

“ZOJ” AND “SOT” TWO OPPOSITE TERMS

Dr. Muhammad Shakil Auj *

“Soukan”, “Soutan” or “Sot” are the words which are prevailing in our society and also a characteristic of our social set up. Unfortunately and out of ignorance we have supposed as a natural and lawful phenomenon. Since “Sot” or “Soukan” are meant to be negative therefore we can say that there is no concept of “soukan” or “sot” in Islam. Islam has given the concept of “Zoj” (wife) and not “sot” (second or other wife of the same husband). But ignorant people have taken the two in same meanings. Moreover, from the word “sot” have come out the words of “sotapa” (urdu) and “sotiada” (hindi) whose meaning is the enmity between two “sokan”⁽¹⁾.

Kitabistan English Dictionary has given these meanings of the word: “heart burning caused by the co-wife”. In Ilmi dictionary there are some idioms given in connection to this word which contains negative meanings. Such as, “sot bhali sotela bura”, i.e. the children of sokan are even worse than the sokan. “Sot ka lana ji ka jalana”, i.e. bringing the second wife is to burn the first wife alive⁽²⁾. Kitabistan Urde-English dictionary writes: Sot per sot or jalapa. i.e. A third co-wife is worse than the second for the first. The word ‘sokan’ or ‘sot’ is used for the wife who is brought in presence of the first one. Hence the two wives of a husband are said to be sokan of each other. In Urdu literature there are a lot of popular proverbs related to the word sokan. For example, ‘sot buri hay choun ki or sajhe ka kam kanta bura karel ka or bdri ki gham, it means that sot is bad even if her presence is just nominal, and same is the situation of doing some business in partnership. ‘karl kanta or barsat ki ghumas bhi achi nahi’ (gham-ghumas: perspiration). (Jame-ul-Amsal)

* Prof. Dr. Muhammad Shakil Auj Dean, Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi

‘Sokan bhugti jae or sotela na bhugta jae’, i.e. in comparison to sokan her children hurt more (Adopted from Najm-ul-Amsal).

‘Sokan to chon/chawwani ki bhi buri’ i.e. sokan is not tolerable even if she is a very lower status. We do not know when she will hurt us. Enemy is an enemy.

‘Sokan jaya, kis ko bhaya’ i.e. sokan’s children cannot be loved.

“Sokan zehr ki churi, ek bhi buri sokan mar gai aankh chorgai”⁽⁴⁾.

To prove the Islamic concept of polygamy as a severe cruelty, the word sot is used, rather misused. It actually seems to be a strategy of reducing the purity and respect of the revelation of Allah. For, all the above mentioned idioms and proverbs are actually a mirror of Hindu society. You will not find such proverbs and idioms in Arabic language and literature because they do not have such concept of second wife in presence of the first wife or wives as these proverbs and idioms are depicting. The mixing of Hindi words in these proverbs clearly shows from where these evil, bad and negative views about sokan have come.

No doubt the social concepts of a different religion have their effects on Indian Muslim society and it has transferred its negative culture to the Muslim language and literature. That is why, the concept of second marriage is almost unacceptable in the Muslims now, although the Quran permits it.

According to the revelation the concept of second marriage was a positive act in its spirit, and still is, which is supposed to be negative in our social set up due to our ignorance and therefore those who do second marriage are not

supposed to be good persons. This support of the society against the second marriage has named this purely natural and lawful act as just a sexual lust and a cruelty to the woman, and due to this reaction unnatural and unlawful attitudes have been growing powerful in the society.

We think that those who have joined the concept of *sokan* with the second marriage have tried to distort the concept of Quranic beauty of social set up. For, the prevailing concept of “*sokan*” could be possible in an un-Islamic society but there is no room for it in an Islamic Society. Imagine the Quranic concept of polygamy and how far it is from the concept of “*sot*” of our society! There is a great difference between them.

The influence of the word ‘*sot*’ is not so good on our society and the words of “*sotela*” (step brother/son) and “*soteli*” (step sister/daughter) have come out of this word.

Hence it is not possible that the words evolved out of the word ‘*sot*’ do not possess the basic meanings of the root word. That is why, the words “*sotela*” and “*soteli*” also contains the full negative meanings of “*so*”. While instead of “*sotela*” Islam has given the terms of “*Akhyafi*” and “*Allati*” (i.e. with common mother or common father). Even this differentiation is because of a requirement so that in inheritance, rightful share could be given to the rightful heirs and both of these terms do not contain any glimpse of negativity. But the word “*soteli*” prevailing in our society not only contains discrimination but a meaning of hatred is also there. That is, the meaning of anyone relating to “*sot*” from the very moment of his/her birth is supposed to be an enemy.

In an Islamic society, since the terms “sharing a common mother” or “sharing a common father” have been used instead of “*sotela*” therefore how it is possible that the children who are named in relation to their parents possess an enmity or hatred

among them, since they have a respect of the relation of their father or mother. On the contrary, “sotele” (step children) who are related in connection to “sot” and obviously people do not think “sot” as good so the “sotele” children are also not supposed to be good. For this is also a fact that the words or terms used for a special meaning not only include a whole history of their origin in them, but they have a pivotal position in the society also in their effects. No society is free from the influence of these words. There are hundreds of examples of the influence of words.

Muslim society has its own separate identity which is known for its beliefs and views and principles of reactions. Its customs and traditions and common habits also serve as an identity. But if in a Muslim society because of the wrong choice of words some positive practice starts giving negative meaning then it is the responsibility of the scholars to provide some alternative words to the society so that the negative words could be avoided.

Since the fact described by the words of “sot” and “sotela” is nothing except a negative attitude while this same fact has been described by the Quran as a positive attitude, therefore there is an essential need to change these prevailing terms in our society and make them according to the Quran. We cannot deny the possibility of a pleasant change in our society by just quitting these terms.

The Quran has called the second wife of a husband as “zøj” just as it has called the first wife, and not “sot”:

﴿وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ اسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ﴾⁽⁵⁾.

(And when you want to replace one wife from the other)

This verse shows that every wife who comes in the life of the husband, whether first or second, has a permanent status and value as “zoj”. Not that the first wife is “zoj” and the later one is “sot” or both are the “sot” of each other. This concept is not according to the Quran for the Quran has described the reality of the marital relationship by the word of ﴿لَتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً﴾⁽⁶⁾ and ﴿لَيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا﴾⁽⁷⁾. It means that there is a satisfaction and mutual affection and kindness for you in the marital status. Moreover, according to the Quran this relation generally established with only one wife and gradually developed into polygamy sometimes. Therefore in both the cases we have to accept the element of satisfaction and mutual love and kindness in an equal degree. It is not that if a man has only one wife only then she will be a means of satisfaction and if there are two then they will become a torture. If it was so then Allah the most Kind and Merciful would never have asked as to do such a negative, despicable, barbarous and evil thing.

Now think about it! If two or more than two wives are actually enemies and opponents to each other then would it not be so that this enmity, hatred and dispute have their effects on the husband? As a result of which would it not be the case that the husband gets only pain and torture from his wives instead of satisfaction. In this way the command of polygamy as a negative command, would not become a clear proof of a defect in the Islamic law? We think all this actually springs out of the word “sot” the concept of which has eclipsed the concept of polygamy in Islam.

The words which the Quran used for the sons of the previous wives of a woman are specially worth noticing: These are ﴿أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ﴾ or “the sons of the husbands”⁽⁸⁾. The Quran does not call “sotailay betay” (step sons) i.e. the sons are referred not to “sot” but the husband. But under the influence of a different

religion we have supposed this relation as a “step relation” (sotela rishta) instead of our own relation and hence we regard the second marriage as some stigma in whose result the “sotela” relation comes into being. This is an ignorance of our society and does not have any relation with the Quran.

Similarly, see the word ‘Rabaib:

﴿وَرَبَائِبُكُمُ اللَّاتِي فِي حُجُورِكُمْ مِّنْ نِّسَائِكُمْ﴾^(٩).

“And those daughters of your women who are from their previous husbands and are in your guardianship and care”

In this verse the word “rabaib” is worth noticing. It is a plural of “rabiba” which is in the meter of “fa’il” and meant for “maf’ul” (doer).i.e. “marbooba” which means the girl who is being nurtured. That is why, the man responsible for this pleasant duty (i.e. the father) is called Ra’ab”.

According to Imam Raghīb the word “ra’ab” and “ra’abatun” are specified to both husband and wife, when they nurture the children of their previous spouse. According to these meanings that the child is also called by the word “rabeeb” or “rabeeba”.

واختص الراب و الربة بأحد الزوجين إذا تولى تربية الولد من زوج كان قبله والربيب والربيبة بذلك الولد^(١٠).

Its root word is “Rabb” which is described in ‘Al-Mufradat’ as:

الرب في الأصل التربية وهو إنشاء الشيء حالا فحالا إلى حد التمام^(١١).

“Rubb” actually is said to be the guardian or one who nurtures. It is the being who grow up something till it reaches its perfection”.

In these meanings no one except Allah is worthy of being called a "Rubb". ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ and when the Quran denotes the brought up and care by the parents: ﴿كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي﴾⁽¹²⁾ that is also because the parents also grow up the children in the same way i.e. According to their capability and status they grow up and nurture the children gradually till they reach their perfection.

We can easily deduce from this explanation that the word "rabeeba" contains hundred percent meaning in it. It means that "rabeeba" is the relation which quite similar to one's real children in its meaning. There is not a glimpse of "sotela pan" in it. Besides, it is referred to the woman's previous husband; this also shows that there is no concept of step relation in it, for "sot" cannot be used for men. Hence those people who take the meaning of "rabeeba" as "step daughter" distort the literal beauty and perfection of the Quranic word. An example of this distortion can be seen in the meaning of "rabeeb" given by Ilmi Urdu dictionary: سوتیلایا بیٹا، جو پہلے خاوند سے ہو۔

(Step son who is from the first husband)

The same mistake is repeated here which people do when they denote the "later wife" as "sot" but the sad thing is that this mistake is not confined to just Urdu dictionary or literature but has reached our interpretative literature also. "Tafseer-e-Naeemi" says:

"Here "rabeeba" means that girl who is from the womb of one's own wife but of her previous husband i.e. "soteli beti" (step daughter). Since the step daughter lives with her mother, and the step father grows her up that is why she is called "rabeeb"⁽¹³⁾.

In the above statement, whatever is written with the words of step daughter, step girl and step father, has darkened the beauty and subtlety of the meanings of the Quran. I would not say that all this has been written intentionally, but whether it is not a fact that the above mentioned statement reflects the Hindu society in the Muslim society?

In the interpretative literature of Urdu, these mistakes have been found in the works of other interpreters also though in some other form. Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi, while giving reasons for the prohibition of “collecting two sisters” (in one nikah), writes:

“The Quran wants to stimulate this natural need of man that when there is a close relationship of maternal or paternal relations, then their mutual relationship must be based naturally on love and kindness. This thing requires that those causes should be suppressed which are responsible of envy and hatred among such relations. Since if the two real sisters are confined within the nikah of a single man there is a strong possibility that although being two real sisters, they would be involved in the emotions of envy, hatred and enmity. That is why its door has been closed.”⁽¹⁴⁾

Pir Karam Shah Al-Azhari writes:

“Collecting two sisters, whither real or sharing milk of the mother (raza’i), is also unlawful, and Hazrat Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) has also forbidden to collect paternal aunt and niece, maternal aunt and niece also in one nikah and the reason he described is that these are the relations of love and affection, if they become ‘sokan’ to each other then the envy and enmity which is generally found in ‘sokan’ will appear instead of love and affection”⁽¹⁵⁾.

The interpreter of “Tafseer Namoonah” writes:

“Why Islam has prohibited such marriage, perhaps the reason is that two sisters, because of their physical and natural relationship, love each other too much, but when they become rivals to each other then that natural love will no more be there but a kind of conflict will develop in them which is very dangerous for their life as both the emotions of love and rivalry would fight with each other in their hearts”⁽¹⁶⁾.

Maulana Ghulam Rasool Saeedi writes:

“The reason of this nikah being unlawful is that these blood relations (maternal and paternal) and there is an enmity and envy among the “sokans” hence if two sisters, maternal aunt and niece are collected in one nikah then it would be against the unity of blood relations and necessarily a means of separating blood relations”⁽¹⁷⁾.

You have seen the reason of collecting two sisters, Allati, Akhyafi and Raza’ai (sharing one mother, one father and the milk of one mother) and maternal aunt and niece and paternal aunt and niece in one nikah at a time in the words of the above mentioned interpreters. The summary is that if two sisters were collected in one’s nikah at the same time there it would have been possible that two sisters, even though they were real sisters would have been involved in the same envy, hatred and enmity which is particular to “sokan” and in case of being “sokan” there would have been an envy and enmity appeared instead of mutual love and affection which is generally found in sokans. In case of becoming sokan to each other there would have been a kind of conflict hazardous to their life. Since there is enmity and envy among sokan which necessarily finishes the unity of blood relations and departs them, etc. etc.

You have seen the words and concepts of “sokan” in the interpretations of our interpreters which consist of negative

meanings in all of them. Actually we wanted to show the same thing that our interpretative literature, inspite of its knowledge and scholarship, could not be saved from the social attitudes and Urdu dictionary and literature.

The conclusion of these references comes out that since the relation of “sokan” is not good therefore Allah did not like it among two sisters, but along with that another result also comes out that except the two sisters the relation of mutual envy and hatred and conflict of life has been admired for all the other women (May Allah save us from this result), if the polygamy in Islam consists of these meanings in its result. As stated above. Then with due respect! Should we not take such an interpretation of the law of Allah as the contempt of law? We all should think over this issue.

کے وکیل کریں، کس سے منصفی چاہیں

(Whom we should make an advocate and from whom we seek justice)

We think that Allah’s Shariah is complete and perfect and consists of thousands of qualities and reasons in each of its command, however if Muslims do not practice according to its real spirit then it does not show that there is a fault or mistake in the Shariah, but shows that Muslims themselves are mistaken. The commands of God are always unbeatable. If people have distorted their Shariah then what is the fault of the Shariah?

آنکھیں اگر ہوں بند، تو پھر دن بھی رات ہے

اس میں قصور کیا ہے بھلا آفتاب کا

(If the eyes are closed, the day is seen to be night, so what is the fault of sun in it)?

Notes and References

1. Ilmi Urdu Lughat (jamay) Waris Mir Sirhindi, p.927, Ilmi Kitab khana, Kabir street, Urdu Bazar, Lahore. Pub. 2000.
2. IlmiLughat; p.926.
3. Kitabistan Composite Dictionary, p.389, Bashir Ahmed Qureshi, kitabistan pub.38 Urdu bazar, Lahore. Revised ed. 1998.
4. Urdu Lughat (tareekhi usul pe) vol. 12, p.71, Urdu lughat board (taraqi e Urdu board) Karachi. 1991.
5. Al-Nisa/20.
6. Al-Rome/21.
7. Al-Aaraf/189.
8. Al-Noor/31.
9. Al-Nisa/23.
10. Al-Mufradat fi Gaharib ul Quran(Arabic) p.185, Noor. Muhammad kar khana tijarat e kutb, Aram bagh, Karachi. P.184.
11. Ibid;p.184.
12. Asra/24.
13. Mufti Ahmed Yaar Khan Naeemi, Ashraf-ul-tafaseer, commonly known as Tafseer e Naeemi, vol. 4 p.642. Tafseer under the verse 23 of Al-Nisa, Maktaba e Islamiah, Mufti Ahmed Yar Khan Road, Gujrat. Pakistan.
14. Taddabur e Quran, vol.2, p.276, Faran foundation, 122 Ferozpur road, Ichra, Lahore. First ed. 1983.
15. Zia-UI-Quran, vol.1, p.333, tafseer under the verse 23 of Al-Nisa, Zia-UI-Quran pub. Ganj baksh road, Lahore. 1402H/1982.
16. Tafseer e Namoonah, vol 2p.411, tr. Maulana Syed Safdar Hussain Najafi, Misbah ul Quran, Trust, Lahore. 1417H.
17. Tibyan-UI-Quran, vol.2, p.623, Farid book stall, 38 Urdu Bazar, Lahore. Second ed. 2001.