

Regulation of polygamy in South Africa in the Context of the Proposed Single Marriage Statute: Is it a Victory for the Equal Treatment of Women?

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Abstract: The proposed Single Marriage Bill brought a glimpse of hope in resolving uncertainties and problems posed by the fact that marriages in South Africa are regulated by different pieces of legislation. However, as in the case of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998, the proposed Single Marriage Bill, perpetuate patriarchal norms by making it clear that only a man is permitted to have more than one wife while denying such a right to their female counterparts. Accordingly, on the face of it, the proposed Single Marriage Bill reflects a clear discrimination against women. If the law is to treat spouses equally, women should be allowed to have more than one husband if they desire such. One justification for polygyny is sexual incompatibility where a man has high libido and seek multiple partners. Equally there are some women with high libido that cannot be quenched by one partner, yet they are denied the same alternative available to men. Another reason in support of polygyny is prestige where a wealthy man can afford multiple wives. Nowadays many women are affluent and powerful capable of supporting multiple partners, if they so desire. To uphold the ideal of an egalitarian society, South African law must consider polyandry within its legal framework. Introducing polyandry will undoubtedly raise a thorny issue of morality, but the government has already legislated one of the most contentious issues such as permitting LGBTQIA+ community to flourish within the country by giving them legal recognition. For South Africa to remain committed to equality and justice, it must address these gender disparities in marriage legislation, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights and opportunities within the institution of marriage.

Keywords: Marriage, polygyny, polyandry, Single Marriage Bill

Introduction

Polygyny is a cultural practice pertaining to a man that is simultaneously and lawfully wedded to more than one spouse. In such a union the man is regarded as a polygamist. There is a common tendency in academic literature of mentioning polygamy when referring to polygyny that is conceptually wrong. Polyandry refers to a woman that is concurrently and lawfully wedded to many husbands (Ngema, 2016). Polygyny is not novel, and it has been in operation even during the biblical era. Despite its existence for a long period of time, it has not escaped from scrutiny that leads to its condemnation and the arguments against it may be classified into three broad categories, namely the theological one, those founded on morality and those which originate from human rights deliberations (Dlamini, 1989). It appears that right from the advent of colonialism in Africa, the institution of polygyny was strongly condemned by both colonialists and missionaries. Such prejudice can act as an obstacle against social harmony and harmonious co-existence of multiplicity of cultures in one society. This brings back the ugly memory of the repugnancy clause which subjected African customary law and moral norms to the European values and morals over African values (Dlamini, 1990; Koyana, 2002; Juma, 2007; Taiwo, 2009). In the context of polygyny such impartiality appears in the adoption of a principle that was decided in the case of *Hyde v Hyde and Another* 1886 CR 1 PD 133 and adopted into South African law. This paper intends to discuss the proposed Single Marriage Bill and consider whether its regulation of polygamy is in line with the constitutional value of equality and whether it is a victory for the rights of women to equality. This paper aims to explore the potential for legalising polyandry, acknowledging that lawmakers are not yet prepared to abolish polygamy. Before treading on the new and uncertain waters, the paper will commence by investigating the historical reasons that led to practice of polygyny in

African customary law and not to be quick to condemn the practice without its proper understanding of the religious and cultural factors that feeds to its continuation. It is always advantageous to revisit history because it illuminates the present and the present illuminates the future. The second part of the paper will juxtapose polygyny with human rights and suggest some recommendations to be followed by the lawmakers when finalising the Bill. This article is based on Gender and Feminist Legal Theory. This theory scrutinizes how laws and legal systems perpetuate gender inequalities and aim to promote women's rights and gender justice. To this theory in the study, we Evaluate the extent to which the proposed Single Marriage Statute challenges or reinforces patriarchal structures within polygamous marriages, standards to promote substantive gender equality, ensuring women in polygamous unions have equal access to resources, rights, and protections.

Reasons behind the practice of polygyny in African customary law

Traditionally there are numerous reasons or factors that led Africans to practice polygyny. The reasons include, inter alia, 'political, economic, social, religious and procreative considerations' (Gwako, 1998). It has been noted that polygyny has not escaped the winds of change that transformed and still transforming the way people think about its practice. There is the growing view that perceives polygyny as a barbaric cultural practice that is contrary to the human rights that are guaranteed by modernity. The winds of change mentioned above are attributed to "internal and external influences associated with colonial and post- colonial policies, urbanisation, formal education, spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, women's access to control over productive resources and their penetration to cash economy" (Gwako, 1998). The reasons that led Africans to have more than one wife or a woman to marry a man who is already married are examined below.

Childlessness

The incapability to procreate offspring is one of the reasons that increase the desire to have more than one wife for the sake of procreation right from biblical times. The inability to have a child carried significant consequences, such as the risk of your property being inherited by a non-family member upon your death, and the absence of a successor to continue your lineage. The practice of polygyny to address childlessness is even took place during the biblical times. Abraham was married to Sarah, and they were unable to have a child of their own and this gave them sleepless nights because they thought their properties will be inherited by a mere servant in their household. Both Abraham and his lawfully wedded wife by the name of Sarah were blessed with long life on earth and by that time were nearly one hundred years old and according to medical evidence or human wisdom it was practically impossible for Sarah to conceive because of her old age. Eventually, Sarah ended up nursing an idea that her Egyptian maidservant by the name of Hagar should have an intimate relationship with her husband, thereby becoming her co-wife so that she can procreate a desired heir for her household. (Genesis 16: 3). Hagar agreed to marry Abraham as the second wife and bore him a child by the name of Ismael (Genesis 16: 4).

Procreation of offspring is also of great significance among African people. Childlessness is not merely seen as an unfavourable incident but is considered as a calamity (Mbiti, 1969). A child, more especially a male child, is preferred over a female child in an African society. One of the things that show the importance of a male child is the practice of a levirate union (*ukungena* in Zulu, *kenela* in Sesotho). In addition to addressing the issue of childlessness, the levirate union was a compassionate African practice that ensured the widow, and her children were cared for by one of her late husband's surviving brothers, without compelling her participation. (Ngema, 2015). Nowadays greedy family members of the departed brother who is survived by her widowed wife become attracted to levirate only if the deceased left some valuable assets behind and they end up failing to take care of the widow and her children. This has contributed to the unpopularity of the practice of levirate and also the prevalence of contagious diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the practice is now on the wane (Ngema, 2019).

Likewise, the practice of the *ukuvusa* custom and the marrying of a seed raiser affirm the significance of producing a desired male heir. The *ukuvusa* custom is usually practiced when a deceased has left property but had no male heir to continue his name and thereby saving it from extinction. His natural heir normally takes the deceased brother's cattle and marries a wife for his dead brother. The latter newly wedded wife will be known as the wife of the deceased brother and children born out of that relationship will be known as his children to preserve his name from extinction (Olivier, 1995). This custom has been unknown in Pedi and other tribes (Bekker, 1989). The *ukuvusa* custom is primarily resorted to when the deceased dies unmarried. The marrying of a seed raiser is a common custom amongst the South African *Nguni* and is practiced when a husband (while he is alive) has no children in a particular house and decides to marry a seed raiser for the purpose of procreating children on behalf of his infertile wife in the house. The man may marry a seed raiser as a substitute or additional wife only in respect of one of his houses with status. A seed raiser may be married when the wife concerned passes away and left no offspring; has

already passed the child-bearing age without producing a desired heir; has her marriage terminated before producing an heir and abandoned her husband before giving birth to a desired heir. The persistence of the above-mentioned practices confirms that the woman's childbearing potential was thought to be her most important attribute (Ngema, 2022). In traditional Africa, daughters are brought up for marriage or in the faith that they will get married one day. They also grow up with the expectation that one day they will leave their parent's house to start their own home, because in most cases, if not all cases, it is the female who moves to the man's house to start a marriage. To the contrary, sons are brought up to live with their parents and therefore sons together with their wives guarantee the parents' security and social life (Caldwell, 1977). Almost everywhere in Africa, it is unthinkable for a parent to go and reside with his or her married daughter in order to secure social protection. This norm is the position regardless of the fact that nowadays there are insurance policies that can secure social protection at old age. Moreover, the availability and the accessibility of the old age grant in South Africa have alleviated the plight of elderly people to some extent. In the same vein, it is unacceptable for a married daughter to bring her wedded spouse to her parents' household in order to take care of her sick parents. This is why many couples spend sleepless nights if they procreate many daughters without a male issue. An African person will take an additional wife in the hope and belief that the second marriage will finally give the family the much desired and awaited male heir (Maillu, 1988). It appears that according to the normative system in Africa, it is considered as both inhuman and a mark of irresponsibility to persecute the first wife by way of divorce simply because she has no fruit of the womb or is unable to bear a desired male offspring. Polygyny is unquestionably seen as a compassionate solution for a wife who is unable to bear children (Dlamini, 1983; Dlamini, 1991). It is naturally accepted that the main God-given objective of intimate sexual relations between married couples is to procreate descendants (Nhlapo, 1991). Africans know that "life can only continue on earth only when the old give way to the birth of the young and that the tree that does not bear fruit brings an end to its own kind" (Maillu, 1988). In short, traditional thought regard procreation of offspring as the basic requirement of life. If a person is naturally unable to procreate to procreate offspring people will always understand and sympathise with him or her (Maillu, 1988). If a couple is unfulfilled by their inability to procreate children, "to the husband the question of resorting to another woman becomes a reality" (Maillu, 1988) and this usually becomes the first desire to become a polygamist. Modernity offers some viable solutions to the problem of childlessness such as the adoption of a child and in vitro fertilisation. Due to the constant desire for some people to have children that share the same blood with them makes an adoption of a child not attractive to them. Moreover, in vitro fertilisation is very expensive and some people in rural areas are not even aware of it. As a result of this, childlessness as a justification of polygyny seems not to be taken away by modernity.

Labour force

In traditional Africa it was not always feasible to hire people to labour for you because traditional society was not functioning in a cash economy. Likewise, African communities placed great emphasis on self-reliance. This does not necessarily mean that people did not resort to employing others at some stage. They hired people but it was not common to do so because they knew that a worker comes up with some constraints (Maillu, 1988). Therefore, the backbone of the traditional economy was based on reliance on the resources they could produce for themselves and save it for their survival (Adams & Mburugu, 1994). If the mode of production required greater workforce, they had no substitute other than increasing the family by polygamous relations. Against the above background it became clear why a wife was expected to bear children and therefore increase the hands of the family. It should also be appreciated that a low birth rate was not seen as an asset but a liability. As a result, a man whose wife merely procreated one or two children considered the expansion of the number of the family hands by marrying more wives (Brown, 1981). If a married woman is advanced in age or has a corresponding increase in her domestic duties because of the expansion of the family size, she is usually generally willing to tolerate her husband taking another wife who will release her from some of the house chores such as farming of crops and brewing of traditional beer for visitors (Gwako, 1998). Considering the child mortality ratio in traditional Africa, the desire to produce more children to maximise family security is understandable (Maillu, 1988). In our contemporary society many people have shifted 'from the communal economy to the individualised, industrial and money economy' (Maillu, 1988) and therefore reliance on a family-based labour force has steadily lost significance. In our contemporary urbanised society, many adult males flock to cities in search of employment to be able to support their families. It becomes practically difficult for such male people to afford family accommodation in cities. This situation arises simply because urban workers in lower income groups receive poor wages and consequently cannot afford to stay with their families in their places of work. Therefore, family splits become inevitable. Such family splits are also necessitated by the constant pressing financial needs that compel a wife to supplement family income by doing farm work in the village while her husband continue with employment in the city (Cronk, 1991; White & Burton, 1988; Jacoby, 1995; Rubin, 1990). In this new rural-urban placement there is an arrangement that is made, it is that the man would travel

to the countryside when his pocket allows while his wife reciprocates that by visiting her husband to the city (Maillu, 1988). However, problems arise associated with this urban-rural placement because in some cases the place of employment is far from home and thereby making it difficult to travel home quite often because of financial constraints. This results into a situation where a husband must find a new helper in the city (if he does not have self-control). He will eventually marry her if he is an honest man. If he finds another companion in the city, it does not imply that he is divorcing his first wife, as the second marriage is not due to any fault in the first marriage (Maillu, 1988).

Warfare

In the olden times for men the delayed marriage was usually associated with the duties of warriors. This was because traditionally, a regiment that was still active in wars was not allowed to get married until the men reached a specific age. The custom of delaying marriage was closely connected with warfare (White & Burton, 1988). A high male mortality from warfare, disease, or dangerous occupations such as hunting, fishing and herding animals increased the consequence of huge age gap between men and their wedded wives (Ember & Ember 1971). The relationship between age differences and disparity in mortality rates alluded to above could lead to a situation where there was an average of two wives per husband. In traditional Africa if ethnic group X defeats group B, the victorious group usually emphasises taking of captives rather than killing the enemy. A victorious group could plunder resources from the villain group such as livestock and convert it to pay *lobolo* and thereby enabling themselves to afford many wives (White & Burton, 1988). This shows that a community that is richer than its neighbours could easily take more wives. If it is a militarily dominant community, it could be able to loot more cattle as a means of *lobolo* payment and consequently amassed surplus wives from their neighbours. This justification of polygyny can no longer hold water in our contemporary society that is not plagued by wars.

Sexual incompatibility

It appears that different people are gifted with different libido, and it is not always possible to compare couples sexually. While it might be possible to find a man who may be completely satisfied by having sexual intercourse once a week or once a fortnight other men may demand to have it daily and maybe repeatedly sometimes (Maillu, 1988). This shows that naturally people do not have the same libido (Maillu, 1988). Problems might arise in a situation where a husband has an extraordinary libido while his spouse has a low appetite for sexual intercourse. This is apparent when 'his high demand can be easily a great strain to her, worse so if her health is not excellent or when she is pregnant, or under psychological difficulties' (Maillu, 1988). The natural solution for a man with a high libido is to marry a second wife. Thus, it is regarded as immaturity to divorce a wife who has a low sex drive when there is no assurance that the second wife will not have the same problem (Maillu, 1988). Apparently, the traditional society caters for husbands with a high sex drive but does not cater for wives with a corresponding high sex drive. This is because there is no culturally sanctioned alternative for females who find themselves in an uncomfortable position of being sexually unsatisfied by their husbands. Biological differences and cultural beliefs contribute to enhancing man to have more than one wife. Maillu argued that males have extraordinary libido if matched to females. Women's sexual requirements are affected by certain periods such as pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and hormonal changes during menopause (Maillu, 1988). For a female sexual appetite is affected by pregnancy, more especially at the earliest and later stages of a pregnancy (Maillu, 1988). At childbirth, it becomes impossible for a woman to engage in sexual intercourse for a certain period after birth, during menstruation and because of hormonal changes during menopause (Agadjanian & Ezech, 2000). Polygyny serves as a solution to menopause due to the belief that several females may lose sexual appetite while male appetite runs for his entire life span. An argument relying on sexual incompatibility as a justifiable reason behind the continuation of polygyny is flawed to some extent because if it is true that males have high libido if compared to their female counterparts, women could not be found having sexual relations outside the confines of their wedlock. According to our own observation and understanding of the dynamics of love affairs, it is possible for a female to have an extremely high libido up to such an extent that even her husband cannot be able to sexually satisfy her. Unfortunately, there is no provision of any solution for such a female person with a high libido. On the contrary, such a woman with high libido is labelled with some derogatory names and her condition is regarded as something abnormal. In Zulu for example, they say "*unempene*," meaning that her private part is itching her and makes her to have a strong and constant desire for sexual relations with men. In other parts of Africa, some cultural groups go an extra mile to control the sexual appetite of women by practicing the cultural practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). If such an assumption that females have low libido if compared to their male counterparts is true, females would not be caught in any act of adultery and there would be no practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Therefore, justifying polygyny based

on sexual incompatibility belongs to patriarchal norms, lacks scientific support, and is unlikely to withstand scrutiny from a human rights perspective.

Polygyny under International Human Rights

Polygyny permits men to have more than one wife while women are not accorded the same right. On the face of it this is a blatant discrimination against women and therefore it is not surprising that the Convention on Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) perceives polygyny as constituting discrimination against women and provided that:

“Polygamous marriage contravenes a woman’s right to equality with man and can have such emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependents that such marriages ought to be discouraged and prohibited. The committee notes with concern that some state parties, whose Constitution’s guarantee equality rights, permits polygamous marriage in accordance with personal or customary law. This violates the constitutional rights of women and breaches the provisions of article 5 (a) of the Convention” (CEDAW Recommendation 21, 1994).

It is noticeable that most of the international human rights instruments mandate member states to eradicate practices that may result to discrimination (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011). It is beyond any doubt that polygyny is a clear form of discrimination against women because it only permits a man to marry more than one spouse while denying the same right to women. Gaffney-Rhys rightfully observed that many authors in our contemporary society agree that non-discrimination provisions that are entrenched in the international human rights instruments can be used to deal with discrimination in the context of polygyny (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011). International human rights instruments advocates for the equality of spouses prior to marriage, during marriage and after its dissolution. This is buttressed by article 16 of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which provide that “men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have a right to marry and found a family [and] are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.” In a similar vein, articles 23 (4) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) and article 6 of the African Women’s Protocol provides for the equality in relation to marriage. The treaty monitoring bodies do not mince their words on the issue of polygyny and they clearly recommend for its abolition because it is a blatant discrimination against women (General Recommendation 21 para 21 and general Comment 28 para 24). In the General Comment 28 the Human Rights Committee interpreted the equality of treatment in relation to the right to marry and concluded that polygyny is a violation of the principle of equality and ought to be abolished whenever it continues to exist. The Human Rights Committee also declared polygyny to be a violation of article of the ICCPR and requested member states to adopt legislative measures aimed at eliminating polygyny in their respective territories (CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 24, 1999). The CEDAW Committee recommended that “polygynous marriages contravene a woman’s right to equality with men and must therefore be prohibited” (General Recommendation 21 para 14, 21). The International human rights also try to protect the rights of women in countries where polygyny continues to exist by mandating member states to make it sure that women are entitled to the rights and benefits that they were going to enjoy if they solemnised monogamous marriages. This is supported by the General Recommendation 29 of the CEDAW Committee which provided that “with regard to women in existing polygamous marriages, state parties should take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of their economic rights.” Likewise, article 6 of the African Women’s Protocol provides that “monogamy is encouraged as the preferred form of marriage and that the rights of women in marriage and family, including, polygamous marital relationships, are promoted and protected.”

South African Legal Framework on Polygyny

It goes without saying that polygyny constitutes differentiation on a specified ground of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on sex and gender) because polygyny is only practiced by the bridegroom and not the bride. This means that a man is permitted to have more than one wife simultaneously while a female is not permitted to have more than one husband. This form of discrimination is expressly protected by section 7 (6) of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 which provides that: “A husband in a customary marriage who wishes to enter into a further customary marriage with another woman after the commencement of this Act must make an application to the court to approve a written contract which will regulate the future matrimonial property system of his marriages.” On the face of it, CEDAW has already argued that polygyny is repressive in nature, encroaches upon the equality rights of women and is unacceptable. The latter view that perceives polygyny as an infringement of equality rights of women implies two different arguments, namely: (a) that men have the right to have more than one wife while women are not accorded the same right; (b) that the institution of polygyny results in prejudice in women. Therefore, the application of the principle of non-discrimination could require either the abolition of male

right to have more than one wife or to allow wife to have more than one husband (SALC). The former alternative was rejected by the South African Law Commission because it was concluded that polyandry is not acceptable in any of the religious or cultural traditions of South Africa and to introduce it as a solution to objections against polygyny appears arbitrary and contrived (Kaganas F and Murray C, 1991). As a result of this, some authors argue for the complete abolition of polygyny in order to promote and protect the equality rights and dignity of women that is enshrined in the Constitution and the international human rights instruments (Mbatha, 2011; Kelly, 2006; Thobejane, 2014). The international human rights position is that polygyny violates the right to equality in the context of marriage and must therefore be outlawed or prohibited. However, in countries where it is still allowed and practiced, state parties must ensure that women are entitled to the same rights and benefits they would have enjoyed in monogamous marriages (Mwambene, 2017). This is a compromise and recognition of social realities that reflects that non-recognition of polygyny creates more problems than intended good. Polygyny was not accorded full legal recognition in South Africa for more than three hundred years before the enactment of section 6 (7) of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 that permits polygyny. This non-recognition of customary and religious marriages (e.g. Muslim marriages) was based merely on the fact that they are potentially polygamous. The non-recognition of polygyny led to many social ills victimising woman and children the most (Ngema, 2016). Polygyny constitutes a differentiation between women and men, because only men have freedom to choose between having one or multiple wives while women have no such right. The question is whether such differentiation constitutes a violation of the right of women to human dignity or not. Dignity also incorporates the freedom of choice. Women have the power to choose whether or not to be a party to a polygynous relationship. A first wife could in theory protect herself by insisting on a civil marriage (that is monogamous in nature) or by refusing to consent to the subsequent customary marriages.

Also, the argument for abolition overlooks the complex factors that sustain the institution of polygyny. Simply calling for its abolition without addressing these underlying factors would result in superficial legislation, potentially repeating the historical injustices faced by discarded wives. To effectively address polygyny, comprehensive measures must be taken to understand and mitigate the socio-economic, cultural, and legal conditions that perpetuate its practice.

Sections 9, 10, and 31 of the Constitution of South Africa are pivotal in enabling the realization of polygamy within the framework of constitutional rights, particularly those of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity, which are integral to the institution of marriage and are to be exercised within the context of cultural and religious practices. The Draft Marriage Bill of 2022 exemplifies the legislature's commitment to modernizing its marriage laws to inclusively acknowledge diverse forms of intimate partnerships, irrespective of individuals' gender, sexual orientation, or religious and cultural affiliations. Chapter 3 of the Single Marriage Bill specifically addresses the requirements for polygamous marriages, while sections 3(d) and (e) respectively provide for the recognition of polygamous marriages entered into both before and after the Bill's enactment. However, the Bill notably excludes recognition of polyandry, which reflects a patriarchal bias that perpetuates gendered discrimination without a justifiable basis. This omission in the Single Marriage Bill thus underscores ongoing debates about gender equality within legal frameworks governing marital relationships.

Conclusion

As already argued, the inability to procreate offspring is one of the major reasons for the continuation of polygyny among Muslims, Christians and in terms of African customary law. It is noticeable that childlessness as a justification has not been taken away by modernity even though modernity offers some reasonable solutions such as child adoption and in vitro fertilisation. A constant desire to have a child from a person's loins makes it not attractive to adopt a child. In both African customary law and Christianity levirate union is one of the justifications of polygyny and is strongly linked to the inability to procreate offspring. Due to the emergence of social upheavals such as HIV/AIDS and greed among the kindred of the departed husband, it has lost popularity and is on the wane. Sexual incompatibility is a further ground for justification of polygyny in both Islamic religion and African customary law. However, an argument that males are naturally endowed with extraordinary libido if compared to their female counterparts no longer holds water. There is no scientific evidence in support of that assumption and common-sense dictates that if such an assumption is true, females would not be caught committing adultery and there would be no customary practices aimed at curtailing the sexual urge for women such as female genital mutilation (FGM). The justification of polygyny through warfare continues to hold some relevance, albeit less prevalent in contemporary societies where wars are less frequent. Nevertheless, conflicts persist in regions like the Middle East and parts of Africa. Historically, polygyny has been associated with providing for surplus women widowed by war, reflecting a cultural and practical response to societal upheaval and loss.

The proposed Single Marriage Bill in South Africa therefore represents a critical opportunity to re-evaluate the legal landscape of marital practices, particularly in addressing gender disparities perpetuated by polygyny. While historically rooted and culturally significant, polygyny has faced increasing scrutiny under contemporary human rights frameworks, which emphasise equality and non-discrimination. The Bill, however, falls short of true gender equality by maintaining a one-sided approach to multiple marriages, favouring polygyny over polyandry. To truly uphold constitutional values of equality and justice, South African lawmakers should consider legalising polyandry alongside polygyny, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights and opportunities within the institution of marriage. This step would not only promote social harmony and cultural inclusivity but also align with global movements towards gender equity in diverse marital practices.

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