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Child Marriage: Its Medical, Social, Economic and Psychological Impacts on Society and Aftermath

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Child Marriage: Its Medical, Social, Economic and Psychological Impacts on Society and Aftermath

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ABSTRACT:

The current research work describes the disadvantages of child marriage and its impact on the different aspects of society. Early marriage has not only bad effects on the health of young girl but socially, economically and psychologically, it has countless disadvantages. Due to poverty and lack of education, parents consider getting their daughters married early as the biggest solution. Medically, the average age of girls also decreases after going through the process of early motherhood. Although, Child rights are the part of fundamental rights of constitution but practical implications are vanished. In Islam, Child marriages are strictly forbidden and limitations are set for marriage but most of the Islamic countries like Pakistan large number of early marriages is taking place and these marriages have countless drawbacks. The present study strives to analyze that how bad effects of early marriages on the health and psychology of young couples, and what are the economic and social disadvantages of child marriages? Main objective of the paper is to analyze the demerits of early marriages and its impacts on society and its Islamic solution according to the teachings of Islam. The research has mainly been conducted through primary and secondary sources including research reports, WHO report, papers published in various journals, newspapers and documents from archives and libraries. The study has not only tried to bring out the multiple bad effects of early marriages but also analyzed that today how can this curse be eradicated from society.

Key words: Early Marriage, Society, Islam, Child Rights, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a lifelong bond of love, the union of two souls as well as the guarantee of the growth of human race. A closer look at world's history reveals that the history of marriage is very old, when people learned to live together in the society; he also felt the need of a life time companion. In order to help the human race to grow, there was a need for a bond like marriage.

The concept and practice of marriage first appeared in Mesopotamia around 2350 BCE, and many years later marriage was formally recognized as a ritual in Hebrew, Greek and Roman societies. (Edward, 2003). Every sensible and respectable society has made marriage an integral part of the society and had made it a regular part of the law, but at the same time the concept of underage marriage has begun to grow and brutal results are found as a result of early marriages. Not only in Pakistan but all over the world, as a result of Child marriage, there are numerous physical, educational, psychological, social and economic problems. Early marriage is still a sign that a girl is not getting the rights she deserves in society, gender inequality seems everywhere,

where poverty, ignorance and economic exploitation are common. South Asia is the second largest region of the globe after West Africa where child marriages are common, surprisingly that number is growing. Patriarchal system run by males is totally male dominated and in it, women have no right to live life of her own free will, she cannot pursue a career of her own choice nor husband. About 40% of girls in poor countries of the world get married early and even today in many parts of the world, it is very common for girls to get marry early. (Sathar, 1984) When families living in extreme poverty and sometimes girls themselves find marriage a way to reduce costs and secure finances. The effects of child marriage are generally linked to health and nutrition, fertility and population growth, child mortality and gender-based violence. Although the national Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 16 years for females and 18 years for males, in Pakistan, the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act (SMCRA) 2013 was a landmark law that rose the minimum age of females to 18 years for marriages in the province. (Jawad, 2018) Underage marriage in Pakistan is based on cultural customs and traditions, robs girls' childhood, due to underage, they fail to fulfil their social responsibilities and so many social, economic, psychological and domestic problems arise.

The present study is an attempt to provide answers to many questions to many questions i.e. What is the concept of child marriage in Islam? How early marriage is a constant threat to the Islamic and other societies? What are the physical, socio-economic and psychological effects of early marriages in the focused context of Islam? How to end child marriages from society? These and many other questions are haunting the mind and in present study an effort has been constructing to answer.

Marriage in The Eyes of Islam

In Islam, the relationship between husband and wife is highly valued and their rights have unique significance. The first relationship in the world is between husband and wife, the marriage of Hazrat Adam and Hazrat Hawwa started a social and religious relationship on earth and the human race grew.

Allah says in the holy Quran and describes marriage differently: He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. (Surah Yusuf: 30,21) According to the Holy Prophet Muhammad SAW, the best of them is the one who has good morals and the best of them are the ones who treat their wives well. In the eyes of Islam, marriage is not only a martial bond between a man and a woman, but it is also a manifestation of peace, tranquility, shame, modesty, tolerance, love, sacrifice and forgiveness.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW said: There is nothing like marriage, for the two who love one another. (Sunan, Ibn Majah). Islam's position on child marriage is very simple; Islam has no concept of child marriage and strongly opposes forced marriages. It is also bright clear the all-Holy Prophets also married their daughters after consulting them. Islam is the only religion that has allowed girls to express their likes and dislikes in marriage and the age limit for adulthood is clear.

The minimum standard according to Islam for those young couples who get married is that they not only have reached the level of puberty but also have the better maturity level to handle and understand their all-fundamental rights, duties and responsibilities in wedding and they should be able to meet them positively. (Huda, 2002)

According to Islam, if a child reaches the age of puberty by the age of 18, then he is eligible for marriage, because an 18 years old child is mentally and physically able to carry out and understand social responsibilities well. The scholars and muftis also agree that the one who prays and fasts after reaching puberty is a conscious one, but prays and fasts are not obligatory for adolescents. It is also stated that the puberty of children can be accessed from their mental and psychological maturity. Sometimes 18 years old is mentally strong enough to handle responsibilities of society, but sometimes even a 30 years old man does not have the strength to make good decision. (Ali, 2012) Imam Abu Hanifa also opposed the marriage of minors and said that until the child reaches the age of puberty and he had a proper understanding of how to choose a spouse. Imam Abu Hanifa also believes that parents do not have the right to marry off their children against their will or before they reach puberty. (Ali, 2012)

Medical Impact on Early Marriages

Underage marriage is actually a martial bond in which both the bride or one of them is under 18 years of age. It also reduces health and education opportunities to a dangerous level, especially for girls, and they on the other hand, suffer from many mental and physical illnesses due to their innocence and young age. Poverty causes many parents to force their daughters to get married early, because of it, girls' education and their financial expenses are unbearable and early marriages are considered the best way to reduce poverty. Early marriage can lead to serious health problems for girls. Early marriage also results in shorter birth spacing and the girl becomes more vulnerable each year as she goes through puberty especially pregnancy related injuries such as obstetric fistula. Child brides are often unable to discuss safe sex practices and therefore have a high risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections during sexual intercourse. Integrated outcomes of child marriage reach the girls themselves, with infant brides having a 60% higher chance of death in the first year of their lives than those born to mothers over the age of 19. (Berti, 2003)

However, underage marriages, involves both girls and boys, according to Santhya, Gilrs from Pakistani are more effected and forced for early marriages more than males. This is a very important issue in the socio-cultural context that needs comprehensive attention. Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2015) estimated that in every three girls, one got married before the age of 18, and same one girl out of ten gets pregnant or becomes mother at the very early age between 15 to 18. (Report, 2015)

It is also a fact that one in three girls fall prey to sexual violence at an early age, due to which their next life is spent in unknowing fear, hatred and suffocation. Such girls are given in marriage soon, lose their beauty very quickly. They also look older than their age in terms of size and shape. Early marriage increases the chances of pregnancy by

90% and early motherhood is detrimental to the health of both mother and child. At the time of delivery, such girls lose their lives due to complications. In almost all Islamic countries of the world, marriage limit is fixed. Most of the countries are in favor of marriage after 18 years because according to medical science, the age of puberty for a boy and a girl is 18 years after which they can get married. (UNICEF, 2001) There are numerous medical disadvantages to marrying before the age of 18. In a young marriage, the chances of giving birth to a child are very high or not at all and in both cases can't the girls bear the birth in her body. Thus, their average age decreases and premature aging occurs. From premature sexual relations uterine and breast diseases begin to develop in girls very quickly. (UNICEF, 2005) In Islam, the life and health of both men and women is very important and religion Islam is strongly against the violation of rights. Early marriage not only causes medical harm but also effects education, employment, mental and physical wellbeing of females. Girls face the consequences but they also tolerate different unconditional situations like unintentional pregnancies, miscarriages, premature labor, low birth weight, mental and maturity ethics are seen in teenage girls and are closely linked to early marriages. (Nour, 2009)

Social Impacts of Early Marriages

The social disadvantages of early marriage are quite high. The biggest disadvantages of early marriages for a boy are that he does not have a special place in a society due to not being financially strong, due to which he has to bear domestic responsibilities and expenses, they are out of his range. On the other hand, due to early marriage of girls, they are deprived of proper education and then they come under the care of a man and they need a man's hand till last breath. Due to lack of proper education, females could not get a suitable job, she even could not support the household expenses and thus became part of the unemployed population of the country. (Singh, 1996) Another difficult situation is that parents cannot afford to pay too much dowry and nowadays due to high inflation dowry has become a huge burden for parents. To deal with this difficult situation, children are allowed to get married early so that no dowry is given in exchange for the young bride. It has also become fault of the society that the girl will bring heavy dowry as she is old, so the parents married their daughters early in order to avoid the notion. (Report, 2020)

There is no concept of dowry in Islam but due to its proximity to Hindus in the Subcontinent, many false traditions were introduced among the Muslims and dowry is one of them. Dowry has become a major scourge in the world at present only in Pakistan and India well as many social rights are not being given to girls in the society such as education. As a result of early marriage girls' status became domestic, not less than a housemaid. "Early Marriage in the country not only deprives the child of basic education but also stops his personal development. Many uneducated and unskilled brides/females rely heavily on their husband and in-laws to live and their whole life spends in need. Similarly, females are not enough mature, clever or skilled enough to perform household tasks with organized manner or they also cannot take good care for

their husbands and children and entire in-laws. Early marriage also snatches away a chance of leading better life and a girl cannot adopt valuable and necessary skills as an occupation, which are essential for the labor market, therefore she can never play a significant role in alleviating poverty at home. Expelling girls from schools and forcing them for early marriages reveals that poverty will be passed from mother to her daughter, family to family and even till the future generations to come". (Report,20)

"Islam does not allow male domination over female but maintains women's rights, dignity, honor and status by ensuring and believing gender equality, balance and also equal rights for both man and woman in all spheres of human cultured life. According to Islam, a woman regulates completely, who has a legal personality and able to enter into contract or can make will in her own name for children. Female has all right to adopt any profession, work or business of her own choice and has authority and full right like men to dispose her property, wealth and things. Woman is granted for inheritance in almost various levels like as a mother, as wife, as sister and as daughter. She has also full freedom and right to choose husband for herself, and she can also demand dower and maintenance from husband at any time. Islam commands men to treat with their partners, wives with sympathy and full respect, Deen-e-Islam provides honor, respect and social status to women and their guarantee". (Yohan, 2003)

The above lines prove that Islam strongly opposes underage marriage in the society as there is no mental harmony between the young couple and difficulties arise and later these hurdles go on to take the form of divorce and the opportunities for the girl to move forward in society and live a good life are lost forever.

Economic Impacts of Early Marriage

The biggest reason for early marriage is economic condition, according to Islam, every child brings his own substances, but still parents with weak faith consider more children because of their bad circumstances, especially girls/daughters whose education is considered futile and given less importance than sons. While according to Islamic teachings, a Muslim woman can run a household by participating in all kinds of economic activities not only that but can also get higher positions by getting higher education. In Islam, women are never prevented from becoming economically strong, but in Islamic society, underage marriage, however shatters a girl's future. Then the low income and high expenses increase, many domestic problems start to arise, this can lead to poor household conditions and an increase in poverty and dangerously low per capita income. The biggest disadvantage of early marriage is that the girl's education is incomplete and she cannot do a good job even if she wants to after marriage and thus the financial condition at home remain bad. (Aziz, 2015)

"With many children, early marriages are considered the best solution to curb poverty and reduce economic pressure. To poor parents, a lesser daughter means one less person to feed, clothe, nourish and educate. Families often use child marriage as strategy to evade food security. Females are often used as debt substitutes, paying loans and resolving disputes. In different societies, bride's family is compelled to pay

a dowry; there underage marriage is tantamount low bride price. In different societies, where the groom's family is responsible to pay the dowry for the bride, there younger girls have lucrative costs. Different parents cannot afford their several children; think early marriage as the best option to reduce their poverty." (Khanna, 2013)

The biggest financial loss of child marriage is increase in population growth and adverse impact on fertility.

"The biggest economic cost to date is underage marriage due to its impact on high population growth and inflation. Involvement in large families and consequent population growth delays the demographic division from child marriages that can result from low fertility and high investment in the education field. The cost of this association could go higher in the trillions of dollars from now and 2020 onwards". (Raj, 2010)

Psychological Impacts on Early Marriage

Early marriage revolves around a myriad of psychological problems; actually, spouses don't have mutual understanding due to very young age and they remained failed to understand each other's psychology. Thus, distances and battles gradually increase from the beginning. Globally girls who get married off before the age of 18 are more likely to be victim of domestic (physical or sexual) violence, and when the violence starts again, not all ages are left behind. According to the international Council of Research on Women, with low levels of education and married adolescent between the ages of 15-19 years old are at a high risk of domestic violence than older and more educated women. The young girl is not clever and brave because of her innocence and inexperience; she is unable to understand the likes and dislikes hidden in human attitudes and thus as a result of not understanding social attitudes, she become very puzzle, remain confused and feel inferior. Psychologically, early marriage of a girl causes her a lot of stress and problems like PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Depression. (Nasir, 2003)

"According to research in the United States, marriage under the age of 18 increases the risk of cancer, heart diseases and diabetes especially among young girls". (Dawn, 2014). Due to underage marriage where girls are not able to fulfil even domestic responsibilities and they also suffer early pregnancy and pregnancy related mortality, morbidity, causing major physiological and psychological health issue in adolescent girls. Lack of confidence and mental readiness in a healthy martial relationship can lead to depression. WHO convened 65 world health assembly on early marriages in 2012: WHO policies such as Health 2020 and guidelines for the protection of adolescent's health point to a need for further implementation and better research surveillance. WHO has taken an active role in addressing this issue through a global exercise, involving technical experts and representatives from various United Nations agencies, government and nongovernmental organizations from all six WHO regions, to draw increased attention to research on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and create a list of priority research issues? (WHO, 2012). From an Islamic point of view, the root cause of psychological problems is early marriage in which the girl suffers

from many mental illnesses due to her mental retardation and not being mentally prepared for marriage. Early marriages also hinder adolescents' personality development and physical development, as the child has to undergo constant physical, mental and emotional changes before reaching mental maturity. When a girl is married with aged husband there is high chances of becoming widow in a very young age, eventually young widow may face various socio-economic problems and can't take care of orphan children. This situation causes elopement or suicides, sometimes remarriage often creates horrible problems for couple and children, so psychologically shattered family cannot gain sound and smooth level and status in a society.

Recommendations

- Early marriages should be prevented by using social media as a tool.
- Electronic media should also broadcast dramas, TV shows and programs on the disadvantages of early marriages. Print media should also publish informative columns and research reports on the harms of early marriages.
- On the harms of early marriages, purposeful articles or essays should be included in Urdu and English secondary and higher secondary textbooks.
- Lady health workers can play positive role in reducing the ratio of early marriages, by talking to the girl's parents, they can inform about the dangers of early marriages.
- Distribute pamphlets from house to house to raise awareness of the dangers of child marriage in a religious context.
- Strict legislation is needed to prevent underage marriage; marriage under the age of 18 should be annulled.
- Feminist organizations should play a positive role in preventing early marriages.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is essential for the survival of human beings and humanity as well as peaceful love and harmony in society. Raising the human race with mutual love is the ascension of this sacred relationship; however, Islam lays down certain rules regarding marriage. Forced and underage marriage is not a concept in Islam, in the light of Quran and Sunnah, girl has full right to marry of her choice. Child marriage is a global problem and almost every region of every continent suffers from this social evil, it is also a violation of basic human rights and marrying early is associated with negative outcomes. Practical distance from Islam led to the promotion of underage marriage, from the medical point of view, young girls are unable to cope with the stages of pregnancy and motherhood, so the life of either mother or child is in danger. After getting married early, the parents put their daughters to death with their own hands. Becoming a mother at a young age fails to understand social values and attitudes, which leads to fights, quarrels and divorce.

Early marriage in a society causes irreparable damage to the girl's education due to which she is in need of a husband for the rest of her life, but unable to support her husband financially. Child marriage has serious disadvantages, at a young age, a girl

suffers from diseases such as depression, high/low blood pressure, and unconscious fear and so the girl fails to give birth and nurture a better human race. Failure, poverty and degradation are passed from one generation to another. Islam sets universal rights for women, marriage of own choice, education, the right to choose profession, Islam introduced these rights for women to the world fourteen hundred and fifty years ago. If the teachings of Islam are followed uniformly, child marriages will soon cease to exist. There is a need for an Islamic solution to this problem, only then fruitful and far-reaching results emerge and the women's right in the society will prevail.

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