

Islamic Social Order

The foundations of the social system of Islam rest on the belief that all human beings are equal and constitute one single fraternity.

Equality of Mankind

God created a human pair to herald the beginning of the life of mankind on earth and all the persons inhabiting this world today have sprung from this pair. For some time in the initial stages the progeny of this pair remained a single group. It had one religion and spoke the same language. There were little or no difference among them, but as their numbers gradually increased, their diversification and growth were divided into various tribes, and nationalities. Their languages became different; their modes of dress varied; and their manners of living also became distinct from one another.

All these differences are said to be signs from Allah. They do exist in the world of reality. Hence, Islam recognizes them as matters of fact. It does not seek to wipe them out or to ignore them but affirms that their advantage consists in affording the only possible means of distinguishing one from the other. But the prejudices which have arisen among mankind out of these differences in the shape of groupings and organizations based on race, color, language, nationality, etc., are disapproved by Islam. Islam regards all distinctions of birth, of high and low amen, of upper and lower classes, on natives of the soil and aliens as the manifestation of their ignorance. It declares that all men in the world have sprung from the same parents and therefore, are equal in their status as human beings.

After propounding this concept of equality of mankind, Islam adds that if there can be any real difference between man and man it cannot be one of race, color, country or but one of their relationship with their Creator. The most honored of people in the sight of God is the most righteous. On the basis of this fundamental tenet, Islam seeks to build principled society as against the racial, national and parochial societies existing in the world. The basis of cooperative effort among men in such a society is not one's birth but a creed and a moral principle.

Any one, if he believes in God as his Master and Lord and accepts the guidance of the prophets (the essence of which is embodied in Islam, the message of the last Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon

him)) as the law of his life, can join this community, whether he is a resident of America or Africa whether he belongs to the Semitic race or the Aryan; whether he is black in color or white skinned; whether he speaks a European language or Arabic. All those who join this community will have the same rights and social status. They will not be subjected to any racial, national or class distinct of any kind. No one will be regarded as high or low.

There will be no untouchable among them, nor could be polluted by the touch of anyone's hand. There will be no handicaps for them in the matter of marital relations, eating and drinking and social contacts. None will be looked down upon as lowly or mean by reason of his birth or profession. Nobody will claim any distinctive rights by virtue of his caste, community or ancestry. Man's merit will not depend on his family connections or riches, but only on whether he is better than others in moral conduct or excels others in piety and righteousness.

Such a social order, out-stepping the geographical boundaries and limits of race, color and language as it does, can spread itself in all parts of the world and on its foundations can be raised the edifice of the universal brotherhood of men. In societies based on race or nationality, only those people can join who belong to a particular race or country and the door is closed in the face of those who do not belong to them. But in a highly principled society anyone who accepts the creed and its moral standard can become its member, possessing equal rights with everyone else. As for those who do not accept this creed, the community, while it cannot receive them within its fold, is prepared within the limits laid down by law and decency. To give them all the basic human rights on condition that they are from the people of the Book or those who are classified under their category.

After appreciating these foundations of Islamic social order, we would like to cast a glance over the principles and patterns of social relationship which have been fostered by Islam.

The Institution of Family

The foremost and fundamental institution of human society is the unit of family. A family is established by the coming together of a man and a woman, and their contact brings into existence a new generation. It then produces ties of kinship and community, which gradually develop into a large society. The family is the institution through which a generation prepares the succeeding generation for the service of human civilization and for the discharge of its social obligations with devotion, sincerity and enthusiasm. This institution does not merely recruit cadets for the maintenance and development of human desire that those who have to replace them in future should be better than themselves.

In this respect, the family can be truly called the fountain-head of the progress, development, prosperity and strength of human civilization on the earth. Hence, among social problems Islam devotes much attention to those relating to the family and strives to establish this important social unit on the healthiest and strongest foundations. According to Islam the correct form of relationship between man and woman is marriage, that is, the one in which full social responsibilities are undertaken by them and which results

in the emergence of a family. Free sex–license and irresponsible behavior are not condoned by Islam as innocent pastimes or ordinary transgressions.

Rather, they are acts which strike at the very roots of human society. Hence, Islam holds every form of extra matrimonial sex–relationship as sinful, forbidden (Haram) and punishable under the criminal law of Islam. It prescribes severe punishments for the offense so that such unsociable behavior may not become common. At the same time it aims at purifying and purging the society of all activities which encourage such irresponsible actions or provide opportunities for them. Regulations of Hijab (For Muslim Women) ban on free mixing of men and women, restrictions on filthy music and pictures, and discouragement of the spread and propagation of obscenities and aberrations, are all intended to guard against this. Their sole object is to protect and strengthen the institution of the family.

Islam does not merely regard the desirable form of social contact as just permissible but holds and affirms it as a good and virtuous act, indeed, an act of worship. It does not simply look upon celibacy of an adult person with disfavor, but it calls upon every young man to take in his turn upon himself the social responsibilities of married life just as his parents did so in their time. Islam does not merely regard asceticism and perpetual celibacy as no virtue at all but as aberrations and departures from the true nature of man and acts of revolt against the Divine plan of things.

It also strongly disapproves those rites, ceremonies or restrictions which tend to make marriage a difficult and tedious affair. The intention of Islam is that marriage may become easy and fornication the most difficult thing in society and not vice versa as it is in most of the societies today. Hence, after debarring a few specified relatives from entering into matrimony with one another, it has legalized marital relations with all other near and distant kith and kin. It has removed all distinctions of caste and community and permitted matrimony of any Muslim with any other Muslim.

It has recommended that the amounts of Mehr (dower) should be fixed at a low and easy figure, the burden of which can be easily borne by the husband and has dispensed with the necessity of priests and offices of compulsory registration. In an Islamic society marriage is such a plain and simple ceremony as can be performed anywhere before two witnesses, though it is essential that the proceedings should not be kept secret. The idea is that the society should know that the couple is now going to live a matrimonial life.

The family itself Islam has assigned to man a position of authority so that he may maintain order and discipline, as the chief of the household. Islam expects the wife to obey and look after the comforts and well– being of her husband and expects the children behave accordingly to their parents. Islam does not favor a loose and disjointed family system which is devoid of any authority, control and discipline and in which someone is not pointedly responsible of the proper conduct and behavior of its members.

Discipline can only be maintained through a central authority and in the view of Islam the position of father in the family is such that it makes him the fittest person to take over this responsibility. But this

does not mean that man has been made a tyrant and oppressor in the household and woman has been handed over to him as a helpless chattel. According to Islam the real spirit of marital life is love, understanding and mutual respect. If the woman has been asked to obey the husband, the latter has been called upon to exercise his privileges towards the welfare of the family and treat the wife with love, affection and sweetness.

It makes the marital bond strong but not unbreakable. It aims at keeping the bond intact only so long as it is founded on the sweetness of love or at least the possibility of lasting companionship still exists. When this possibility dies out, it gives man the right of divorce and woman the right of separation, and under certain conditions where married life has become a source of misery or nuisance, gives the Islamic courts of justice the authority to annul the marriage.

Relatives and Neighbors

Beyond the limited circle of family the next social sphere which is sufficiently wide is that of kinship and blood relationship. Those who are one's kith and kin through relationship with common parents or common brothers and sisters or relations through in-laws, Islam wants them all to be mutually affectionate, cooperative and helpful. In many places in the Qur'an good treatment of the Zawil Qurba (near relatives) is enjoined. In the traditions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) good treatment of one's (Silat Al-Rahm) has been emphasized and counted among the highest virtues.

A person who cold-shoulders his relatives or treats them in an indifferent manner is looked down upon by Islam with great disfavor. But this does not mean that it is an Islamic virtue to be partial or unduly lenient toward one's relatives as may result in injustice, is repugnant to Islam which condemns it as an act of Jahiliyyah (ignorance). Similarly, it is utterly un-Islamic for a government official or public trustee to support his at public expense or to be partial to his kith and kin in his official divisions: his would actually be a sinful act. Fair treatment of one's as enjoined by Islam, should be at one's own expenses and within the limits of justice and fair play.

Next to relations come the neighbors. The Qur'an has divided them into three categories:

A neighbor who is also a relative; an alien neighbor; and a casual or temporary neighbor with whom one had occasion to live or travel for some time. All of them are deserving of fellow-feeling, affection, courtesy and fair treatment. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said:

Ayesha and Ibn Omar reported from the Messenger of Allah who said; Gabriel did not stop to advise me about neighbors till I thought that he would soon make him an heir. – (Agreed upon)

In another tradition the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

Abu Hureira reported from the Messenger of Allah who said: "By Allah he does not believe, by Allah he does not believe, by Allah he does not believe". The companions asked who is he O Prophet of Allah?

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "One whose neighbor is not immune against his mischief".

Again, he (peace be upon him) said: that a person who enjoys a full meal while his neighbor is starving really possesses no faith in Islam. The Prophet was once informed of a woman who used to offer prayers regularly and keep fasts very often and gives alms frequently, but her neighbors were sick of her abusive tongue. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that woman deserved only the fire of hell. He was also told of another woman who did not possess these virtues but did not trouble her neighbors either, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that she will be rewarded with paradise.

The complete saying goes as follows:

Abu Hurairah reported that a man asked: O Messenger of Allah! Such and such a woman is reputed for such prayer, and fasting and alms– giving, but she offends her neighbors with her tongue. He said: She will go to Hell. He inquired: O Messenger of Allah! Such and such a woman is reputed less for her fasting, alms– giving and prayer but she gives alms of the remainders of curds and she does not offend her neighbors by her tongue. He said: She will go to Paradise. (Narrated by Ahmed and Bayhaqi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has laid so much emphasis on this virtue that he has advised that whenever a Muslim brings fruits for his children he should either send some to his neighbors as a gift or at least not throw the peelings outside the door so that the neighbors may not have a feeling of deprivation.

The complete Hadith reads as follows:

Amr Ibn Shueib who reposed from his father who re– proved from his grandfather that the Messenger of Allah said narrated it: "Do you know what the duties of a neighbor are?" Help him if he seeks your help, give him succor if he seeks your succor, give him loan if he seeks you loan, give him relief if he is needy, nurse him if he falls ill, follow his bier if he dies, cheer him if he meets any good, sympathize with him if any calamity befalls him, raise not your building higher so as to obstruct his air without his permission, harass him not, give him when you purchase a fruit, if you do not do it, take it secretly; and let not your children take it out to excite thereby the anger of his children.

On one occasion the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that a man is really good if his neighbors regard him as such and he is bad if they consider him so. The complete Hadith goes as follows:

Ibn Mas'ud reported that a man asked the Holy Prophet: O Messenger of Allah! How can I know when I do good and when I do bad? The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said: When you hear your neighbors say – you have done good, you have done good, and when you hear them say – you have done bad, you have done bad. (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

In brief, Islam requires all neighbors to be loving and cooperative with one another and share one

another's sorrows and happiness. It enjoins that they should establish social relations in which one could depend upon the other and regard his life, honor and property safe among his neighbors. A society in which two persons, separated only by a wall, remain unacquainted with one another for years and those living in the same area of a town have no interest or confidence in one another can never be called Islamic.

Next to these is the wider circle of relationship which covers the entire society. The broad principles on which Islam seeks to regulate the general gamut of our social life are the following:

To cooperate in acts of virtue and piety and not cooperate in acts of sin and injustice. To this point Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, But help ye not one another in sin and rancor: Fear God: for God is strict in punishment." (Quran 5:2)

"One's friendship and enmity should be for the pleasure of God only; whatever you (Muslim) give should be given because God likes it to be given, and whatever you (Muslims) withhold should be withheld because God does not like its gift. (Saying of the Holy Prophet)

"You (the Muslims) are the best community ever raised unto mankind; your duty is to command people to do good and prevent them from committing evil."

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Ye are the best Of Peoples, evolved For mankind, Enjoining what is right, Forbidding what is wrong, And believing in God. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, But most of them are perverted transgressors." (Qur'an 3:110)

And the Prophet in various of his other teachings said: "Do not think evil of each other nor probe into each other's affairs nor excite one against the other. Keep yourself away from mutual hatred and jealousy. Do not unnecessarily oppose each other. Always remain the slaves and subjects of Allah and live like brothers among yourselves."

"Choose for others what you choose for yourself." (Agreed upon)

These are some of the social values which Islam affirms and establishes and which it wants to see enshrined in the human society.

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