterly *Turãthunã* (Qum: Mu'assasatu Ãli 'Bayt, 1413) nos. 30-31.

The Other Wives

During the last thirteen years of his life, the Prophet married ten wives. This has become an easy target for anti-Muslim writers and speakers who would like to tarnish the image of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), portraying him as someone who was driven by lust and passion.

If Prophet Muhammad was a man of lust, then why did he not marry any other woman when he was young, wealthy, and lived in a society that accepted unlimited polygamous relationships? Why did he not marry any other woman as long as Lady Khadija was alive, even though it was the prime time of his youth?

Looking at the above logic, the next question is: What was the rationale behind the other marriages of the Prophet during the last thirteen years of his life?

All the marriages of the Prophet, other than that with Lady Khadija, had a positive political or religious rationale. We may divide these marriages into four categories, and some marriages had dual purpose or reasons.

A. Providing protection & dignity to widows, in order to set an example:

1. Lady Sawdah bint Zam'ah: a Muslim lady whose husband had died in Abyssinia. When she returned to Mecca, she was a widow. Her father and brother were not only infidels, but also enemies of Islam. She could not seek shelter with them; they were so opposed to Islam that they could have gone as far as torturing her to death.

The Prophet, now a widower himself, married Sawdah in order to provide protection to her as well as to forge important links of kinship with his opponents.

2. Lady Zaynab bint Khuzaymah: a widow for the second time, when her second husband 'Abdullah bin Jahsh was martyred in the Battle of Uhu . She was known for her generosity, and was famous called "Ummul masãkīn, mother of the poor". Now she herself faced hard times. The Prophet wanted to maintain her prestige, and so he married her in the 3rd year AH. She died less than a year after this marriage.

3. Lady Umm Salamah: She was first married to 'Abdullah Abu Salamah. She migrated to Abyssinia with her husband. She was known for her piety and wisdom. When she became a widow and had orphan children, the Prophet married her in the 4th year A.H. She was also the sister of the chief of a powerful Meccan tribe of Makhzum. This marriage had the element of forging the link of kinship with his opponents in Mecca.

B. To set the slaves free

4. Lady Juwayriyyah bint al-Hãrith. After the Battle of Banu Mustaliq in the 5th year AH, the Muslims took two hundred families of that tribe in slavery. Juwayriyyah, the daughter of the chief of that tribe, had become a widow. The Prophet set her free and married her.

Why? The Muslims, who had made the two hundred families of Banu Mustaliq their slaves, realized that by Juwayriyyah's marriage to the Prophet, all two hundred families were now related to the Prophet by marriage. Out of courtesy to the Prophet, the Muslims set them free. Impressed by this nobility, the whole tribe of Banu Mustaliq became Muslim. By this marriage, the Prophet was able to transform a hostile tribe into an ally.

C. To forge friendly relationships for sake of Islam

5. Lady 'Ãisha bint Abi Bakr: Although the betrothal was done in Mecca, she came into the household of the Prophet after his migration to Medina.

She was the youngest wife of the Prophet.[8]

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8 The popular version of 'Ãisha's young age has been exploited by the anti- Islamic groups to attack the Prophet "for marrying a child". The fact of the

This marriage sealed the alliance with Abu Bakr so that he would be on the side of Muslims during the confrontation against the idol-worshippers of Mecca.

6. Lady Hafsah bint 'Umar ibn al-Khattãb: She became a widow after her husband was killed in the Battle of Badr. The Prophet married her in the 4th year AH. This marriage was also done to seal the Prophet's alliance with 'Umar.

7. Lady Umm Habibah, daughter of Abu Sufyan: She was married to 'Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh and had migrated to Abyssinia.

He became a Christian; while she continued with the Islamic faith and separated from him. Her father, Abu Sufyan, was a bitter enemy of Islam and planned battle after battle against Muslims.

When she returned to Medina, the Prophet married her in order to provide protection for her and also to soften the heart of Abu Sufyan. However, that marriage did not have the desired effect on Abu Sufyan.

8. Lady Safiyyah bint Huyaiy ibn Akhtab: She was the daughter of the chief of Banu Nadhir, a Jewish tribe of Khaybar.

She became a widow when her husband was killed in the Battle of Khaybar. She was taken as a captive by Muslim forces. The Prophet married her in the 7th year AH to maintain her noble status and also to establish marriage ties with her Jewish tribe.

matter is that Lady 'Ãisha was not a child when she was married in 2 AH to the Prophet. At-Tabari, the famous Muslim historian, writes that Abu Bakr's first two wives and their children were all born in the pre-Islamic era. *(Ta'rīkh at-Tabari,* vol. 2 [Beirut: al-A'lami, n.d.] p. 616.) Based on this, even if she was born a year before the commencement of Islam, 'Ãisha would be 15 or 16 years old at the time of her marriage to the Prophet – an age in which marriage was common in most cultures. Ibn Kathīr, in his *al- Bidãyah wa 'n-Nihãyah* (vol. 8, p. 381) states that Asmã' bint Abu Bakr, the sister of 'Ãisha, was ten years older than 'Ãisha. He also reports that Asmã' died in the year 73 AH at the age of 100. Based on this calculation, 'Ãisha was 18 or 19 years old at the time of her marriage.

D. The desire to be related to the Prophet

9. Lady Maymunah bint al-Hãrith al-Hilaliyyah: Her second husband died in 7 AH. She came to the Prophet and "gifted" herself to him if he would accept her. She only desired the honour of being called "the wife of the Prophet". The Prophet (based on verse 33:50 of the Qur'ãn) accepted her as his wife.

E. To break taboos lead by example

10. Lady Zaynab bint Jahsh: She was a cousin of the Prophet; and she was a widow and a divorcee. The circumstances of her marriage to the Prophet was very unusual.

Islam had come to end all the material and social criterion of distinction. Every Muslim was equal to the other. While preaching this equality, the Prophet, as an example, gave his three female relatives in marriage to persons of so-called 'low birth or status'.

Among those three relatives was Zaynab bint Jahsh. She was given in marriage to Zayd son of Hãritha, an Arab slave whom the Prophet had freed and then adopted as a son. After that adoption, Zayd was known as Zayd bin Muhammad – Zayd, the son of Muhammad.

The marriage of Zaynab to Zayd unfortunately soon took a turn for the worse. Zaynab could not overcome the fact that she was of nobler descent than her husband. No matter how much the Prophet counseled them, Zaynab's attitude did not change. So finally Zayd divorced her.

At the same time, verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 33 were revealed.

They declared that the concept of adoption (as it is known today) was not recognized in Islam.[9] After these verses, the people started calling Zayd by his real father's name: Zayd bin Hãritha.

But in order to fully abolish the system of adoption, Almighty God ordered the Prophet to marry Zaynab, the divorcee of Zayd. In

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9 For more details on the Islamic perspective, see my article, "Adoption in Islam," which is available on-line at www.al-m.ca

the pre-Islamic society of Arabia, an adopted son was considered to be like a real son, with the same rights and duties. For example, an adopted son's wife was considered the same as a real daughter-in- law with whom marriage was forbidden forever. And so to break that taboo, the Prophet married Zaynab, the divorcee of his former adopted son.

Both the marriages of Zaynab bint Jahsh served to enforce two important social principles of Islam. First, equality among Muslims irrespective of their ethnic or social distinctions; and second, the fact that a foster or adoptive relationship was not considered a tie of blood and should not be a barrier in marriage.

Conclusion

When Prophet Muhammad was young and wealthy, he had only one wife. But in the last thirteen years of his life when he was over fifty, he married different wives. With the exception of one, all were widows and elderly.

It is a fact that even when Prophet Muhammad had these other wives, his love for his first wife, Lady Khadija, never diminished.

Al-Bukhãri, quotes the youngest of his wives, Lady 'Ã'isha, as follows:

"I did not feel jealous of any of the wives of the Prophet as much as I did of Khadījah…because the Prophet used to (remember and) mention her very often. And whenever he slaughtered a sheep, he would send (the choicest parts) to Khadījah's friends. When I sometimes said to him, 'It appears that Khadījah was the only woman in the world,' the Prophet would say, 'Khadījah was such-and-such, and from her I had children.'"[10]

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10 Al-Bukhãri, *Sahīh*, vol. 5 (Arabic with English) p. 104.

In another narration, according to al-Bukhãri, Lady 'Ã'isha says:

"Once Hãlah, the sister of Khadījah, asked permission to enter the house."

Upon hearing Hãlah's voice, which sounded very similar to that of Khadīja, the Prophet remembered her beloved wife. 'Ã'isha says:

"I became jealous and said, 'What makes you remember an old woman amongst the old women of Quraysh, an old toothless woman who died long ago, while God has given you somebody better than her?'"[11]

The Prophet became visibly upset, and he said:

"By Allãh, I do not have anyone better than Khadījah. She believed in me when others were steeped into infidelity. She testified to my truth when other rejected my claim. She helped me with her wealth when others deprived me. And Allãh gave me children by her."[12]

These sentiments of the Prophet, expressed to the youngest of his wives, clearly show that for him, Lady Khadījah was still the First Lady of Islam. All the other marriages had some social, political or religious reasons behind them. These marriages were not based on lust and passion, as many enemies of Islam would like to say.

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11 Ibid.

12 It seems that al-Bukhãri avoided from quoting the response of the Prophet fully; however, other sources have provided the Prophet's response as quoted. See *Musnad* of Ahmad bin Hanbal, vol. 6, p. 117-118, 150; *Sahih* of Tirmidhi, and Ibn Kathir.

I hope that this discourse has helped in understanding the Islamic view on polygamy as well as the reasons for the Prophet's marriages. Islam is a religion in tune with human nature. It has rules and guidelines for the burning social issues of our time.

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Book 4:

This text covers the concept of polygamy, specifically in the concept of islam and the marriages of Prophet Muhammad.

It discusses marriage in Islam, polygamy in world history, and in Islamic history. It then goes on to explore the marriages of the prophet, why they took place, who his wives were, and the stereotypes attached to his marriages.

It concludes, with the text above sections, by showing the significance of the Prophet's maariage and reflecting the true spirit of marriage in Islam.