

Islam and Fertility Regulations

Muhammad Hammad Lakhvi

Abstract—Islam has a general principle of increase in population. But the Muslims are equally obliged to take care of health, education and the provisions etc. for their offspring and wives in the best possible way. The Muslims would have to regulate and manage the number of children, if any situation affects their duties regarding their wives or children. Islam accomplishes permissibility of temporary blockade in human fertility if someone faces any problem regarding health of mother or children. During the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW), *AzI* (coitus interruptus) was the only way for temporary spacing between the children. In technologically developed environment, the same can be resort through some advanced methodology or instrument of temporary blockade. Solid grounds are available in Islam that the fertility rate should be managed if any of the aspect of human quality is being affected.

Keywords—Islam, Fertility Regulations, Muslims, Qur'an .

ISLAM AND FERTILITY REGULATIONS

ALLAH Almighty (SWT) has created the human being commensurate with the nature, the same nature the great *Deen* Islam has been accomplished upon. As mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

فَاقِمِ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your face towards the religion of pure Islamic Monotheism to be straight (worship none but Allah Alone) i.e. Allah's *Fitrah* (the nature), with which He has created mankind. No change let there be in Allah's creation, that is the straight religion, but most of men know not. [1]

That very nature of human being is social and collective in disposition. Islam has honoured the societal nature of humanity and provided them with such a comprehensive and coherent code of life that has complete ability to satiate the human quest for their communal as well as individual concerns.

The institution of marriage is the basic unit to form a society and fulfill the human needs. Hence the want to have children is the earnest demand of Islam and the human nature at the same time. It proved to be the custom of the best of creation, the prophets and messengers chosen by Allah, to have the wives and children making their best possible contribution to the formation of the society. Allah says about them:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً

Dr. Muhammad Hammad Lakhvi is with the Department of Islamic Studies University of the Punjab (Quaid-e-Azam Campus) Lahore, Pakistan
e-mail:hammad@is.pu.edu.pk.

And indeed We sent messengers before you and made for them wives and offspring. [2]

Our Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) also married and had children. All these prophets are to be followed and they are the people whom Muslims should look to emulate. Allah says

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَاهُمْ أَقْتَدُهُ

They are those whom Allah has guided. So follow their guidance. [3]

There are some references in Qur'an which mention the fact that the basic purpose of the marriage is increase in the offspring. The Holy Qur'an declares that children are a gift and a blessing from Allah. Allah mentions some of the bounties that He has bestowed upon mankind in the following verse:

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ

And Allah has made for you wives of your own kind, and has made for you, from your wives, sons and grandsons, and has bestowed on you good provision. [4]

The holy Qur'an also mentions:

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. [5]

Islam has forbidden celibacy (living without marriage), monasticism (life of monks & nuns) and castration (removal of the male glands) for the reason that is contrary to the human nature as well as Islam. The Holy Prophet (SAW) made this clear when he told those companions who were considering acetic forms of life and determined to be unmarried, to pray whole night and to have fast every day:

وَاللَّهِ إِنِّي لَأَخْشَاكُمْ لِلَّهِ وَأَتْقَاكُمْ لَهُ لَكِنِّي أَصُومُ وَأَفْطِرُ وَأَصَلِّي وَأَرْقُدُ وَأَتَرَوُّجُ
النِّسَاءَ فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي

By Allah! I am the most fearing of you from Allah and most pious of you but I fast and I break my fast; I pray and I sleep; and I marry women. Whosoever turns away from my way of life is not from me. [6]

The Holy Prophet (SAW) not only encouraged marriage but he encouraged marrying those women who are child-bearing. He stated:

تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوَالِدُ فَيَأْتِي مَكَاثِرَ بِحَمِّ الْأُمَّمِ

Marry the loving, child-bearing women for I shall have the largest numbers among the Nations. [7]

تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوَالِدُ ، فَيَأْتِي مَكَاثِرَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Marry the loving, child-bearing women for I shall have the largest numbers among the prophets on the day of Resurrection. [8]

Consequently, it can be made clear that Islam has a general principle of increase in population and the Muslims are desired to take part in this noble cause. But this is not the only duty for which the Muslims are bound morally and legally regarding their offspring and wives. They are equally obliged to take care of their health, education and the provisions etc. necessary for life in the best possible way.

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ الْبِامَامُ رَاعٍ وَمَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

Each of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The ruler who is in charge of people is a shepherd and is responsible for them. The man is the shepherd of his household and is responsible for them. [9]

The husband is responsible to give honourable and sufficient sustenance to his household according to his status and means. Allah, the Exalted, says:

لِيُنْفِقَ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِنْ سَعَتِهِ وَمَنْ قَدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا

Let the rich man spend according to his means, and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. Allah will grant after hardship ease. [10]

If a sufficiently rich man refuses to spend on his family in accordance with his level of means, and the wife was able to take a portion of his wealth, she may take that which satisfies her essential needs and that of her children, avoiding wastage and extravagance. Hind bint 'Utbah came to the Prophet (Peace be upon Him) complaining about her husband, saying:

إِنَّ أَبَا سُفْيَانَ رَجُلٌ مَسِيكٌ فَهَلْ عَلِيَّ حَرَجٌ أَنْ أُطْعِمَ مِنَ الَّذِي لَهُ عِيَالُنَا فَقَالَ لَا حَرَجَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ تُطْعِمِيهِمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

Abu Sufyan (my husband) is a miser and does not spend enough on me and his children. He replied: Take whatever suffices you and your child within proper bounds. [11]

The Holy Prophet (SAW) said to his companion Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas (RAA):

إِنَّكَ لَنْ تُنْفِقَ نَفَقَةً تَبْتَغِي بِهَا وَجَةَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا أَجْرَتْ عَلَيْهَا حَتَّى مَا تَجْعَلَ فِي فَمِ امْرَأَتِكَ

No amount you spend on your family seeking reward from Allah but that He will reward you even if it is a bite of food that you put in your wife's mouth. [12]

It means that the Muslim men are obliged to perform their multidimensional duties regarding their wives and children. Any sort of situation may occur regarding their wives or children, while performing these duties that they would have to regulate and manage the number of children.

Most of the *Ulema* extract permissibility of spacing between the children or birth control from the general principle of the Islamic jurists that 'every thing is permissible unless pronounced otherwise' for family planning is not forbidden in Islam, so permissible. Some others argue from the Qur'anic commandment about lactation period. There is enough ground to argue the temporary blockade in human fertility under the traditions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his companions about *Azl* (coitus interruptus) which are reported in most authentic books of *Ahadith*. During the time of the Holy Prophet (SAW), some of his companions tried to reduce the chances of conception and pregnancy, because they did not want any more children. The Prophet was aware of that. Some referred to him while some relied on the fact that no edict was given concerning the question of preventing pregnancy.

According to Jabir (RAA):

كُنَّا نَعْرَلُ عَلَى عَهْدِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَالْقُرْآنُ يَنْزِلُ

We used to practise 'azl in the Prophet's (pbuh) lifetime while the Qur'an was being revealed. [13]

كُنَّا نَعْرَلُ عَلَى عَهْدِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَنْزِلَ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَلَمْ يَنْهِنَا

We used to practise coitus interruptus during the Prophet's (pbuh) lifetime. News of this reached him and he did not forbid us. [14]

According to Abu Sa'id:

خَرَجْنَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي غَزْوَةِ بَنِي الْمُصَلِّيقِ فَأَصَبْنَا سِنِيًّا مِنْ سَبْيِ الْعَرَبِ فَاشْتَهَيْتُنَا النِّسَاءَ وَاشْتَدَّتْ عَلَيْنَا الْعُرْبِيَّةُ وَأَحْبَبْنَا الْفِدَاءَ فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَعْرَلُ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا نَعْرَلُ وَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بَيْنَ أَظْهُرِنَا قَبْلَ أَنْ نَسْأَلَهُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ فَسَأَلَنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ مَا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ لَا تَفْعَلُوا مَا مِنْ نَسْمَةٍ كَانَتْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ إِلَّا وَهِيَ كَانَتْ

We rode out with the Prophet (pbuh) to raid Banu al-Mustaliq and captured some female prisoners . . . we desired women and abstinence became hard. [But] we wanted to practise 'azl; and asked the Prophet (pbuh) about it. He said, 'You do not have to hesitate, for Allah has predestined what is to be created until the judgement day. [15]

There are many other traditions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) which reflect the permissibility for every individual to manage the number of children through possible available means of

temporary spacing based upon his own specific circumstances. During the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his companions *Azl* was the only way for temporary spacing between the children. In technologically developed environment, the same can be resort through some advanced methodology or instrument of temporary blockade. Though this management or planning could not be hundred percent result-oriented as the Holy Prophet (SAW) mentioned in the fore-cited *Ahadith*:

مَا مِنْ نَسَمَةٍ كَانَتْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ إِلَّا وَهِيَ كَانَتْ

That soul must be created which is predestined to be created until the day of resurrection. [16]

Islam is a complete code of life and religion of pristine nature that covers all possible issues of human life. Islam accomplishes permissibility of controlling the increase in number of children if someone has any problem other than the financial constraint. Because Islam believes that the only true provider for all mankind is Allah. If Muslims follow what Allah has prescribed for them, Allah will provide for them. Allah has warned about killing one's children out of fear of poverty for either parents or the child. Allah says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ مِنْ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ

Kill not your children because of poverty - We provide sustenance for you and for them. [17]

Allah also says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا

And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them as well as for you. Surely, the killing of them is a great sin.[18]

The fertility management by temporary means is not that of killing the children anyway. We have mentioned the above verses just to keep in mind that the financial issue should not be the ground for regulating the fertility. There could be so many other reasons to address the issue. Health of mother or children and unavailability of appropriate medical facilities could be regarded as proper legal ground to manage the fertility. The base could also be obtained from social, political or unhealthy moral circumstances. Though the quality of life (or living standard) has not been given much importance by Islam but the quality of human being is very important in the eyes of Islam. Solid grounds are available on the basis of above-mentioned *Ahadith* that the fertility rate could be managed if any of the aspect of human quality is being affected. Islam furnishes topmost significance to the harmony, peace and smooth running of the society. Any action or policy which may contribute to the welfare of the society should be highly and widely appreciated. It is pleasing that Ministry of family planning has changed its name to ministry of population affairs few years ago if the targets have also been

changed under the umbrella of Islam to provide the society with quality and welfare in real sense.

REFERENCES

- [1] (Ar-Rum 30)
- [2] (Ar-Raad 38)
- [3] (Al-Anaam 90)
- [4] (An-Nahl 72)
- [5] (al-Kahf 46)
- [6] (Al-Bukhari 4675)
- [7] (Abu Dawood 1754)
- [8] (Sahih Ibn Hibban 4103)
- [9] (Al-Bukhaari, 2416; Muslim, 1829)
- [10] (At-Talaq 7)
- [11] (Al-Bukhari 5049)
- [12] (Al-Bukhari 2592 & Muslim 1628)
- [13] (Al-Bukhari 4808)
- [14] (Muslim 2610)
- [15] (Al-Bukhari 3823)
- [16] (Al-Bukhari 3823)
- [17] (Al-Anaam 151)
- [18] (Al-Isra 31)