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## **Marriage, Morality, and Modernity: An Islamic and Secular Perspective on Extra-Marital Relationships**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores the sacredness of marriage (Nikah) as a God ordained covenant enshrined in the Quran and analytically evaluates the current social phenomenon of extramarital relationships (EMRs). Based on the Quranic injunctions and the prophetic traditions, and classical jurisprudence, the study focuses on Nikah as a sacral relationship and a contractual relationship that protects chastity, provides companionship and maintains societal cohesiveness. The article also outlines the rights and responsibilities of the spouses according to the version of rights and responsibilities laid down by the Islamic law and points out the importance of mutual respect, affection, and mercy which are the main pillars to follow. It is in this context that EMRs are ranked as major infractions since in Islam, they are referred to as zina and have been considered as harmful to the morality of individuals and religious stability. The influence of EMRs in contemporary settings based on the psychological, cultural, and socio-economic factors, such as digital aspects, globalization, and the changes in the family structure, are also explored in the study. Relative lessons of secular and other religious perspectives also bring out the common understanding of marriage as a stabilizing system and repugnance towards infidelity. Through examining the interplay between the divine commandments and the modern-day challenges, the article reveals the importance and the need to strengthen the Islamic values, to strengthen the marriage institutions, and to face the new menace to the fidelity. It concludes, finally, that the sanctity of marriage is not a mere spiritual need, but also a critical measure towards upholding moral order, family and social cohesion amongst the Muslim circles.*

**Keywords:** Marriage, Nikah, Allah (SWT), Extra-Marital Relationships, Zina, Islamic Law, Qur'an, Hadith, Family, Morality.

### **Introduction**

Islam is the only religion ordained by Allah (SWT) as the complete and perfected way of life. The Qur'an declares:

﴿إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ﴾

"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" (3:19). The Qur'an and Sunnah form the unshakable foundation of this faith, offering comprehensive guidance for all aspects of human existence - from personal spirituality to social organization. Islamic culture (*thaqafah*) is unique in its divine origin, blending Quranic commandments with human wisdom (*a'raf*) and time-tested traditions (*'adat*). This theocentric culture establishes a framework built on *Tawhid* (monotheism), worship, and strict adherence to the *Halal* while prohibiting

the *Haram*. It cultivates noble virtues including justice, honesty, modesty (*Haya'*), purity (*Taharah*), patience, and complete reliance on Allah (SWT).

Marriage in Islam is a divine covenant of profound significance. Allah says:

﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً﴾

"And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy" (30:21). The Qur'an beautifully describes spouses as garments for one another:

﴿هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ هُنَّ﴾

"They are your garments and you are their garments" (2:187), symbolizing mutual protection, comfort, and adornment. The Prophet (SAW) elevated marriage's status by declaring, "When a man marries, he has completed half of his religion" (Bayhaqi). This sacred bond transforms marital life into continuous worship (*ibadah*) when conducted according to divine commandments.

Islam unequivocally forbids all forms of illicit relationships. The Qur'an warns:

﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّانَا إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾

"And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is an outrage and an evil way" (17:32). To safeguard marital purity, Islam establishes comprehensive preventive measures. Believers are commanded:

﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ﴾

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts" (24:30), with similar injunctions for women (24:31). These regulations include: modest dress codes, prohibition of sexually suggestive environments, restrictions on free mixing of genders, and censure of lewd speech or behavior. The Prophet (SAW) promised extraordinary rewards for those who maintain chastity, stating that among those shaded by Allah on Judgment Day will be "a man who is seduced by a woman of beauty and position but says, 'I fear Allah'" (Bukhari).

Islam establishes a complete moral framework where every action becomes worship when aligned with divine will. As Allah's vicegerents (*Khalifatullah*), humans are entrusted with upholding justice and morality in all relationships. The Qur'an reminds:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

"I did not create jinn and mankind except to worship Me" (51:56). This worship extends beyond rituals to encompass all lawful conduct within marital, social, and professional spheres. Islamic teachings balance divine commandments with human nature, permitting regulated polygyny as a social solution while maintaining strict conditions to prevent abuse. The system's perfection lies in its divine origin - offering timeless solutions to human challenges while elevating mundane acts to spiritual worship when performed with consciousness of Allah (SWT) and adherence to His guidance.

### Secular and Sociological Definitions

In a secular context, extra-marital affairs can be classified broadly as adultery, infidelity and emotional affairs. Adultery is usually defined as sex between a married individual and someone other than their partner (Black, 2019). This legalistic definition focuses on the physical betrayal act which in most jurisdiction is still a reason to divorce. Although the terms fidelity and adultery are widely used interchangeably, infidelity has a broader scope of

behaviors, including emotional betrayal and non-sexual intimacies that are contraventions of relationship agreements (Fincham & May, 2017). Emotional affairs, a more modern, point to a profoundly emotional relationship beyond marriage that often competes with the closeness of the main relationship without the physical consummation of sexual intercourse (Glass, 2003). These definitions point to how the society has changed to appreciate that non-physical betrayals can be just as hurtful to marital trust.

Psychological studies also differ in their distinction between sexual infidelity (physical unfaithfulness) and emotional infidelity (psychological unfaithfulness), findings of which vary with regard to gender perceptions of which is more distressing (Buss et al., 1992). According to social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), infidelity can be viewed as a breach of contracts in the relation in which the partners calculate costs (e.g., guilt, risk of divorce) and benefits (e.g., novelty, emotional support). In the meantime, symbolic interactionism attends to the way people create the meaning of fidelity depending on social standards and their values (VanderDrift et al., 2012). As an example, consensual non-monogamy (CNM) actively opposes the conventional understanding by promoting morally non-exclusive relationships on consent (Conley et al., 2013).

The digital era has stretched these definitions even more online interactions that are made with romantic or sexual undertones have broken the conventional lines of cyber infidelity (Whitty, 2005). Technology can help to break the fidelity boundaries by enabling micro-cheating through social media, which are easy-to-ignore behaviors that betray trust (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2018). Cultural relativism is also a factor; the Western individualism tendency will tend to consider infidelity as an individual betrayal, whereas collectivist societies tend to give more weight to family or community consequences (Coontz, 2005). Such secular constructs are in stark contrast to the absolutes of Islam and demonstrate how context influences definitions of marital violation.

## **Forms and Types**

### **Physical vs. Emotional Infidelity**

The relationships that people have outside marriage occur in different variations, and two of the most prominent ones are physical and emotional infidelity. Physical infidelity is a sexual affair with another person in the context of marriage and is usually regarded as the most explicit form of betrayal (Thompson & O Sullivan, 2016). Men are reported to find physical infidelity more upsetting than emotional infidelity, which may be because of an evolutionary fear of uncertainty over paternity (Buss et al., 1992). Emotional infidelity, in its turn, is focused on creating strong and romantic relationships with a person who is not a spouse, without necessarily engaging in sex (Shrout & Weigel, 2020). Women, especially, feel more distressed regarding emotional infidelity because it puts their relationships in danger and long-term commitment (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2018). These differences point to the differences in gender and psychological dimensions of perceptions of betrayal. Other researchers believe that emotional infidelity can be more detrimental to marital stability because it violates the emotional exclusivity- a key element of modern-day expectations of marriage (VanderDrift et al., 2012).

### **Online Infidelity: Social Media and Dating Apps**

These are some of the ways in which the digital age has brought new dimensions to infidelity and online interactions make it difficult to define infidelity. Online infidelity includes sexting,

emotional communication by social media, and communication through dating applications (Whitty, 2005). Research indicates that people tend to justify such acts since they do not consider them to be harmful to them even though they can be advanced into physical involvements (McDaniel et al., 2017). Social media (e.g., Facebook and Instagram) support micro-cheating, which is when a person does something small (e.g., liking a flirty photo, sending a secret message) that can damage trust (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2018). Dating apps also create new grey areas, where one can engage in illicit affairs anonymously (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). Studies reveal that partners often differ on the issue of whether online relations are considered infidelity, creating conflict on the boundaries of the relationship (Drouin et al., 2016). This uncertainty highlights the importance of couples to talk about norms of digital fidelity.

### **Temporary vs. Long-Term Affairs**

The extra-marital relationships also differ in time span as they may either be short-term or long relationships. These temporary relationships, which can be fuelled by opportunity or situational circumstances, can be one night stands or fleeting flings (Barta & Kiene, 2005). These are commonly linked to impulsivity or unfulfilled sexual desires (Mark et al., 2011). Unlike the short-term affairs, long-term affairs are highly emotional and physical, as the couples may engage in long-term relationships which in some cases have lasted years (Allen et al., 2005). Such cases are usually indicative of underlying dissatisfaction in the marriage as the partner is involved in the affair in search of some emotional gratification or companionship (Glass, 2003). Long-term affairs are especially devastating, because they establish parallel relational commitment that overlaps with the primary marriage (Shrout & Weigel, 2020). It has been found that the longer an affair has continued the less chances of reconciliation in a marriage (Olson et al., 2002).

### **Psychological and Relational Motivations**

The reasons that drive infidelity add further insight to the different types of infidelity. There are people who do things because of approach motives, i.e., they want to get excitement or have their self-esteem validated (Selterman et al., 2021). Other people may feel avoidance motives, be it to avoid marital conflict or emotional neglect (Barta & Kiene, 2005). The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980) assumes that people who have a lower relationship satisfaction, or fewer perceived alternatives, are more likely to commit infidelity. Also, according to attachment theory, individuals with an anxious or avoidant attachment style are more likely to engage in emotional or sexual infidelity (Allen & Baucom, 2004). These psychological theories can be used to understand how some people are inclined to physical matters, whereas others seek emotional relationships out of wedlock.

### **Cultural and Generational Variations**

There is a big role of cultural norms in shaping the perceptions of infidelity. In Western individualistic countries, adultery is mostly perceived as a personal betrayal (Coontz, 2005), and collectivistic societies tend to recognize it as a family or communal sin (Drigotas et al., 1999). There are also differences between generations with younger generations more likely to view digital interactions as infidelity (McDaniel et al., 2017). The emergence of consensual non-monogamy (CNM) is upsetting the conventions, with some couples opening up their relationship (Conley et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the breach of boundaries in CNM is still

regarded as a betrayal (Moors et al., 2021). Such differences indicate the flexibility of how infidelity is conceptualized across situations.

Secular interpretations of infidelity are classified relative to behavior and intent whereas Islamic doctrines provide an absolute disapproval of extra-marital relations (Quran 17:32). The Quran and Hadith speak of a serious sin *zina* (illicit sexual relations), and there is no difference between physical and emotional betrayal (Al-Krenawi, 2012). Contemporary researchers warn against digital infidelity, which is the categorization of inappropriate online interactions as *zina al-lisan* (adultery of the tongue) (Hassan, 2018). This doctrinaire mindset is opposite of that of secular psychology where definitions of infidelity change with the norms of society. However, they are united by the realization of the severe damage to the relations delivered by betrayal, physical, emotional, or digital in nature.

### **Marriage as an Institution: Importance and Sanctity in Islam**

#### **The Islamic Concept of Nikah**

In Islamic theology and jurisprudence, *Nikah* (marriage) is understood as a sacred institution and contractual agreement (*'aqd*) that signifies not merely social utility but spiritual harmony ordained by Allah. It represents one of the foundational building blocks of Islamic society, offering legal and emotional grounding for the family unit (Meraj, 2018). The Qur'an refers to this bond as "Mithāq Ghalīz", a "strong covenant" a phrase used only a few times in the Qur'an to emphasize the seriousness of certain obligations. As Allah states:

وَأَخَذْنَ مِنْكُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا

*"And they (your wives) have taken from you a solemn covenant"* (Qur'an 4:21). This verse underscores the legal and ethical dimensions of Nikah, highlighting it as a divine commitment involving rights, responsibilities, and mutual respect. According to Banoo and Ahmed (2024), this concept not only formalizes the marriage contract but spiritually aligns it with Allah's decree, thereby elevating its significance beyond temporal arrangements (Banoo and Ahmed, 2024).

A cornerstone verse that captures the emotional and theological objective of marriage is found in Surah Ar-Rum:

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

*"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He placed between you affection and mercy..."* (Qur'an 30:21).

This verse reflects marriage as an emotional refuge, based on *mawadda* (love) and *rahma* (mercy). Yusuf (2005) emphasizes that this emotional scaffolding aligns with the Islamic view of sexuality and marriage not as hedonistic outlets, but as mechanisms for emotional and spiritual harmony (Yusuf, 2005). Nikah thus symbolizes Allah's intent to pair hearts and minds in a balanced ecosystem of trust and tranquility.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also validated marriage as a spiritual necessity. In a Hadith he said:

"النِّكَاحُ مِنْ سُنَّتِي فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي"

*"Marriage is my Sunnah, and whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me"* (Ibn Majah, Hadith 1846). Another narration reinforces this divine institution as half of a believer's religious responsibility: "When a person marries, they have fulfilled half of their religion" (Bayhaqi, Shu'ab al-Iman, 6/382). As Odeh (2022) explores in his comparative thesis, while

Christianity often regards marriage as sacramental, Islam emphasizes a pragmatic-sacred blend that supports human needs and societal stability while ensuring moral integrity (Odeh, 2022). The Nikah, therefore, becomes a sacred institution grounded in divine sanction and social relevance.

Moreover, Nikah is formalized through explicit terms: *Ijab* (offer), *Qabul* (acceptance), *Mahr* (dower), and witnesses reflecting Islam's commitment to transparency and consent. Banoo and Ahmed (2024) argue that these components uphold justice and mutual respect, particularly protecting the rights of the bride. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated:

"أَعْظَمُ النِّكَاحِ بَرَكَةً أَيْسَرُهُ مَوْنَةً"

*"The most blessed Nikah is the one with the least expenses"* (Ibn Hibban, Sahih). This Hadith underscores the essence of marriage as a spiritual journey rather than a material transaction. As Meraj (2018) notes, the simplicity of Nikah in prophetic tradition discourages extravagance and highlights its core as a God-centered pact, built on modesty, accountability, and divine awareness.

### Objectives of Marriage in Islam

The first and perhaps most profound objective of marriage in Islam is companionship, as it fulfills the natural human need for intimacy, emotional support, and partnership. The Qur'an emphasizes this companionship as a divine blessing, stating:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ

*"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy"* (Qur'an 30:21). This verse articulates marriage as a source of *sukūn* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (mercy). Such values are foundational for stable marital relationships, as they promote emotional health, mental peace, and interpersonal growth. According to Meraj (2018), this companionship is not merely emotional but spiritual, allowing both spouses to journey together toward righteousness and divine pleasure. Odeh (2022) notes that in comparison to other traditions, Islam places companionship at the heart of its theological and legal framework of marriage, emphasizing mutual fulfillment over individualism.

Another central objective is procreation the continuation of the human species through a lawful, ethical, and spiritually conscious structure. The Qur'an describes this purpose eloquently:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ

*"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women"* (Qur'an 4:1). Procreation in Islam is not seen merely as a biological act, but a divine trust involving the responsibility of raising righteous children. Yusuf (2005) underscores that child-rearing within marriage ensures legitimate lineage, emotional stability for children, and moral clarity in society. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also said: "Marry those who are loving and fertile, for I will boast of your great numbers before the other nations on the Day of Judgment" (Abu Dawood, Hadith 2050). This Hadith affirms procreation as a noble goal blending personal fulfillment with communal benefit (Odeh, 2022).

A third major objective is moral and spiritual stability. Marriage functions as a safeguard against immoral behavior such as fornication and adultery. The Qur'an proclaims:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأُفْرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ

*"And they guard their private parts. Except with their wives"* (Qur'an 23:5–6). Marriage thus becomes a protective barrier for one's chastity. Shabnam and Ahmed (2024) argue that Islamic marriage is uniquely constructed to promote self-discipline and regulate sexual expression within ethical bounds. Moreover, Meraj (2020) highlights how the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) described marriage as fulfilling "half of one's faith," encouraging believers to use it as a vehicle for spiritual growth. Moral harmony in marriage leads to peace in the broader society, making it a cornerstone of social order and divine obedience.

### **Rights and Duties of Spouses**

The Qur'an outlines a framework of mutual rights and responsibilities for spouses, grounded in fairness and compassion. A foundational verse states:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ

*"Men are protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their wealth"* (Qur'an 4:34). This verse introduces the role of *qawwamah* (guardianship), whereby men are tasked with financial responsibility and moral leadership not domination. Meraj (2018) explains that this role is accompanied by accountability and should not be misconstrued as superiority. Yusuf (2005) adds that Islamic marriage calls for a balance of power, where both partners are contributors to the family unit's success. Islam therefore harmonizes biological differences with equitable legal and emotional obligations.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) provided a practical model for spousal conduct. He said: "The best among you is the one who is best to his wife" (Tirmidhi, Hadith 3895). This Hadith emphasizes kindness, support, and equity in daily interaction. Another Quranic metaphor describes the spousal relationship as one of intimacy and mutual care:

هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ

*"They are a garment for you and you are a garment for them"* (Qur'an 2:187). Garments offer protection, warmth, and beauty just as spouses do for one another. Odeh (2022) interprets this verse as illustrating emotional transparency and spiritual intimacy, which are critical for a stable marital life. This mutuality extends beyond physical roles into intellectual and emotional partnership.

Furthermore, both the husband and wife have equal but distinct rights. The Qur'an affirms:

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

*"And women have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness"* (Qur'an 2:228). This egalitarian principle is reinforced in the works of Shabnam and Ahmed (2024), who argue that Islamic law ensures equitable rights such as inheritance, consent, and protection against abuse. Similarly, Meraj (2018) maintains that Islam envisions spouses as spiritual allies working together in trust, respect, and love. The duties are not rigid, but contextually adaptable, ensuring that justice, kindness, and mutual benefit remain the core of marital life.

### **The Role of Married Couples in Islamic Society**

Marriage, in Islamic thought, is one of the most fundamental social institutions, deeply embedded within the moral, spiritual, and legal frameworks of Muslim societies. It serves not only as the foundation of family life but also as a stabilizing force for the broader community (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2021). Islamic injunctions, as derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, endorse heterosexual marriages for all capable men and women, outlining rights, obligations, and the equitable treatment of spouses. The Quran and Hadith emphasize companionship, mutual respect, and the preservation of moral and social harmony within the marital unit (Meraj, 2018). The Qur'an states: "And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21, Sahih International). This verse encapsulates the essence of marriage as a bond grounded in love, compassion, and mutual comfort.

According to the Islamic point of view, marriage is a religious obligation as well as a social obligation. The reason it is considered a protection against immorality is that it is a way to satisfy natural human desire to do so in a legal way. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) termed marriage to be a part of his Sunnah and encouraged his followers to marry and discouraged unnecessary celibacy. The Prophet said: Marriage is my Sunnah and whoever does not follow my Sunnah has nothing to do with me (Ibn Majah, 1846). In this context, marriage is not a sacramental union but also is not a civil contract; it is a union that contains both a spiritual and a contractual element. Such holistic approach means that marriage is a form of worship and a social arrangement with a structure that, as such, serves a moral and practical purpose.

In Pakistan and other Muslim societies, the ideals of the Islamic marriages are contrasted to the existing sociocultural practices. Ahmad and Ahmed (2021) note that although Islamic doctrine encourages equality, gender equality and well-laid-down rights of the husband and wife, the cultural practices tend to misrepresent them. Forced marriage, unequal inheritance, and a lack of autonomy among women do not follow the spirit of the laws of Islam (Munir & Akhter, 2018). It is remarkable that Islam gives women the right to choose her spouse freely, a right that is sometimes overlooked in some cultures. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) nullified the marriage of *Khansa bint Khidam* when she protested that she had been given in marriage by her father against her wish (Sahih al-Bukhari, 5138), which is a sign of the significance of consent. This discrepancy between original Islamic injunctions and cultural misinterpretations makes it necessary to focus more on the creation of public awareness and legal enforcement to protect the rights to marriage.

The marriage in Islam is based on the jurisprudential foundation of *nikah*, a contractually stipulated agreement to formalize the sexual activity and describe the rights and responsibilities of the partners (Munir & Akhter, 2018). This is a contract that is binding to both the sides and free consent. Any sexual relationship not in this contract is forbidden strictly *Nikah* is contractual and provides that marriage is a conscious, mutual agreement with the goal of stability and moral purity. Islamic law also upholds the rights of women under this union, which include the payment of dower, maintenance and treatment with respect. The Quran says: And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts graciously (Quran, 4:4) further establishing the financial stability and dignity of the wife. Islamic law also gives certain roles to spouses, in order to achieve balance and harmony in the family. Atiq (2024) notes that women are assigned the roles of ensuring domestic matters are taken care of and rearing



of the children whereas the men have the responsibility of providing the family with the needed financial resources and protecting the family. This division is not however created to encourage inequality, but to ensure that there is appreciation of complementary roles with mutual respect and cooperation. The Quran refers to the husband as a *qawwam* (protector and maintainer) (Quran, 4:34), which is associated with responsibility, as opposed to privilege, and requires compassion and fairness.

Marriage under Islamic law is also consistent with the general goals of the *maqasid al-shariah* (goals of Islamic law) which focus on the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage and wealth. According to Baj (2021), a stable family, the safeguarding of children, and the preservation of order in society are among the reasons why marriage needs to be regulated. The Islamic paradigm of marriage encourages common moral obligations, emotional support, and collaborative help, which allow people to achieve personal fulfillment and social cohesion.. In addition to its religious and legal aspects, marriage has significant socioeconomic implications. Khatun, Islam, and Latif (2022) explore the multifaceted significance of marriage, noting its role in strengthening social cohesion, fostering economic stability, and supporting extended kinship networks. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided practical examples by assisting in household chores and maintaining a compassionate relationship with his wives, thereby embodying the ideal balance of responsibilities. A stable marital union contributes to the reduction of social problems such as crime, poverty, and moral decay, while also enhancing emotional well-being and community solidarity.

Yet, a gap persists between Islamic ideals and actual marital practices in many Muslim-majority societies. Cultural traditions, patriarchal norms, and socioeconomic pressures often lead to deviations from the principles of justice, equality, and compassion prescribed in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2021). In some regions, marital disharmony, domestic violence, and neglect of spousal duties erode the sanctity of marriage, leading to divorce and family breakdown. The Qur'an warns against unjust treatment, urging spouses to either live together honorably or part ways in kindness (Qur'an 2:231). To bridge the gap, scholars call for comprehensive marital education, policy reforms, and public awareness campaigns that emphasize authentic Islamic teachings over cultural distortions. They advocate for pre-marital counseling, gender-inclusive community initiatives, and stricter enforcement of laws that protect marital rights.

Thus, marriage in Islam is a multidimensional institution encompassing religious obligations, legal contracts, moral safeguards, and social responsibilities. It is designed to promote stability, compassion, and justice within the family and society. Upholding the Qur'anic and Prophetic model of marriage requires both adherence to divine injunctions and a conscious effort to reform cultural practices that undermine these ideals. By aligning marriage practices with the principles outlined in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim societies can ensure that marriage remains a source of spiritual fulfillment, emotional security, and social harmony. In doing so, they not only strengthen the family unit but also contribute to the moral and structural integrity of the entire community.

## **Overview of Religious Perspectives on Extra-Marital Relationships**

### **Islamic View**

#### **Quranic Prohibitions**

Islamic teachings strongly prohibit extra-marital affairs (zina), regarding them as one of the gravest moral and social vices. The Qur'an explicitly forbids approaching unlawful sexual relations, highlighting both the physical act and the behaviors leading toward it. As stated in *Quran*:

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزَّانِيَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

*"Do not even approach zina, for it is indeed a shameful deed and an evil way"* (Surah Al-Isra, 17:32). Similarly, Surah An-Nur prescribes a severe punishment for fornication:

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةً جَلْدَةٍ

*"The woman and the man guilty of fornication, flog each one of them with a hundred stripes"* (Surah An-Nur, 24:2)). These injunctions underscore the sacredness of marriage and the seriousness of violating its boundaries. By placing zina in the same category as major sins such as shirk (idolatry) and murder, the Qur'an makes it clear that extra-marital relationships are destructive to both the spiritual state of the individual and the moral fabric of society (Raesi et al., 2025).

### **Punishments and Repentance**

Classical Islamic jurisprudence divides punishments for zina into *hadd* (fixed punishments prescribed by divine law) and *ta'zir* (discretionary punishments left to the judge's ruling). For married individuals guilty of zina, the *hadd* punishment is stoning to death (*rajm*), while for unmarried individuals, it is one hundred lashes, as derived from the Qur'an and the hadith corpus (Ibe, 2023). However, Islamic law also emphasizes the importance of repentance (*tawbah*). The Qur'an states:

الزَّانِي لَا يَنْكِحُ إِلَّا زَانِيَةً أَوْ مُشْرِكَةً

*"The fornicator does not marry except a fornicator or an idolatress"* (Surah An-Nur, 24:3), which indicates the social consequences of persistent sinful behavior. Yet, the door of repentance remains open:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا

*"Except those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds"* (Qur'an 25:70). This highlights the balance between divine justice and mercy within Islamic ethics (Rad & Akhuni, 2018).

### **Socio-Religious Impact**

Beyond legal injunctions, Islamic thought stresses the wider social harm caused by extra-marital relationships. These acts undermine trust between spouses, destabilize families, and can lead to broken homes and societal decay (Al Helal, 2013). Scholars have noted that communities with strong adherence to Islamic values witness lower rates of marital infidelity, as faith acts as both a deterrent and a source of resilience against temptation (Malekzadeh et al., 2025). Moreover, religious leaders in Muslim contexts play a critical role in counseling couples, reinforcing moral values, and providing pastoral care to address marital conflicts before they escalate into infidelity (Agabi, n.d.). Thus, the Islamic framework sees zina not only as a private moral failing but as a collective social threat requiring both individual restraint and community accountability.

### **Comparative Religious Perspectives**

#### **Christianity and Infidelity**

Christian doctrine, like Islam, condemns adultery as a violation of divine law and marital vows. The Ten Commandments declare: “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14, New International Version). Within Christian theology, marital fidelity is closely tied to covenantal faithfulness, reflecting the bond between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25–33). Burdette et al. (2007) found that religious involvement and biblical teachings reduce the likelihood of marital infidelity, especially among individuals with strong denominational ties. However, Christianity also emphasizes forgiveness and reconciliation; through confession, penance, and the grace of God, individuals who transgress can seek spiritual restoration. The pastoral dimension is therefore central, with clergy offering guidance, counseling, and encouragement for rebuilding trust in marriages affected by infidelity (Agabi, n.d.).

### **Judaism and Infidelity**

In Jewish law (*Halakha*), adultery is strictly prohibited and is considered one of the gravest sins, punishable by death in biblical times (Leviticus 20:10). Marriage is seen as a sacred covenant (*kiddushin*), and sexual relations outside it are regarded as desecration of this bond. Rabbinical interpretations stress that fidelity within marriage is not merely a personal obligation but also a communal concern, as infidelity disrupts the moral purity of the community. Like Christianity and Islam, Judaism balances law with repentance, allowing transgressors the chance to return to God through *teshuvah* (repentance), which involves remorse, confession, and commitment to change. Studies such as Raesi et al. (2025) suggest that across faith traditions, repentance mechanisms serve as crucial pathways to reintegrate individuals into religious and social communities after marital breaches.

### **Secular Ethics and Infidelity**

Secular perspectives on extra-marital affairs are informed largely by humanistic ethics, psychology, and sociology rather than divine injunctions. While adultery may not carry religious connotations in secular societies, it is still widely condemned for its damaging impact on trust, family stability, and children’s well-being (Çaksen, 2023). Modern psychology frames infidelity as a breach of relational contracts, leading to trauma, attachment disruptions, and long-term emotional harm (Raesi et al., 2025). Legal systems in many countries also address adultery indirectly through divorce laws, alimony, and custody arrangements, reflecting recognition of its social costs. In secular frameworks, therapy and counseling are common remedies, focusing on rebuilding trust and fostering communication between partners. Thus, while differing in foundation, secular and religious perspectives converge on recognizing the destructive impact of extra-marital affairs on individuals and families.

### **Modern Challenges**

#### **Globalization and Shifting Norms**

Globalization has immensely transformed the idea of marriage and faithfulness in that all cultures, ideologies, and values are being introduced into close contact. In traditional societies where religious and moral codes were the governing factors of acceptable sexual behavior, globalization has brought in secular aspects of individualism, autonomy and personal freedom. This influence, which is frequently spread by global media, migration, and international education, leads to the change in the perception of these issues in the younger generations regarding fidelity and marital obligations. The increase in the number of cases of marital infidelity in the Christian setting can be partly explained by the fact that religious observance is losing its power as people care more about self-fulfillment than about dogmatic

rules (Ibe, 2023). Likewise, communication with the Western liberal world usually legitimates the practices that previously were punishable in the religious context, such as casual relationships and adultery (Rad & Akhuni, 2018). This movement is a conflict between community morality and a sense of religion and modern ideology which puts an emphasis on individual expression and choice.

Moreover, globalization does not only change the attitude of the individual, but it also affects the social institutions, which previously supported marital fidelity. Religious institutions which used to wield much influence in the formation of the moral of the people are often confronted with the global discourse of secularism and pluralism. This loss of religious control opens up room to more liberal attitudes towards sex in societies that were previously controlled by the more conservative notions of sexuality. The tendency to compromise spiritual commitment, which is facilitated by the worldwide cultural exposure, is associated with the higher vulnerability to infidelity (Malekzadeh et al., 2025). Therefore, the world has become a hybrid cultural space where the traditional religious expectations and the secular liberal values are in conflict. This frequently puts people in contradictory moral terrains, where religious sanctions of marriage are asserted and the secular society challenges them.

### **Technology and Social Media**

The age of cyberspace has also challenged the issue of infidelity in marriage like never before in the history of marriage and relationship facets since technology and social media provide unprecedented layers of secrecy, contact, and temptation. By providing a discrete communication channel that is convenient and easy, the social networking sites, dating apps, and instant messenger systems facilitate emotional, as well as physical cheating. Unlike pre-digital times when the distance and efforts were conditions to commit adultery, the latest digital technologies enable to make people be involved in unacceptable activities at minimum investment. These technologically mediated relationships may easily have a destabilizing effect on marriages, in a situation where the religious or spiritual values have deteriorated hence making people vulnerable to digital temptation (Malekzadeh et al., 2025). This phenomenon explains why an online setting that is easy to use and anonymous can destroy ethical boundaries allowing interactions that can result in emotional or sexual dishonesty.

Technology is also challenging the pillars of loyalty and loyalty in marriage, on top of the fact that it facilitates infidelity. Online sexual behaviors, sexting, or over communication with non-spouse can help foster a certain level of betrayal that is similar to physical cheating. This kind of behavior becomes hard to monitor with the prevalence of smartphones and social media networks and increases the marital issues. However, there is still some protection offered by religious and spiritual values. Couples with a strong spiritual base will be in a stronger position to overcome temptations of digital platforms and use faith as their principles of self-restraint and abidance within the moral boundaries (Malekzadeh et al., 2025). Marital fidelity in the digital world is becoming an acute problem in the modern context that cannot be resolved adequately through legal or religious means but requires active discussion between religious groups, families, and experts in digital ethics.

### **Changing Social and Cultural Norms**

The modern perception of the society towards marriage and extra marital affairs has also been affected by the social and cultural changes of the modern world. Gender equality, sexual freedom and personal autonomy have become trendy shifts in an approach to societal

expectations because it has resulted in many individuals considering marriage to be less of a fixed institution but more of a one-to-one relationship that could be removed to be renegotiable. Such movements promote a liberal approach toward infidelity and treat it as a choice issue instead of a wrongful act (Raesi et al., 2025). Compared to it, Islam, Christian, and Jew had religious practices that still underline the concept of faithfulness as the key to the purity of marriage, thus making a sharp contrast between secular liberalism and religious conservative values (Lyman et al., 2014). This dichotomy is a manifestation of cultural differences on the topic of morality, in which one branch of the strand focuses on the concept of personal freedom and the other focuses on the idea of collective responsibility and faith. At the same time, the changing culture has also influenced gender dynamics in marriage, and thus changing the infidelity patterns. Traditionally, the leniency of extramarital behavior among men has been greater than that of women who have incurred even cruel punishment. With the increase in feminist movements and the gender equality movements, women are now demanding their rights to independence at times at the expense of the traditional marriage roles. Religions are reacting to those changes by reinstating a commitment to faithfulness as a universal human responsibility in marriage regardless of gender (Lyman et al., 2014). However, on a secular level, infidelity can be viewed as an exchange of bargaining in a relationship (Raesi et al., 2025). This reorganization of the culture exhibits two trends at once; on the one hand, modern values pursue the independence and equality of people, and on the other hand, the religious visions safeguard the fidelity as the only constant standard and the stability of a family. The emerging tension establishes the changing moral landscape in which religious and non-religious ideologies fight to control the marital behavior.

### **Conclusion**

The comparison of extramarital relations (EMRs) in the socio cultural and religious context of Tehsil Taxila shows a strong conflict between the stipulations of divinity and the changing reality in the society. Social contract is not what Islam defines marriage to be, but rather a covenant sanctified by Allah (SWT), intended to protect chastity and also to offer emotional and spiritual rest and to support a socially upright society. However, modernity, information technology and cultural changes keep on to contest this covenant. Thus, EMRs are viewed not just as some threat to personal morality but also to the stability of the family and society. The fact that they are quite widespread speaks to the delicate balance between the traditional Islamic values and such a globalized world that tends to excuse or even forgive those practices that are considered to work against the teachings of their religion. In this respect, this is where the need to instill even more importance on self-incrimination, family structures, and societal constructs comes in because it can be a factor that contributes to the reinforcement of marriage loyalty or a broken society. This combination of dissatisfaction, financial stress, the culture, and lack of spiritual resources proves that EMRs are not just accidental and avoidable but complicated processes of overlapping factors that should be addressed as a whole based on faith, awareness, and transformation.

Admittedly, the modern sense of urgency is to reconnect marriage life to the divine roots and, simultaneously, to combat contemporary problems on the basis of practical, compassionate, and culturally sensitive approaches. Improvement of family education, introduction of premarital guidance and open dialogue on emotional aspects of the marriage needs may reduce the susceptibility in which infidelity occurs; and on the same note, communal and

institutional efforts should support the Qurayan meeting of marriage being a source of affection, benevolence and peace. At the same time, to reduce the influence of online resources that establish silence and attraction, it is important that the work of policymakers, teachers, and religious leaders is combined. More importantly, people should be made aware of their responsibility in front of Allah (SWT), and that faithfulness is not a social duty but rather a worship and obedience. Following an intervention framed in the Islamic precepts without forgetting about the modern-day realities will help the societies in Taxila to uphold the virtue of marriage, revive the intra-family confidence, and foster the culture where salvation comes more than transient daggers. Therefore, the struggle over EMRs is not only a social problem, it transforms into a spiritual purpose of the defense of the divine order, the preservation of human dignity and the establishment of a productive coexistence between is and future generations.

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