

## Institution of Family in Islam

- Showkat Ahmad Wagay

### Abstract

*One of the most distinctive features of Muslim society is the paramount importance that it offers to the institution of family. The institution of family is considered as the cornerstone of a healthy and composed society. However, in contemporary times, the nature, function, and structure of the family have been subjected to multiple questions. Sexual permissiveness and other similar types of behaviours like homosexuality, living relationship of unmarried couples, are considered as equally legitimate expressions of the family unit. Islam takes a moderate stance, arguing that the family is a divinely inspired institution, with marriage as its quintessential component. Islam terms each and every act of extra-marital sex as sinful and forbidden (haram) and makes it a criminal offence. Its fundamental case being that these acts undermine the very root of society. However, Islam does acknowledge that sexual urge is very much natural in its composition; it therefore regulates certain law which does not overlook the sexual drive in man but institutionalize it through marriage. This is to retain men and women within the constraints of moral bindings. Moreover, sexuality is perceived as one of the intrinsic components of man's life ought to be regulated and disciplined through the proper guidance. This faculty of human beings cannot be left ungoverned because everybody will act as per his own whim. Furthermore, Islam perceives institution of family as the basis of the entire socio-cultural structure and a self-sustaining mechanism to ensure a sense of morality, support children's education and reinforce family ties as inevitable for the social, ideological and cultural stability over the entire span of society. This paper is an attempt to outline the objectives and functions of the institution of family as enunciated in the Islamic scriptural discourse.*

**Key words:** Family in Islam, sexuality, Islamic scriptural discourse.

### Introduction:

The fundamental unit of Human Society is institution of Family. This Institution is established by the coming together of a man and Women, and their contact brings existence to new generation. This institution is an instrument of continuity which prepares the succeeding generation to serve human civilization. However we live in an era in which the nature, function, and structure of the family have been thrown into question. Many, for example, would consider an illicit relationship, a single mother, and homosexual couples as equally legitimate expressions of the family unit. Islam argues that family is a Divinely-inspired and ordained institution. That came into existence with the creation of man. The institution of the family plays a very important part in Muslim society.

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Moreover this institution is organised in such a way that it operates as society in miniature. About 'one third of the ahkam (legal injunctions of the Qur'an) relate to the family and its proper regulation<sup>1</sup>. Islam affirms God's sovereignty over the entire gamut of man's life. It refuses to divide life into compartments of the sacred and the secular, perceives life as an integrated whole and for this reason sexuality and reproduction are parts of the whole Islamic system of life<sup>2</sup>. In addition this Institution is the basis of the entire socio-cultural structure and a self-sustaining mechanism to ensure social, ideological and cultural stability over the entire span of society.

### **Objectives and Functions:**

Man, woman and child are all in need of a permanent and lasting institution in order to comply the role in society. For survival, protection and support, socialization and societal identification of the individual the family is the Institution which can take care of the entire process, from the initial phases to its fruition The Quran says:

"O Mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, created of like nature, his mate, and from the two created and spread many men and women"<sup>3</sup>

Islam recognizes sexual urge common to all human beings, but in Islam it is not trivialized as man's animalistic function, to be tackled by his own whim and fancy. Moreover, Sexuality is perceived as one of the essential parts of man's life to be regulated and disciplined through the proper guidance. However, Islam does not overlook the sexual drive in man but institutionalize it through marriage to enable Men and Women to fulfill their natural urge. Current conventional wisdom among Muslims and nonMuslims alike holds that Islam is a religion with a positive view of human sexuality. However, in Islam Sex through marriage alone provides the control mechanism for the sexual urge<sup>4</sup>. Quran says;

"You are a garment to them, and they are a garment for you"<sup>5</sup>.

This brief Quranic verse encapsulates the primary aims of marriage—to provide warmth, comfort, and protection and to beautify. Within the Islamic vision, children have a right to be conceived and reared in a stable and secure environment; marriage is deemed to provide such an environment. In contrast, celibacy and sex outside of marriage are strongly discouraged because they are considered behavioral extremes that are not conducive to a wholesome society. Furthermore, Islam clearly demarcates between legitimate and illegitimate human relationships. Segregation, of opposite sexes, exists primarily to minimize

the chances of developing illicit relationships<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, sex through marriage also helps one to maintain his/her chastity and guard him/herself against committing the prohibited acts. Sex in the context of marriage is a legitimate, enjoyable activity—an act of worship that is deserving of Allah's reward. Conversely, sex outside of heterosexual marriage is considered deviant, deserving of punishment in the here-after. Furthermore, the relationship in the family, between all its members, and most important of all, between the husband and wife, is not wholly a sexual relationship. In addition, it is a spiritual and Psychological relationship sustains and generates love, kindness, mercy, compassion, mutual confidence, and self-sacrifice, this function of marriage and family is emphasized in the Qur'an in a number of ways. It says

"And (one) of His signs is that He created for you, of yourselves, spouses so that you may console yourselves with them (and find rest and tranquility in them). He has set between you love and mercy"<sup>7</sup>

And they say, "Our Lord, let our spouses and children be a source of joy for us, and keep us in the forefront of the righteous"<sup>8</sup>."

"Our Lord, and admit them into the gardens of Eden that you promised for them and for the righteous among their parents, spouses, and children. You are the Almighty, Most Wise"<sup>9</sup>.

This Institution takes a full time job for Child rearing and upbringing, their education, orientation, character-building without this institution the function of childbearing remains incomplete. However stable Family Institution will give rise to stable society and finally stable civilization. The family has been for long time the main educational institution. The individual learns about norms, values, religion within the family. Women are granted with the function of educating children according to the norms of society. This is certain when both parents and children should be mindful of their obligations towards each other<sup>10</sup>.

"... and be mindful of your duty to God in whose name you appeal to one another and to (the ties of) the womb"<sup>11</sup>".

The family's role as a basic organ of socialization is referred to by the Prophet in a number of *ah hadith* (traditional sayings) where he has said

That every child is born in the nature of Islam and it is his parents who transform him into a Christian, Jew or Magian<sup>12</sup>.

The rights do not relate entirely to moral, cultural and ideological aspects. However, they include the economic and social rights of the family members. The law of inheritance in divine scripture also reveals the nature of economic obligations within the family structure. Moreover, the members of the family remain integrated because it is the institution of family that provides them economic security. Aged is not forced to go to old people's homes. Orphans are not thrown into orphanages. Furthermore, the poor and unemployed are not made to survive on public assistance. Instead, all of these problems are, in the first instance, solved within the framework of the family. Similarly, there may be orphans in the family or society and the family alone can provide them with the love, care and dignity they need<sup>13</sup>.

Someone once said to the Prophet, "I have property and my father is in need of it". The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "You and your property belong to your father. Your children are among the finest things you acquire, Eat of what your children acquire"<sup>14</sup>.

Similarly, there may be orphans in the family or society and the family alone can provide them with the love, care and dignity they need. The Quran says

And if you fear that you will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry such women as may seem good to you, two or three or four (at a time). If you fear that you will not act justly, then (marry) one woman (only) or someone your right hand controls. That is more likely to keep you from injustices<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the family in the Islamic scheme of life provides for economic security as it provides for moral, social and emotional security and also leads to integration and cohesion among the relations. Widening the Family Horizons and Producing Social Cohesion in Society. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said:

"Matrimonial alliances (between two families or tribes) increase friendship more than anything else"<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, this Institution develops one's sense of responsibility and induces one to make greater efforts towards earning a living and improving one's economy. This aspect is referred to by the Qur'an when it enjoins people to marry; it says

"Marry those among you who are; single and (marry) your slaves, male and female, that are righteous; if they are poor, God will enrich them out of His bounty; God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing"<sup>17</sup>.

In addition, the family is an institution that provides security for the individual in a world of uncertainty, the awareness about rights and obligations has started to be seen in discourse of individuals on themselves. It goes along with the process of individuation in a changing society, being influenced by the exposure to other cultures and to media<sup>18</sup>. The family values debate has been generated against just such a backdrop in the late-twentieth-century. Consequently, concern about the family has moved to the center of the political arena. Threats to the family, on the one hand, and salvation through the family, on the other, are the two most prominent themes in the recent family politics discourse. That the family is broken and in need of repair is a common assumption of many social observers. Its complement is that families are worth fixing because making them strong (again) is the key to solving most of society's ills<sup>19</sup>. There are, of course, functions of the family other than those discussed above. However, the functions we have discussed are the most important from an Islamic perspective. Moreover, sociological function of the family is to facilitate the process of procreation. Certainly, a helpless infant needs to have some sort of assurance of physical and emotional support to survive, and in some cases a pregnant woman might well need to have others to assist her, if complications arise. The virtual helplessness of human infants is one explanation for what families do. From an evolutionary perspective, the institution of marriage serves as a mutually beneficial deal between men and women, providing women with the certainty of male support and companionship to bear and raise children and providing men with the assurance of which children were theirs, along with the promise of sexual loyalty by men in exchange for sexual exclusivity by women. Furthermore, Families play an vital role in transmitting the explicit rules of the social order, involves instructing children in general concepts of right and wrong, and explaining appropriate behavior in various social situations.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, religion and the family have been intimately related. Each has an influence upon the other\_\_ neither can be fully understood apart from the other. Moreover, the institution is designed to maximize the welfare of man. However, vigorous social structure of society depends on the Institution of Family. Where the cohesive bond gets diluted, the society begins to tumble. Western society presents a glaring example of this phenomenon. Moreover, the disintegration of the family in the West is, in part, a result of confusion about the place and the role of the family in society. However, Islam has valued the

ties that bound the member of the family together and put restrictions on disobedience of children towards their parents, and disobedience of the wife toward the husband to prevent the breakdown of the family. Moreover, high degree of responsibility prevails. The entire system operates in a way that strengthens and fortifies the family and not otherwise.

## References

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  - <sup>8</sup> Qur'an.24:74
  - <sup>9</sup> Quran. 40: 8
  - <sup>10</sup> Zeenat Kausar, *op.cit.*p.7
  - <sup>11</sup> Qur'an 4: 1
  - <sup>12</sup> Ibn Hanbal, Vol, 2. pp, 315 and 346
  - <sup>13</sup> Ahmad Khursheed , *op.cit.* p.23
  - <sup>14</sup> *Mishkat*, Book XIII. p.716.
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  - <sup>17</sup> Qur'an 24: 32
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