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## "Delayed Marriage among Women in Pakistan: Its Social Causes and Solutions in the Islamic Perspective"

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### Abstract:

*Pakistan, an Islamic state often referred to as the fortress of Islam, has been experiencing an increase in the average age of marriage due to international changes and the world becoming a global village. Pakistan is among the countries where the trend of delayed marriages is growing. Parents strive to find a good match for their daughters so that they can lead a happy and prosperous life in their in-laws' house. Due to this wait, the number of unmarried girls in Pakistan is rapidly increasing. According to a United Nations report, there are currently ten million women over the age of 35 in Pakistan waiting to get married. This highlights the severe issues related to marriage in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>*

*Economic depression stands as a significant cause of delayed marriages. Approximately 34 percent of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line<sup>2</sup>, unable to meet their basic needs, let alone the one-time marriage cost averaging 450,000 rupees. Hence, economic conditions constitute a primary reason for marriage delays. Additionally, several other factors contribute to this issue. This article will emphasize and discuss the social causes in detail.*

**Keywords:** Delayed marriage, women, social causes, solutions

### Introduction:

It is important to stress that marriage plays a significant role within the social system in the context of Islam; this is important both as the continuation of the human race as well as the condemnation of base natural instincts through civilized means. Other important relations are viewed in Islam as such crucial ones that it is impossible to regard one's faith as whole without them and marriage is viewed as half of faith. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated:

"إِذَا تَزَوَّجَ الْعَبْدُ اسْتَكْمَلَ نِصْفَ الدِّينِ فَلْيَتَّقِ فِي النِّصْفِ الْبَاقِي"<sup>3</sup>

"When a servant marries, he completes half of his religion; let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half." Allah Almighty has referred to marriage as the practice

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of the prophets in the Quran: We have sent messengers before you, and gave them wives and children."<sup>4</sup>

Besides facilitating love and cooperation of two people, marriage creates a powerful family relationship. Marriage is one of the ways in which a person can improve on how responsible he or she is in meeting peoples needs and satisfying them. Hence, marriage is regarded as a highly recommended and an essential pillar in Islamic sharee'ah in enabling an individual to live a fulfilling and a balanced life. The ones who delay or neglect marriage which is not allowed on the grounds of necessary conditions pave a way for deviation, misguidance and sins.

In Pakistan, the proportion of girls who remain unmarried is rising; the greatest rates highest found to be in the urban areas; there is also delay marriage for men and women. One could, therefore, ask why people are postponing marriages and what this means for society. What are the directives of an Islamic marriage if one decides to postpone the marriage? The answers to these questions are tried to be given in this article.

### **The Impact of Modern Education on Delayed Marriages:**

The primary reason parents often delay their children's marriages is their insistence that their children complete their education first. However, by the time their education is finished, the optimal age for marriage may have passed. This delay can lead to various psychological and social issues among the youth, which are frequently observed in society. It's important to recognize that education can continue after marriage, and there are no religious prohibitions against this. When a girl becomes of marriageable age, she should be married, and the marriage should not be delayed merely for the sake of contemporary education. It is mentioned in a Hadith that when a person has a child, they should give the child a good name and provide a good education. Then, when the child reaches maturity, they should arrange their marriage. If the child reaches maturity and the parent does not arrange the marriage, and the child falls into sin, then the sin (to some extent) will be upon the parent. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says:

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «من ولد له ولد فليحسن اسمه وادبه فإذا بلغ فليزوجه فإن بلغ ولم يزوجه فاصاب إثمًا فإنما إثمه على أبيه.»<sup>5</sup>

### **Searching for the Ideal Partner:**

Beyond completing education and securing employment, the pursuit of an ideal partner further contributes to delaying marriage. Many seek a partner who is intelligent, well-educated, has no siblings, and is perfect in every way—similar to a model. This idealism can add several years to the time it takes to find a suitable match. Muhammad ﷺ says about it:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِذَا حَظَبَ إِلَيْكُمْ مَنْ تَرْضَوْنَ دِينَهُ وَخُلُقَهُ فَرَوْجُوهُ إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوا تَكُنْ فِتْنَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ وَفَسَادًا عَرِيضًا<sup>6</sup>

"When someone whose religion and character you are pleased with proposes to (someone under the care) of one of you, then marry to him. If you do not do so, then there will be turmoil (Fitnah) in the land and abounding discord (Fasad)."

Thus, this issue is spreading to the extent that girls are sitting at home waiting for proposals, and while proposals are available, they are waiting for the ideal match. This is also a major reason why in Pakistan, ten million girls aged 35 are unmarried and waiting for marriage.<sup>7</sup>

### **Delay in Marriage Due to Employment:**

Additionally, parents often postpone the marriage of daughters who are the primary earners in the family. These daughters play a crucial role in supporting their family's income, often covering the educational and other expenses of their younger siblings. In our society and culture, it is uncommon for children to express their desire for marriage directly to their parents. Consequently, these young women and men may be overlooked and remain unmarried for extended periods.

Sometimes, the process of finding a spouse takes so long that individuals surpass the ideal age for marriage. This is why the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) emphasized the importance of living a life of moderation and temperance in all aspects. Delaying marriage can lead to numerous negative social, psychological, and health consequences. Marrying at an appropriate age helps protect individuals from sins and other harmful behaviours.

Reflecting on the life of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), we observe that he never advocated for delaying marriage due to financial concerns or other social criteria. He taught that economic challenges and cultural customs should not be seen as justifiable obstacles to marrying at a suitable age. In light of the Prophet's teachings, we will also explore the model of an ideal Islamic marriage

"عن ابي هريرة ان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال : "تتکح النساء لاربعة لمالها، ولحسبها، ولجمالها، ولدينها، فاطفر بذات الدين تربت يداك"<sup>8</sup>

Abu Huraira *Razi allhu anhu* reported God's Messenger as saying, "A woman may be married for four reasons, for her property, her rank, her beauty and her religion; so get the one who is religious and prosper.

The concept of marriage has significantly evolved over time. In the past, early or even child marriages were common. However, these practices have gradually become obsolete. With the rise of modernity and materialism, the trend has shifted dramatically towards the opposite extreme, leading to a prevalence of late marriages. Below are some possible reasons for this delay.

### **Disparity in Expectations:**

In many instances, the expectations for choosing a spouse are misaligned due to significant economic disparities. On one hand, extreme poverty restricts options for some individuals, limiting their ability to meet the financial and social criteria often demanded by potential partners or their families. On the other hand, immense wealth raises expectations, with affluent individuals seeking partners who can match their economic status or social standing. This economic imbalance creates a widening gap between different social strata, making it challenging for people to find compatible partners.

### **Caste and Class Divisions:**

Much like in Hindu society, considerations of caste and class play a significant role in our society, making marriage a complex issue with respect to these divisions. While the concept of "Shari'a caste" acknowledges certain social hierarchies for practical purposes, the imposition of self-defined caste systems has become a significant barrier. Temporary wealth or social status is often used as a benchmark for determining suitability, which can delay marriages as individuals and families seek to align these transient standards with their own. This emphasis on caste and class distinctions complicates the marriage process, leading to prolonged delays as parties struggle to meet these stringent and often arbitrary criteria. According to a United Nations report from last year concerning Pakistan, 22 million young men and women in the country are waiting to get married. The report states that due to the lack of suitable matches, parents marry their children to cousins. When cousin matches are not available, parents are now willing to consider matches outside their caste and community, but they hesitate due to the lack of suitable and reputable matches outside their own caste and community.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Burden of Dowry**

In many societies, the practice of dowry has become a significant burden. Families often go to extraordinary lengths to meet the expected standards to avoid societal competition and potential insults. This relentless pursuit to provide an adequate dowry can lead to severe financial strain on the family. The pressure to meet these demands can be so intense that it delays marriage for many women, leaving them unmarried and approaching the brink of old age. This cruel and pervasive ritual not only imposes a heavy economic toll but also affects the social and emotional well-being of countless women.

Dowry, in its original and modest form, refers to a collection of gifts and life necessities that parents provide to their daughters upon marriage. According to Shari'ah (Islamic law), it is permissible (halal) to give necessary items to one's daughter without any form of ostentation or competitive display. The intention behind such gifts should be to support the newly married couple as they start their life together, not to showcase wealth or social status.

When parents willingly and happily provide their daughter with essential items at the time of her marriage, this act is not only allowed but also aligns with the tradition

(Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). An example from the life of the Prophet illustrates this practice: when his daughter Fatimah al-Zahra (may Allah be pleased with her) married Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet gave her modest but necessary items. These included a simple shawl (paludar chador), a (mushkiza), and a pillow filled with azhar grass. These items were practical and reflected a spirit of simplicity and modesty

"عن علي، رضي الله عنه قال: جهز رسول الله ﷺ فاطمة في خميل وقربة ووسادة حشوها إذخر<sup>10</sup>

"The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, gave the following things as dowry to his daughter-in-law, Fatimah al-Zahraa, may Allah be pleased with her: a blanket with cotton, a mushkiza, a pillow filled with azhar grass."

### Understanding the Concept of Dowry in Islamic Tradition

Many scholars interpret the hadith about the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) providing items to his daughter Fatimah al-Zahra (may Allah be pleased with her) as giving her a dowry. However, it is essential to understand the historical and cultural context of this action. In pre-Islamic Arabia and during the Prophet's time, the concept of dowry as we understand it today—gifts or wealth given by the bride's family to the groom or his family—was not a prevalent practice.

The term "dowry" as used in contemporary times did not exist in the same form during the Prophet's era. The items given to Fatimah were part of her preparation for marriage, but they did not constitute a formal dowry in the modern sense. These provisions were more about ensuring she had the necessary items to start her new household, rather than a dowry intended to enhance her social status or fulfill societal expectations.

In the case of Fatimah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) provided her with modest and essential items such as a shawl, a water skin, and a pillow filled with grass. These were practical gifts meant to support her daily life, not a lavish dowry. Moreover, there is no documented evidence that the Prophet gave similar items to his other daughters as dowry, suggesting that this was not a fixed tradition or expectation. The hadith uses the word "جهز" (jahhaz), which translates to "prepare" or "equip."<sup>11</sup> This term implies that the Prophet was helping to furnish and arrange the necessities for Fatimah's household, not providing a dowry in the conventional sense. It's important to note that the money for these items was actually provided by Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), Fatimah's husband, as part of the marriage arrangement. The Prophet's role was to facilitate the procurement of these essentials, ensuring that the couple had what they needed to start their life together.<sup>12</sup>

Referring to the marriage of Hazrat Ali and Fatima, Maulana Shah Moinuddin Nadvi writes, citing "Asaba," that when Hazrat Ali (RA) requested the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for the hand of Hazrat Fatima (RA) in marriage, the Prophet (PBUH) asked, "What do you have for the dowry?" Hazrat Ali (RA) replied, "Nothing." The Prophet (PBUH) then inquired, "Where is your armor?" He suggested, "Sell it." Following the

Prophet's advice, Hazrat Ali (RA) sold his armor to Hazrat Uthman (RA) for 480 dirhams. According to some traditions, Hazrat Uthman (RA) later returned the armor as a gift to Hazrat Ali (RA). Hazrat Ali (RA) took the money from the sale of the armor and offered it to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) then called Abu Bakr, Salman Farsi, and Bilal. After giving them some dirhams, he instructed, "Use this money to buy the necessary household items for Hazrat Fatimah (RA)." Additionally, he gave some dirhams to Hazrat Asma and asked her to purchase perfume and fragrance. The remaining dirhams were entrusted to Umm Salamah for safekeeping.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, these items were not part of a formal dowry but rather a thoughtful preparation for Fatimah's new life. This practice underscores the importance of providing for basic needs rather than engaging in the elaborate and often burdensome dowry customs seen in some cultures today. If it is considered obligatory to accept these items as a dowry, then it should be understood that only the basic necessities which were not already present in their house were arranged and provided by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for his daughter. Therefore:

1. If parents give a gift to their daughter according to their wishes, without coercion or show, there is nothing wrong with it, and the girl will rightfully own it.
2. In Shariah, it is not correct for the groom's side to demand or pressure the bride's family to provide a dowry.

"ذهب جمهور الفقهاء إلى أنه لا يجب على المرأة أن تتجهز بمهرها أو بشيء منه، وعلى الزوج أن يعد لها المنزل بكل ما يحتاج إليه ليكون سكنا شرعيا لانقا بهما. وإذا تجهزت بنفسها أو جهزها ذووها فالجهاز ملك لها خاص بها"<sup>14</sup>

According to Islamic jurists, a woman is not obligated to provide anything to her husband on the occasion of marriage. However, it is obligatory for the husband to prepare a home for his wife that meets the requirements of a Shariah-compliant residence. If the woman or her family voluntarily provides items for the marriage, these will be the exclusive property of the woman.

It is not wrong to give a dowry at a daughter's marriage, but it should consist of items that are useful and necessary for her. The dowry should address her needs, providing things that will be of practical use. This practice is supported by the actions of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him).

### **The Practice of Dowry and Its Social Implications**

The practice of dowry, as it is prevalent today, is not allowed by Sharia law and is highly condemned because this social evil has made it very difficult for poor parents to marry off their daughters. Jurists have declared it as bribery and haram to demand

money, motorbikes, cars, and other valuables from the bride's family, or to request such items through intermediaries.

Parents fear that if the dowry is not sufficiently high, their daughter will be looked down upon. Consequently, they often try to provide more than they can afford, ending up burdened with interest-bearing debt, which is also forbidden in Islam. For not giving an adequate dowry, girls are sometimes condemned, beaten, or even killed. Giving dowry out of a desire for show, fame, and pride, rather than out of kindness, is highly condemned in Islam.

Many poor girls remain unmarried for a long time due to their families' inability to afford a dowry, which is undoubtedly unfair to the girls. Poor parents face immense stress due to the lack of dowry items and are forced to endure unbearable hardships to arrange for the dowry.

In short, the practice of dowry, involving the aforementioned evils, must be eliminated to prevent unnecessary suffering and injustice.

### **Eliminating Extravagance in Weddings**

One occasion where people spend money recklessly is weddings. From engagement to dawat walima, obsessing over baseless customs, exchanging gifts, booking high-end wedding halls, and spending on decorations, these practices are not hidden from the eyes of the wise. How beneficial it would be if extravagance is avoided and this money is spent on welfare of society, and helping and supporting the poor to make them economically independent. This advice applies not only to the poor but also to prosperous societies. Islam prohibit from Israf (extravagance) and Tabdhir (squandering recklessly) Allah says in Qur'an:

" Surely, squanderers are brothers of satans, and the Satan is very ungrateful to his Lord",<sup>15</sup>.

People often take loans with interest just to fulfil their vain and illegitimate desires, whereas Islam encourages marriage to be simple and inexpensive. The Messenger of Allah, ﷺ said: The most blessed marriage is the one in which the burden is less<sup>16</sup>.

I shall not delve into the manner in which youthful individuals delaying marriage attend to their natural and physical requirements or the ramifications thereof, as this is an auxiliary matter. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to acknowledge that when progenitors enter into matrimony later in life and subsequently procreate at an advanced age, they may encounter declining health or even decease prior to their offspring completing their education. This predicament can result in the offspring being of tender age and possibly devoid of sufficient support. This situation necessitates rectification. Parents ought not to postpone their progeny's marriages without necessity, for doing so can shield the offspring from potential psychological and social dilemmas. Expeditious and judicious contemplation of matrimony can similarly yield advantageous repercussions for society, encompassing a presumable diminution in crimes pertaining to sexual conduct.

## Conclusion:

In examining the socio-cultural determinants impacting the postponement of matrimonial unions in Pakistan, elements such as educational and career pursuits, the quest for an optimal partner, and economic inequalities come to prominence. Traditions like dowry and lavish wedding expenditures intensify the predicament, imposing substantial financial and psychological pressures on families, particularly those with limited financial means. These customs not only contravene Islamic doctrines but also obstruct prompt marital unions. Islamic ordinances endorse modesty in matrimonial ceremonies and stress the importance of marrying within an appropriate timeframe. Compliance with these tenets can alleviate the social and psychological repercussions associated with deferred marriages. By valuing religious precepts over materialistic demands, numerous difficulties linked to delayed matrimonial unions can be mitigated, fostering a society that is more balanced and harmonious.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aiknewshd.tv/28-Apr-2024/68759>

<sup>2</sup> . <https://www.urdupoint.com/daily/livenews/2022-04-19/news-3104262.html>

<sup>3</sup> . . Tibreezi, Muhammad bin Abdullah, Mishqat Ul Masabeeh, kitab al-Nikah, vol 3, p 11, Hadith No:3096

<sup>4</sup> Surah Ar-Ra'd:38

<sup>5</sup> . Tibreezi, Muhammad bin Abdullah, Mishqat Ul Masabeeh, Maktaba Muhammadian Lahore , kitab al-Nikah, vol 3, p 24-25

<sup>6</sup> Imam Tirmidhi, Jami` at-Tirmidhi, The Book on Marriage, Hadith No. 1084.

<sup>7</sup> . <https://urdu.geo.tv/latest/363245>- dated 14<sup>th</sup> july 2024

<sup>8</sup> bn Majah, Sunan Ibn Majah «Kitab al-Nikah, Chapter: Rulings and Problems of Marriage, Hadith No. 1585-

<sup>9</sup> - <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/27-Apr-2024/1705410> dated 14<sup>th</sup> july 2024

<sup>10</sup> . /mam al-Nasa'i, Ahmad bin Shuaib al-Nasa'i, Sunan al-Nasa'i, Maktaba Rahmaniyyah, Vol 2, page 122.

<sup>11</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%B2> dated 8<sup>th</sup> july, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> . Maulana Muhammad Manzoor Nomani, Ma'arif al-Hadith, Maktaba Dar al-Isha'at, Karachi, 2007, Vol 7, p 460-461.

<sup>13</sup> . Nadvi, Moeenuddin, Seeyar ul Sahabah, Maktaba Islamiat Lahore, vol 1, p 256

<sup>14</sup> . Jamaat al-Ulama, Al-Musua'a Al-Fiqhiyya Kuwaiti, Dar al-Salsal , vol 16, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> .Al-Qura'n, Bani Israel: 27

<sup>16</sup> - Musnad Ahmad, Musnad al-Sayyida Aisha, vol 9, p 365, Hadith No:24583