Chapter III

THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT
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INTRODUCTION:

The reforms introduced by the Prophet Mohammad (SWA) in the form of the revelations of the Holy Quran, for the upliftment of human society, soon became a subject of sharp criticism because of various reasons.

In the first place, the teaching of Islam was based on a disciplined life, it imposed specific limitations on the social, cultural, economic and personal life of the people of which the masses were not accustomed of. As a result, people, in general, became sharp critics of this new system of life.

Secondly, Islam presented a comprehensive social structure embodies specific social code of conduct for the individual and for the social system. Imposition of such code of conduct was something new and against the vested interest of the influential people of the time. So they opposed this changed system in every possible way.

Thirdly, and perhaps, the most important reform was the imposition of the concept of oneness of God. This concept of monotheism was so important in Islam that it did not accept any compromise in this regard at any moment. The same has
been explained in 'Sura Ikhlas' which is said to be equal to one third part of the Holy Quran. The sura reads,

Say! "He, God, is ONE (alone)
God, the Needless,
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten,
And there is none like unto him.

(S.CXII - A.1.4)

The Spiritual and Practical Supremacy of Islam

These and many other factors including the spiritual and practical supremacy of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, created many hurdles in the progress of Islam. In the midst of such an unfavourable environment and turmoil, Islam did not only survived but, with in a very short span of time, it became a religion of masses. The factors responsible for its progress and popularity were, in fact, the comprehensive code of conduct and the highly disciplined way of life prescribed by the Holy prophet (SWA) of Islam and his faithful devotees.

The changes imposed by Islam upon the believers, were surely radical, and pragmatic in nature. Hence, they were considered against the customs, traditions and the philosophy of the pagan Arabs.
The main body of this chapter will consist of the discussion related to the modes of social control, social code for individual life, the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, Philosophy of marriage, divorce, polygamy, Dower (Mehar) and dowry etc. Codes regarding the inheritance and the importance of education for women would be presented in the next chapter.

The Concept of Social Structure in Islam:

"The mores of social control, as given in Islam are wider than the prayer to Allah. It includes, not only the fear of the day of judgement, but also active service to Allah and his creature".¹ Perhaps, it is the reason why the Holy Quran has emphasized that the muslims while busy in worldly activities, must not forget to remember Allah. Whether they are regular in their prayer to him or are involved in social interaction. Says the Quran;

"that God may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace."

(S. 34, A. 38)

This quotation from the Holy Quran shows, that Islam preaches good deeds in ones relation with his fellow beings more than anything else.
'For Allah bounties and reward in the hereafter has no limit for those who are the righteous'.

The establishment of social relations between the individuals in commercial, family or social dealings have been so important in the eyes of Allah, that he has forbidden all frauds which ought to be committed by human beings. There is, again and again, emphasis on, not doing any fraud either in commercial or social matters in order to keep this relationship pious and sacred. This is why great emphasis has been given on speaking truth even in personal matters. A liar, in the eyes of Islam, has been most disgracefully condemned. This is, in fact, a social code related to individual. In this regard the Holy Quran says,

"Woe to those that deal in fraud, - those who, when they have to receive by measure from men, exact full measure, but when they have to give by measure or weight to men, give less than due. Do they not think that they will be called to account? on a Mighty Day, a Day when (all) mankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds"?

(S. LXXXIII, A.1.6)

There is repeated emphasis, not only against, doing any fraud, either on commercial or in social matters, but, also the muslims have been asked to speak the truth, even in the
cases, if their relatives are involved. To quote from the Holy Quran.

"---give measure and weight with (full) justice, no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear, - whatever ye say, speak justly, even if a real relative is concerned,"

(S.VI, A. 153)

Inference:

From the above two quotations it can be inferred that the expression 'fraud' here is to be taken in the widest sense of the term. "The term 'fraud' is not limited to the economic and commercial dealing but it may mean, dealings in domestic, as well as, in social matters, when a person wants to get more than what he gives"³ Worst of all, it may refer to the spiritual matters when a person asks for Mercy from his Lord when, on his part, he is not willing to give to his fellow being. There are, surely, social and legal checks on such frauds; but the greatest check is due to the fear of the day or judgement. The fear of Allah in these matters is the beginning of wisdom in all matters.

Further there is much emphasis that the muslims should have no difference, what so ever, is in their words and their deeds. Such a conduct has emphatically been condemned and it has been ordained that if a man's deeds are not in
consistence with his words, then such behaviour in all social matters, are extremely condemned by the Almighty. This ordinance is not confined to the deed of men only but the women are also equally accountable under this code of conduct. Such actions of muslims men and women in all social matters are odious in the sight of Allah, because He is the one, who knows what could not be seen by other individual human being.
The Holy Quran says:

'O ye who believe! why say ye that which ye do not? Grievously odious is it in the sight of God that ye say that which ye do not'.

(S. LXI, A.2.3)

Significance of Islamic Code of Conduct

To maintain social norms, the duties towards Allah and the duties towards fellow beings are so much interwoven that they can not be separated from each other, under the Islamic code of conduct. These have clearly been mentioned under the Islamic laws; for example:

1. In the eyes of Almighty it is an offence against society to do shameful and unbecoming acts, the acts which do not have social sanctions whether, locally or universally.

2. Secondly, it is considered a sin to tresspass limits prescribed by social laws, which include insanity in any
form, failure in performing intangible duties of society not clearly defined by law, being selfish, or being proud, instead of being modest.

3. Thirdly, it is also a sin to assign any partner to Allah in the widest sense of the term.

4. And lastly, it is one of the greatest sins to indulge into superstition, instead of being rational as defined by islam.

The Holy Quran addresses the Holy Prophet (SWA) asks him to instruct muslims, in the following words.

say the things my Lord hath indeed forbidden are: shameful deeds, whether open or secret; sins and trespasses against truth and reasons: assigning of partners to God, for which ye are given no authority, and saying things about God of which ye have no knowledge.

(S. VII, A. 33)

In order to maintain decency and modesty in social relationship, muslim men and women have equally been warned to observe the rule of modesty. For example, 'staring by a man at women is certainly not permitted in the social code of Islam'. Surely, it is a breach of refined manners. The need of being modest is the same for both men and women. Although on account of the difference of the sex, in nature, temperament, and the social life of women, a greater amount
of privacy and modesty is expected from women than from men, especially in matters of covering of faces and boosoms, Holy Quran says:

"And say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that may will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do. (24, 30) And say unto the believing women that they cast down their gaze and guard their private parts and they display not their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear there of; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms, and not (24, 31) display their beauty except to their husband's their fathers, their husbands fathers, their sons their husband's son. Their brothers and their brother's sons their sister's son or their women, are the slaves whom their right hand posses, or male servant free of physical needs or small children who have no sense of shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards God, that ye may attain Bliss".

(S. XXIV, A. 30, 31)
Such is a social code of Islam which binds a muslim man and woman to live a life of modesty and to fulfill religious, commercial and social obligations. Such obligations are very wide, which spread over the whole spectrum of family life, neighbours, the members of our own community and other communities.

Emphasis on Personality Development in Islam

Islam preaches both men and women virtues which are essential for living in a decent civilized society. Islam is basically concerned with the development of human character, and in the establishment of decent human society, depending upon mutual trust, tolerance, understanding and faith in God. At so many instances it commands a muslim to follow certain virtues which are essential for maintaining individual and social relationship. For example first and the foremost virtue is that both men and women must have hope, trust and faith in Allah. Secondly, they should have devotion and fairness in practical life. Thirdly, they should have love and practice truth in their thoughts, words and deeds. Fourthly, they should have patience and tolerance even when they are in trouble. Fifthly, they should be humble and should avoid an attitude of arrogance and superiority, they should help the poor and unlucky persons with generosity, kindness and politeness. They should follow the practices and sayings of the Holy Prophet. It is they who are dearest and
nearest to Allah. Lastly, muslims should be chaste, should have purity in sex, in motives, thoughts, words and deeds, including the following of the true path, which has been taught by the great prophet of Islam (SWA). The Holy Quran promises forgiveness and great reward for such people. Holy Quran says:

"For Muslim men and women -- for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engaged much in God's praise -- for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward".

(S.33; A.35)

Other various virtues of the righteous persons which can help them developing their mutual relationship in the cultural and social life have been described in Holy Quran in (S. 42, 36 to 42). Allah has promised to give these persons more lasting reward in this world and in the world after life.

The Holy Quran has been so much particular in establishing a proper social relationship that at numerous places Allah has ordered the muslims not to breed the hatred
for others, even to them, whom they found wicked and hostile. He has instructed muslims to help each other in piety and goodness, to have fair dealing in social life.

"That even the hatred by others towards a true muslim should not lead him to do injustice to them". To quote from the Holy Quran, and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part). Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour; fear God; for God is strict in punishment".

(S.5, A.8)

These and many other 'ayats' from Holy Quran may be quoted to prove that Islam has been essentially concerned with the development of healthy human society. The Quranic commands and instructions are applicable to men and women alike. There is no distinction in the behavioural manifestation and dealings of men and women towards human society. Allah, has enjoined upon muslims men and women to do justice, be good and liberal to kith and kins; and He has forbidden all shameful acts, injustice and rebellions for both the sexes. Says the Holy Quran.

"God commands, justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kins, and He forbids all shameful
deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you that ye may receive admonition (S. XVI, 90).

A Healthy Family Ensures a Healthy Society:

In order to maintain a healthy social relationship in a society. Islam has instructed the believers almost in every possible way to avoid the situation which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict and could destroy the fabrics of social interaction. There is no doubt, that a healthy society depends solely upon the healthy relationship with the individual within the family. If this small unit of the society, that is the members of a family, have good relationship within themselves, then it may be expected that the whole society will be good. In case, this smaller unit is disturbed and lives under a state of tension and conflict, the whole society will be disturbed. In order to keep this smaller unit of the society healthy and intact, some code of conducts are necessary to be adopted by the members of the family, which consists of husband, wife, parents and children.

Mutual Trust and Faith is an Essential Fabric:

If mutual trust, faith and good understanding, prevail within the family, the relationship between the members of the family will remain good, otherwise the family will be disturbed. A disturbed family will adversely affect the structure of the society.
Adultery has been strongly condemned in Islam:

Perhaps because of unending evil effect of adultery, Islam is very strict in matters of pure sex relations between husband and wife. In the Holy Quran, there are very strict instructions against adultery. Adultery is not only considered a shameful act inconsistent with self respect and respects of other fellow beings in the society, but it may also be a source of many other evils. There is no doubt, that adultery, whether it is committed by the husband or by the wife, will destroy the very fabric of family life. It works against the interest of born and unborn child. Ill-feeling, distrust and conflict between the couple and murder might be the result of such an undesirable action of either member of the family. From social point of view, a person may lose reputation as an individual, may permanently break the sacred bonds of family life. Therefore, for a true muslim, it is upon them not only to consider adultery as a sin, but also to avoid any approach or temptation to it. In this context the Holy Quran says:

Nor come Neigh to adultery, for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)".

(S.17, A.36).

It is because of these reasons, clear instructions have been given in the Holy Quran regarding the rights and
duties of the husband towards his wife and children, to the wives towards their husbands and to children towards their mother and father.

A careful examination of the existing situation will reveal, that if an Islamic dictation apparently remained ineffective due to an inadequate religious, moral and spiritual education. It is not because that the Islamic laws and teachings of Islam are defective, or limited, but because of an inadequate religious moral and spiritual education.

Position of Women in Islamic Society

Concerning the women's position in Islamic society, it is to be remembered that Islam regards the woman as an independent member of the society and places no difference between her and the man as far as human virtues are concerned.\(^4\)

It is repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Quran that the favour of the Almighty will be attained only through piety, virtue, knowledge and good deed, of a muslim individual. There is no distinction whether the doer is a male or a female. The Holy Quran says

"O you men, surely, we have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families, that you may know each other; surely, the most honourable of you with Allah
is the one, among you, most careful of his duty".  
(S.49, A.13).
In the same context at another place the Holy Quran declares, in more specific words.

"I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female, the one of you, being from the other"
(S.III, A.194)

The above two ayats from the Holy Quran testifies that Islam does not differentiate between the virtuous of dutiful man from the women possessing the same qualities. It would not be out of place to mention here, that 'in Islamic society, a woman has the right to own and sell her property, she has a right to inheritance, right to seek knowledge, and even the right to seek employment for earning money like any man in the society'.

"In Prophet Mohammad's times there was a woman named 'Zeinab Aattaari' who sold perfume and had the Prophet as one of her clients'. It is evident from the Islamic literature that 'in Islam the woman can also take part in social activities and trade in so far as her participation is consistent with chastity and virtue'. In early Islam, "the women used to accompany Muslim combatants (Mujahedeen) to the war fronts and helped in cooking and nursing the wounded soldiers and so forth".
The Holy Quran comments:

"There is no blame on you for what they do for themselves in a lawful manner"

(S.2, A.234)

Inference:

The above discussions and quotations from the Holy Quran, may lead us to infer, that Islam has been very particular in establishing and strengthening, social bonds and relationship with an ultimate objective of social welfare. It is perhaps, because of this reason, the Almighty has said in very strong language, that 'a man will definitely be a loser if he does no good work and exhorts one another to truth and endurance, to remain concerned with ones own material gain. Pre-occupation of a person only in material gain on or loss is strictly condemned. Faith leads a person to be righteous and contribute to social welfare.

It may also be inferred that a strong faith in Allah and his prophet Mohammad (SWA) may lead a person to do good to others. Obviously, thinking and doing good to others contribute to social welfare. Such persons would, surely, be liked and respected by other members of the society and he would be able to lead others to the path of truth and constancy.

The Holy Quran says:

"Verily man is in loss! except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join
together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of patience and constancy".

(S.CIII, A.23)

In addition to selflessness, forgiveness, humbleness, truthfulness and endurance, the conventions of propriety and privacy are also essential features of a refined social life. It has been enjoined upon the muslim (men and women) that they should not enter the houses of others unless they have sought their permission to do so. Muslims, in general, have been instructed to exchange good wishes and ensure safety whenever they meet each other. It has also been commanded in Holy Quran, that in case, the permission to enter other's house is not given and he has been asked to go back, a muslim must immediately go back without hesitation. Such an action and behaviour will make his life, a life of goodness, and purity. He will remain respectful and honourable for his fellowmen and to the Almighty. (Ref. S XXIV - 27,28).

The Holy Quran further says:

"The believers must (eventually) win through, those who humble themselves in their prayers; who avoid vain talk; who are active in deeds of charity; who abstain from sex except with those joined them in their marriage bonds, but those who desire to exceed limits are transgressors; those who faithfully observe their trust and their covenants; and who (strictly) guard their prayers; these will be the heirs, who will inherit paradise; they will dwell there in (for ever)."
Micro-religious form of Islamic Structure

Upto this point, aspect and macro-culture issues of Islamic society and their importance have been discussed. The remaining part of this chapter will deal with some micro-religious form of social structure of Islam, based on Quranic instructions. This part will consist of the relationship of an individual with his family, his relationship with muslim community as a whole, and the role of an individual as a father, mother, son and daughter and their interrelationship.

As it has been mentioned in the early pages of this chapter that the Competent Creator, views family as the core of the society which has been equipped with conditions which would establish its foundation. For instance, the natural sex mechanism which ties two individual into a life long companionship where peace and happiness could be sought.

Islam, genuinely, considers family life to be of great significance in which women play a very important role in bringing mental peace and happiness within the family. The mutual affection between the couple after marriage is in accordance with the natural phenomena.

Men and Women are Equal:

It is expected that married couple will feel comfortable with each other only when there develops mutual trust, respect and good understanding between them. This is
also the will of the Almighty, the Holy Quran declares:

"And one of the sign is that he created maids for your from yourselves that ye may find rest in them, and ye put between you love and compassion"  
(S.30, A.21)

It is clear from the above verse that the harmony which exists in divine legislation is corresponding to the human nature.

The vital significance of a united family can be well understood through meditation of the Quranic verses. The family is comprised of two main elements namely, men and women. It is expected that the couple, on the basis of their mutual trust, cooperation, and understanding can bring happiness to the family, which will ultimately lead towards a happy society. Frankly speaking, a joint venture of the couple forms such a unique body which enables the tree of humanity to grow, and eventually, bear fruits.

A women cherishes this fruit inside her body for several months, nurturing it with the juice of her life, and after child's birth, she embraces the child as she would nourish her own life and soul. She suckles the baby instinctively, sacrifice her rest, comfort, and peace for it. While the husband, or the father of the expected baby, waits anxiously, with a mixed feeling of pleasure and pain. During all this period, he tries to extend every comfort to his
wife, because he knows that she is the real custodian of his future generation.

It is evident from this fact, that in a family structure, men and women stand on equal footing. The contentment, satisfaction and joy, are the basic components of a happy family life and are responsible for a healthy generation and the well being of the society. Surely, the creation of a healthy society is not possible without a sensible cooperation of husband and wife. In the light of these facts it may be inferred that Islam has given equal status to men and women and has treated them equal without any discrimination.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid. P. 16

3. Ibid, P.16


5. Ibid. P. 20


8. Ibid. P. 21