Islamic Teachings and Social Structure:

Conviction and Contradictions

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In the Light of the Teachings
of the Prophet Muhammad,
upon whom be peace and greeting

By

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(In the name of Allāh, the Most-Kind, the Ever-Merciful).

Dedicated to youth as learning comes prior to practice!

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PREFACE

The conception of this book goes back to an initial idea discussed between the authors regarding the implications of social practices with reference to consanguineous marriages and Islamic beliefs. Visual impairment was found to be one of the major and detrimental outcomes of such marriages, which are strongly supported by the socio-cultural norms in many Muslim societies. Findings of this research sensitized us to the prevalent gap between Islamic guidelines and the social practices of its believers. The contradictions between the two sets of beliefs (social and religious) are mainly due to either lack of knowledge or misinterpretations of the holy text. Moreover, long-existing social traditions are engraved in the mindsets of the people to the extent that they tend to craft contextual relevance with the religious teachings. Against the backdrop of this idea, various topics have been studied in the light of both Islamic provisions and sociological findings. We are hopeful that this text will bridge the gap between social and Islamic beliefs and the way these are practiced. The following section briefly overviews the various topics covered in the book.

The first chapter examines people's perceptions and practices regarding consanguineous marriages in an eastern Muslim society, like Pakistan. The main emphasis is being laid on the association of prevalence of consanguinity, with instances of various degrees of visual impairment including complete blindness, partial-impairmen of vision, and colour blindness. It encompasses two main contexts in which many of the major vital decisions are taken: social and religious. For study purposes, a substantial number of students who were studying at Government College University Lahore, and have been suffering from various forms of visual impairments (complete blindness, partial impairment and colour blindness), were interviewed. An interview schedule was developed which comprised of questions designed to assess the relationship between consanguineous marriages and forms of visual impairment. The findings of this research suggest that marriage preferences have strong social and cultural backing which influences the major life aspects of individuals. Our analysis of Islamic teachings reveals that there is no religious binding which promotes consanguinity; rather people are encouraged to marry outside their kin so they may have healthier offspring. Awareness campaigns and policy making could be pertinent steps towards prevention.

The second chapter intends to develop an understanding regarding the differences between sons and daughters which exist at a socio-cultural level, and the relevant Islamic guidelines. It contends that most of the social practices are not a true representation of Islamic teachings. Religion, nevertheless, remains an integral part of almost every social system: it determines normative structures and their functioning. Exploring both the social and religious dimensions further enabled us to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender conception. These are also helpful in dispelling the long existing misconceptions which have led to various objectionable and staunch practices. Most of the available literature and research has been consulted to gain a deep understanding regarding the female child; whether she is considered as a blessing or curse. It is found that most of the social practices are in contradiction with Islamic teachings. Flawed interpretations mislead masses, and traditional mindsets pose resistance to change. Islam emphasizes an unbiased stance for male and female conception; that only the will of God matters in this regard. However, social attitudes are not found to be the same, and deviate from Islamic guidelines in many ways.

The third chapter aims to develop an understanding of the prevalent customary form of marriages in many parts of the world, including Muslim societies such as Pakistan. This form of marital union is prevalent in South Asian countries and underdeveloped parts of the world, with certain notions attached. These are discussed in the light of various sociological factors and Islamic context. It is observed that the practice is mostly found in the countries where women are underprivileged, and where provisions of law do not support females in general. Lack of implementation is another issue, particularly in cases of marital discord. Consent of the partners is often not ensured, and decisions usually remain in the hands of the elders of the family. Victimization, estrangement, insecurity, and the suffering of children, are some of the negative implications of these marriages. This social practice contradicts with the spirit of Islam where consent of the partners is mandatory. Islamic teachings discourage marital unions without this, and guide that there should not be any compulsion imposed on the couple to be married; the will of the partners is an essential condition. Dowry and dower should not be conditional factors associated with the sustenance and dissolution of marriage. Therefore, it is concluded that people are more concerned about societal factors than about religious guidelines regarding this phenomenon.

In the fourth chapter, the institutionalization of gender has been discussed in the light of societal perceptions and Islamic provisions. Gender is constructed by prevalent social values and cultural traditions within a region. It intends to analyze various structural factors that might

prove beneficial - or disadvantageous - for the two genders (male and female). It is a matter of common observation that when one of the genders occupies dominant positions and receives recognition, then usually it is at the expense of the other. In Pakistan, most of the females are discriminated against, and remain underprivileged throughout their lives due to patriarchal structure. Women comprise almost half of the country's population, however, due to lack of educational and occupational opportunities, they lag behind in many fields and this retards the overall development of the country. The first section of the chapter highlights social structural factors related to the differential treatment towards gender, and recommends that the situation be made better by the formation and implementation of policies and Islamic law in the country. The second half of the chapter discusses various Islamic provisions that enlighten us about the gender roles and rights (inheritance, education, marriage decisions, etc.). Multiple examples of women's participation in various fields have been taken from Islamic history for further elaboration. It is concluded that most of our societal behaviour is in contradiction with Islamic teachings, and we, being Muslims, need to revisit our social practices in the light of the religious guidelines - The Qur'ān and Sunnah. This would lead us to a new path of peace, prosperity, equity and justice.

The fifth chapter is about population growth, and the various challenges posed by it. Population is growing at an alarming rate in certain parts of the world. There are pertinent factors that are causing this multiplication of human beings, and lead to the various implications of immense growth. The authors have discussed population growth and planning in Islamic and social context. It is contended that many Islamic teachings are either not read properly, interpreted correctly, or conveyed with true spirit. There are some educated Islamic scholars who understand the real issues associated with unchecked population growth, and do not accept it merely as the will of God. According to Islamic teachings, family size can be negotiated and planned by married couples. From a social perspective, it is observed that a high level of illiteracy, lack of true religious knowledge, and poverty, are contributing to many detrimental consequences, such as high maternal and infant mortality rates, malnourishment of children, little or no investment in children's education, etc.. On a macro level, growing food insecurity, environmental degradation, increasing unemployment, more solid waste, and poor hygienic conditions, are among the issues not to be ignored.

The sixth chapter is about aging, which is a universal phenomenon that has been defined in terms of its biological and cultural aspects. The chapter intends to focus on various concepts related to older people in the light of Islamic teachings and social context. Like gender, age has its

biological component, and is interpreted in the way society defines it. Roles and duties are assigned mainly with reference to the age group one belongs to, and socio-cultural norms play a significant role in designing such mindsets. Many stereotypical notions limit one's ability to remain an active and productive member of the society. It has been found that the Quranic guidelines strongly emphasize the importance of taking care of elderly people, and express utmost respect to them. This is mainly due to the fact that parents usually have lifelong investment in their children, therefore it becomes obligatory for the children to take care of the needs of their elderly parents without causing them to realize that they become weak and less valued. This was revealed through the Quranic verses more than fourteen centuries ago. The social and biological discipline known as gerontology emerged in the early 20th century highlighting similar aspects related to aging through scientific research. Both approaches can be used in a complementary way to bring about positive change in the attitudes of people. Moreover, social policies can be designed to serve old people, keeping in view their strengths and limitations, so they can have productive and healthy lives.

The seventh chapter is a reflection of sociological thought, and its Islamic relevance as expressed in the prose works of Dr. Muḥammad Iqbal, a celebrated Muslim philosopher and the 'Poet of the East'. Dr. Iqbal has discussed many of these sociological dimensions in his prose works. These dimensions include education, poverty, stratification, gender equity, and social change. Social statistics and dynamics have also been discussed in the light of work done by sociologists such as Herbert Spencer. Malthus' explanation of population growth and its effects has been integrated to further elaborate the phenomenon. The analysis suggests that society has an independent existence; however, the will of individuals plays a pivotal role in shaping the existence, and determining the destiny, of any nation. Social phenomena, such as the role of education, control over population, and the participation of both the genders in the relevant fields, have also been discussed with reference to Islamic provisions. These carry a great degree of concern regarding the maintenance and healthy survival of the human population and civilization.

Having briefed thus, we wish our readers an enlightening journey that will take them to a destination of harmonious balance between Islamic beliefs and social practices.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

This chapter intends to examine social and religious (Islamic) connotations along with people's perceptions and practices in an eastern society like Pakistan. The main emphasis is laid on the association of prevalence of consanguinity with the instances of various degrees of visual impairment, including complete blindness, partially-impaired vision, and colour blindness. This chapter discuses two main contexts in which many of the major vital decisions are taken; these are social and religious (Islamic). As the great majority of Pakistan's population are followers of Islam, marriage preferences and decisions will be seen and discussed in the light of Islamic teachings. In the first half of this chapter, sociological factors are discussed, and the remaining section will shed light on Islamic teachings and their relevance to consanguineous marriages.

In any society, marriage and family are considered as fundamental institutions; these are structured through various social and cultural traditions. The informal laws of any social system are likely to have a strong influence on the perceptions and practices of the people in a given region. There are various social factors which determine the types of marriage preference in a certain community. Marital union between blood related individuals has been one popular form of consanguineous marriages which is commonly practiced in many parts of the world.[1] This form of marriage is between first cousins, second cousins, and other blood relatives.[2] A study reveals that this type of marriage is practiced by approximately ten percent of the the world's population.[3] Many among these are within Muslim societies. Consanguinity has not been found to be associated with the Islamic guidelines, however the guidelines do carry social and cultural significance.[4] Marital arrangements between biologically related people are mainly due to cultural preferences in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries.[5]

The prevalence of consanguineous marriage in the Arab world is among the highest; the percentage of marriages between cousins, in particular, reaches 25-30% of all marriages.[6] This percentage includes 68% in Egypt, 33% in Syria, 51.2% to 58.1% in Jordan, 54.4% in Kuwait, 57.7% in Saudi Arabia, 50.5% in the United Arab Emirates, 40-47% in Yemen, and 35.9% in Sultanate Oman.[7] The proportion of consanguinity in the state of Qatar is reported as 54.5%, whereas that of marriage between cousins is 34.8%.[8] Among the Indian Muslims, about a quarter of marriages were found between related spouses who were second cousins or closer in 1992-93.[9] According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 1990-91, more than half of married women (aged 15-49 years) in the selected national sample were married to their first cousins. The proportions of those married to their second cousins ranged between 50.3 and 61.2%. A sizable number were married to their blood relatives, and the remaining one-third were married to non-relatives.[10]

Endogamous marriages are popular in many Eastern cultures, and Pakistan is one such example. A study of the Pakistani rural community suggests that people prefer cousins and other close relatives for various social, economic, and political reasons.[11] Reliability and trust are among the causal factors which are often emphasized by the people. Many believe that consanguineous unions strengthen family ties.[12] Social pressure from the community members could be an additional factor which takes a toll on these marriages among blood relatives. Caste has also been a serious consideration for marital decisions in Pakistan.[13] Caste, or *biraderi,* is usually preferred, as it can somehow be traced through the same bloodline.

For this study, 110 respondents who were students of Government College University Lahore and were suffering from various forms of visual impairment (complete blindness, partial impairment, and colour blindness) were interviewed. There were 99 males and 11 females among the respondents who were interviewed. The students were accessed through the help of the Centre for Special Students (CSS).[*] The interview schedule was developed for the purpose of data collection. Questions were constructed to assess the relationship between consanguineous marriages and forms of visual impairment. A purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of cases; only those cases who gave prior consent, and had no objection regarding the sharing of results were interviewed. Government College University Lahore entertains students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, which could be considered a plus for generalizability (to an extent) of the findings.

The Sociological Context of Consanguinity

A study conducted in South India also revealed that there is a high instance of children born with eye diseases due to consanguinity.[14] Consanguinity is also prevalent in Arab cultures and Middle Eastern societies.[15] One of the plausible reasons for this is that marriages are mostly arranged in traditional societies, therefore there has been less emphasis on the mental compatibility and mutual understanding of the partners/spouses. At times, socio-economic considerations undermine the significance of aforementioned factors. This then leads to many negative implications; genetic deformations are among the most serious outcomes.

Visual impairments are found to be common among the offspring of couples who are related through blood line. In certain families, the practice is found over generations; therefore one may assume that persistent inbreeding is likely to bring about various genetic deformations among children. Deafness, dumbness, and blindness are commonly-found congenital anomalies, and in serious incidences, mental retardation is also reported in such families. In short, every year, more and more people are added to the disabled population of the country, and that is also due to mere negligence, and the lack of awareness of the people. Traditionally, stubborn attitudes need to be corrected through awareness programmes in the media, and other forms of campaign. Moreover, we belong to an underdeveloped country where the special needs of differently abled people are not catered for at all levels. On the curative side, government needs to take measures to facilitate them in every walk of life. Positive and negative attitudes towards consanguinity indicates long-standing cultural and religious beliefs.[16] It is also stated that increased urbanization and reduced family size might impose constraints on consanguineous unions, and the situation will not remain the same in future.

Visual Impairments and Consanguinity

The data suggest that the majority of parents of visually impaired respondents were first cousins or second cousins. One-quarter of them reported to have parents who were distant relatives. However, none of the respondents were found to be outsiders/other families. Two-thirds of the respondents were completely blind, the rest of them were either visually impaired/partially blind, or colour blind, as shown in Fig 1. It was also found that even paternal grandfathers and grandmothers were close relatives. The information is a strong indicator of the social fact that the majority of Pakistani marriages are arranged between families of relatives.

This common prevalence of consanguinity beings about various issues in the form of diseases. Genetic deformations are among the most serious. Such social arrangements call for immediate attention, and the reformation of public perception and understanding of the gravity of the matter. The majority of the parents of the respondents were normal, however, there were some cases where either the father or the mother was blind. It was found that a quarter of them had a strong tradition of marrying within the extended family. The majority of these were not aware that these endogamous marriages lead to various genetic deformations including visual impairment. Most of these respondents were born blind, and some experienced loss of vision over a period of time, due to disease or accident. Many of them had one or more siblings who were suffering from similar visual impairment. Some also stated that their parents had siblings with such deformation.

Fig. 1: Presentation of Types of Visual Impairment among the Respondents
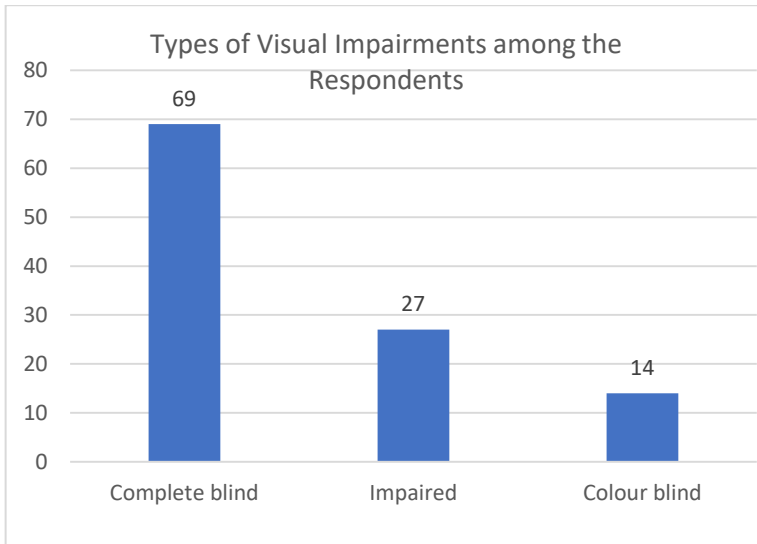
Fig. 2: Presentation of the Relationships of Respondents' Parents

Relationship of Respondents' Parents

First cousin	Second Cousin	Remote relative
41	41	28
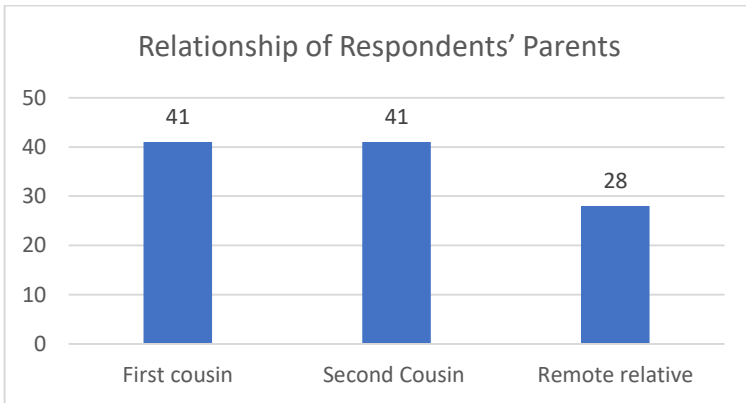
One-quarter of the respondents acknowledged that visual impairment is due to wrong marital decisions, though many have accepted it as the will of God, and not human fault, as presented in Fig 2.

Fig. 3: Presentation of Reasons Causing Visual Impairment

Reasons Causing Visual Impairment

Will of God	Wrong decision	Genetic disorder
40	31	39
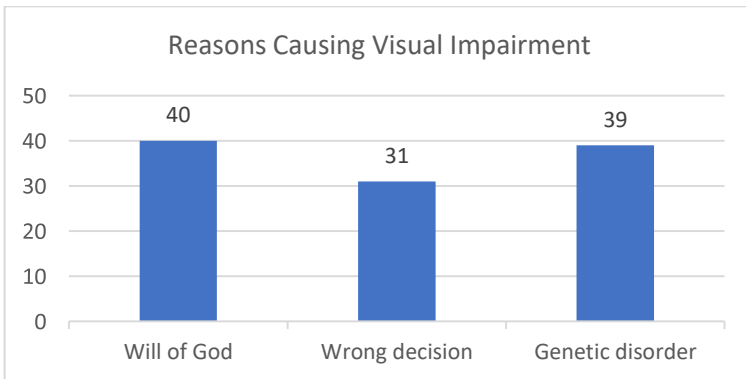
A great majority took the view that families prefer marriages between cousins for religious reasons (Figure 4). These respondents perceived that Islamic ideology endorses consanguineous marriage. This misconception is aggravating the problem, where people prefer to choose partners from among their close relatives, which would increase the disabled population every year. Many think that people should try for more children, even if

their first child is genetically deformed. These respondents were against any pre-conception screening tests for prevention purposes; for them, God decides all aspects of life. However, a few of them condemned this perception, and did not interpret it as predestined. Rather, these respondents stressed the role of human agency as an important one. The perception that God decides all aspects of life is also found to be contrary to their own perception regarding causes behind impairment, and so they wish to marry outside their network of blood relations. This could be a ray of hope which might reduce the instances of such deformations in the coming generation.

The above discussion of the findings reflects that consanguinity is a common pattern of marriage prevalent in society. It has strong traditional association and cultural significance, and it has been taking place for many years. Compliance with long standing traditions has led them to choose partners/spouses from their close relations. As religion is an integral part of any society, it determines various social aspects of an individual's life. People also have certain preconceived notions about Islamic ideology, which may or may not be true. In the following section, we will discuss consanguinity in the light of Islamic teachings.

Fig. 4: Respondents' Perception regarding Islamic Teachings and Consanguinity
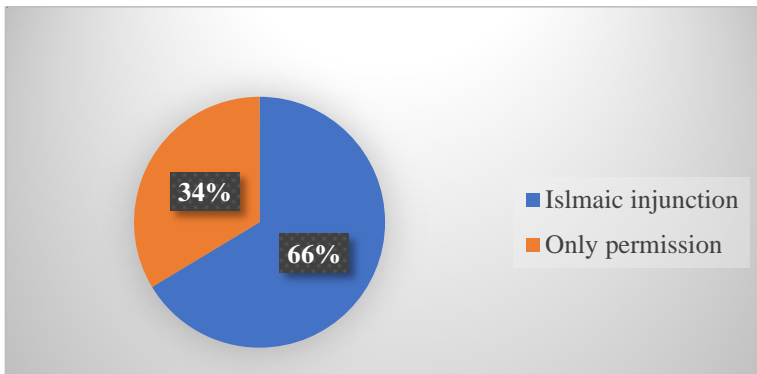
The Holy Qur'ān and Consanguineous Marriages

The Holy Qur'ān contains guidance regarding Nikāḥ (marriage) but does not impose any restriction of caste, clan or family. There are two types of women who have been declared as lawful for marriage to Muslim men.

The first category is believing women, and the Qur'ānic commandment in this regard is general. It has been said:

"فَانْكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ" [17]

"Marry women of your choice."

Permission has been granted to males and females for marriage, on only one condition; that both should belong to the same species. There is no restriction of belonging to any particular human race. White and black can marry each other. Similarly, Arab and non-Arab can also be wedlocked. It has been elucidated in the following verse:

"وَمِنْ اٰيٰتِهٖ اَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِّنْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَزْوَاجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوْا اِلَيْهَا" [18]

"And among His signs is that He created for you mates among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them".

The verse clearly indicates that God Almighty creates mates for human beings out of their own species, so that there can be love and tenderness between them. The purpose of creating male and female is procreation. This is also repeated elsewhere, as follows:

"وَاللّٰهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا" [19]

"And Allāh has made for you mates of your own nature (of same species)".

In these verses, there is no injunction regarding consanguineous marriages. The Divine Book (The Qur'ān) neither commands nor prohibits marriage between cousins. In other words, there is no restriction on a Muslim male regarding marriage to any female, even if she belongs to different caste, tribe or social stratum. Instead of the social status of a woman, the sound character of a partner is emphasized in the Holy Book:

"وَأَنكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ" [20]

"Marry those among you who are solitary and sound of your slaves and maid-servants".

The verse even permits marriage to male or female slaves who possess good characters. The word 'ṣāleḥ' in the verse quoted above is generally translated as 'pious' or 'virtuous'.[21] This is certainly one meaning of this word, but according to E.W. Lane's *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, it also means suitable, fit, in good condition, sound, and whole.[22] According to Muḥammad Asad, the term 'aṣ- ṣāleḥīn' connotes here both moral and physical fitness for marriage: i.e., the attainment of bodily and mental maturity as well as mutual affection between the man and the woman concerned.[23] So the verse can also be translated as follows: "Marry those who are single and sound (both physically and mentally) of your slaves and maid-servants".

The Holy Qur'ān has permitted Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women, though women from the people of the Book *(Ahl al-Kitāb)* can

only be married to Muslim men. The Holy Qur'ān articulates this, in this
regard:

<div dir="rtl">"وَ الْمُحْصَنٰتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنٰتِ وَ الْمُحْصَنٰتُ مِنَ الَّذِيْنَ أُوْتُوا الْكِتٰبَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ" [24]</div>

"…and lawful unto you in marriage are not only chaste women who
are believers, but chaste women of the people of the Book revealed before
your time".

Interpreting the above-mentioned verse, Muḥammad Asad observes:
"Whereas Muslim men are allowed to marry women from among the
followers of another revealed religion, Muslim women may not marry
non-Muslims: the reason being that Islam enjoins reverence of all the
prophets, while the followers of other religions reject some of them - e.g.,
the Prophet Muḥammad or, as in the case with the Jews, both Muḥammad
and Jesus (upon whom be greeting).Thus, while a non-Muslim woman
who marries a Muslim can be sure that - despite all doctrinal differences -
the prophets of her faith will be mentioned with utmost respect in her
Muslim environment, a Muslim woman who would marry a non-Muslim
would always be exposed to abuse of him whom she regards as God's
Apostle".[25]

The people of this scripture include Jews and Christians only. Women
belonging to any polytheistic religion are not permitted to join to Muslim
males in a matrimonial relationship.

The Qur'ānic teachings regarding marriage clearly instruct males to
marry women who believe in monotheism and possess sound character.
Such women may be from the people of the Book, but the Qur'ān has not
imposed any condition of caste, tribe or clan. Consequently, Muslims have
been granted full liberty in their choice of spouse. Contrary to the liberty
of choice in the selection of a spouse, consanguineous marriages have not
been enjoined in the Holy Qur'ān.

Ḥadīth Literature and Consanguineous Marriages

Islam envisages a society that is comprised of healthy and strong believers.
So, Muslims should have mutual marriages which result in such progeny.
Islam laid the foundations of a physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy
society about 15 centuries ago. The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace
and greeting) has promoted strong believers over feeble ones. Imām
Muslim has narrated the following Ḥadīth:

<div dir="rtl">"اَلْمُؤْمِنُ اَلْقَوِيُّ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِ الضَّعِيفِ" [26]</div>

"A strong believer is superior to a feeble believer".

The spirit of the message is that Muslim men should think seriously
before marrying women who will produce healthy progeny. If a marriage

results in offspring who are weak and disabled, it is disobedience of this Ḥadīth.

Imām Ibn Mājah has transmitted the following Prophetic tradition, on the authority of Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah (God be pleased with her):

" تَخَيَّرُوا لِنُطْفِكُمْ فَانْكِحُوا الْأَكْفَاءَ وَأَنْكِحُوْا إِلَيْهِمْ" [27]

"Choose the best for your sperm, and find compatible women and propose marriage to them".

Imām Abū Dāwūd has transmitted the following Ḥadīth, which permits the men to have sight of women whom they wish to marry. The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) is reported to have said:

"إِذَا خَطَبَ أَحَدُكُمُ الْمَرْأَةَ فَإِنِ اسْتَطَاعَ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَى مَا يَدْعُوهُ إِلَى نِكَاحِهَا فَلْيَفْعَلْ" [28]

"When one of you asks a woman in marriage, if he is able to look at what will induce him to marry her, he should do so".

This action is permitted by Sharīʿah, so that he can observe her physical beauty and other desirable characters to be transmitted to his heirs.

The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) has advised Muslim men to think seriously before marrying women who will produce their progeny. If a man is married to a woman and the union breeds offspring who are physically or mentally abnormal, the marriage would not be encouraged in Islam. It has been underlined in Ḥadīth literature that a man should be careful in choice of his partner. Imām Nasāʾī has narrated the following Ḥadīth:

"انْظُرْ إِلَيْهَا فَإِنَّ فِىْ اَعْيُنِ ٱلأَنْصَارِ شَيْئًا" [29]

"There is something in the eyes of Anṣār, therefore, if one of you wishes to marry one of their women, let him look at her".

The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) said this because their women were bleary-eyed and small-eyed.[30] This undesirable characteristic might be transmitted to their progeny as a consequence of marriage.

Imām Muslim has transmitted a Ḥadīth according to which a man came to the prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) and informed him that he had contracted to marry a woman of Anṣār. Thereupon, the messenger of Allāh said:

"أَنَظَرْتَ إِلَيْهَا، قَالَ لَا، قَالَ: فَاذْهَبْ فَانْظُرْ إِلَيْهَا فَإِنَّ فِي أَعْيُنِ الْأَنْصَارِ شَيْئًا" [31]

"Did you cast a glance at her?" He said: "No". The messenger of Allāh said: "Go and cast a glance at her", for there is something in the eyes of the Anṣār.

Imām Ibn Mājah has quoted the following Ḥadīth:

"تَخَيَّرُوا لِنُطَفِكُمْ فإِنَّ الْعِرْقَ دَسَاسٌ" [32]

"Exercise care in choosing (wives) for your sperm, for hereditary quality is wont to return".

Geneticists have recently recommended that consanguineous marriages should be avoided to ensure strong and healthy offspring. Marriages between cousins have been prevalent among the Arabs, which is why Ḥadīth literature also provides us with guidance. The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) is reported to have said:

"اِغْتَرِبُوْا لَا تَضْوُوْا" [33]

"Marry out of your tribe so that you may not breed feeble children".

So, according to this tradition, inbreeding should be discouraged, as there is a danger of begetting puny children due to marriage with kith and kin.

Imām Ghazālī (d.1058) has emphasized in his famous book *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* that a wife should not be selected from relatives; otherwise, offspring will be weak. According to him, "A bride should not be a near relative […]. The Prophet said 'Do not marry a near relative, as in that case a child is born weak'". [34]

Caliph 'Umar (God be pleased with him) told the clan of al-Sā'ib, who concentrated marriages within their clan:

"ياَبَنِى السَّائِبِ، قَد اَضْوَيْتُمْ، فَأَنْكِحْوْا في النَّزَائِع" [35]

"O son of al-Sā'ib! You have had puny children; you should marry outside the clan".

Another version of this tradition is as follows:

"قال لآل السائب: قد أضويتم فانكحوا في النزائع أي في الغرائب من عشيرتكم" [36]

Besides blindness in offspring, there are several other diseases that may occur due to repeated consanguinity and inbreeding, such as anemia, cystic fibrosis, thalassemia, and phenylketonuria (PKU).

All these diseases result from the marriage between two carriers of abnormal genes. The genes are called recessive, because if one spouse carries them and the other is normal, no disease results in the offspring, though some may become carriers of the harmful genes. Persistent inbreeding, or repetitive consanguinity through grandparents, to parents, to the couple concerned, and in families known to have these diseases or to carry the harmful genes, the probability increases of a marriage between two carriers leading to affected children. [37]

Consanguineous Marriage in the Light of Sīrah

The Prophet Muḥammad (upon whom be peace and greeting) contracted plural marriages, like the other people of his country. His marriages with 11 modest ladies, who are called 'mothers of the believers' (*Ummahāt al-*

Mu'minīn) were unanimously accepted. His wives included women from the Quraysh tribe, as well as from outside his tribe. He did not marry any woman from his clan, Banū Hāshim. Among his wives, two were from Jewish families and one was a foreign lady - an Egyptian called Sayyidah Māriya the Coptic, whose family were Christians. He married one of his cousins, Zainab bint Jaḥsh, who was the daughter of his paternal aunt, Umaimah bint 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. This marriage did not result in any progeny. The percentage of the Holy Prophet's marriages which were between cousins was only 9, if the total number is accepted as 11, and only two of his wives bore children.

The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) married his daughter Fāṭimah to his cousin 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (God be pleased with both of them). The couple had three sons - Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Moḥsin, and two daughters - Zainab and Umm Kulthūm (Allāh be pleased with all of them). Besides Fāṭimah, ʿAlī contracted numerous other marriages within and outside the Quraysh tribe.

Views of Modern Muslim Scholars

A prominent Saudi scholar, Sheikh M.S. Al-Munajjid cites in Fatwa regarding marriage between cousins in Islam:

> "The Islamic view is that while marriage between cousins is permissible, it is preferable to choose a marriage partner from outside one's family. We have to distinguish between what is permitted, and what is advocated. Some clans restrict marriages to amongst their kin only – a practice far from what is advocated. It is worth stressing here that when marriage between cousins is repeated over several generations, it is bound to have more negative effects on children. This does not imply that by permitting such marriages, Islam encourages any such practice. It advocates the cementing of social relations throughmarriage between totally unrelated families."[38]

Prof. Abdel Rahim Omran has opined on the issue of consanguineous marriages, as follows:

> "I should emphasize that marriage between cousins is not prohibited in Islam. After all, the Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed his daughter Fāṭimah to marry his cousin 'Alī; but this was in a healthy family. However, if genetic diseases occur in the family, or if puny children are found, then the family is well advised to disallow intermarriages within the family. The medical advice can come under the general rule of 'no harm and no harassment". [39]

Conclusion

The findings suggest a strong association between consanguinity and visual impairments among the children. This shows that a sizeable majority of the visually impaired respondents' parents are either first cousins or close relatives. Some also have grandparents who were married within their extended families. This causes deleterious effects on the offspring. These marriage preferences have a strong social and cultural backing that influences the major life aspects of individuals. Our analysis of Islamic teachings suggests that there is no such binding in the religion which promotes consanguinity, rather people are encouraged to marry outside their kin so they may have healthier offspring. The prevalent religious myth might be dispelled through the findings of present research covering both social and religious contexts.

Pre-conception genetic testing and counselling sessions may play a vital role in reducing the incidences of deformity among the offspring. Raising awareness regarding such matters might also be helpful in inculcating factual knowledge about these impairments, and how they can be prevented. Educating the masses at community level can be an important tool to break stubborn traditional attitudes and long-existing misconceptions. The deleterious implications of consanguinity, such as congenital abnomalies, can be reduced if not eradicated. It should be emphasized here that the cost of such marital unions is way too high, not just for the children who are born with these deficiencies, but for the entire family. Being the caretakers of these children, parents suffer the most. They can also play a significant role in raising awareness at community level. At a macro level, government should make policies that are facilitative for differently-abled populations, however the main emphasis should be on prevention. Raising awareness regarding negative implications of consanguineous marriages, and then pre-conception screening of spouses would be valuable steps towards changing the perceptions of the people.

CHAPTER TWO

DAUGHTERS AS A BLESSING OR A CURSE

Introduction

This chapter aims to understand the differences between sons and daughters which exist at a sociocultural level, and the relevant Islamic teachings. It is often observed that most social practices are not usually indicative of religious teachings. Every society comprises of various social institutions, and religion is a fundamental one of these; it provides guidelines for the functioning of the rest, such as family, economics, law, politics, and others. Gender, another socially constructed concept, cannot be disassociated from the larger social structure; therefore, both aspects will be explored for better comprehension. Relevant available literature is consulted for this purpose. It is divided into two sections: the first part sheds light on the social construction of the birth of a daughter, either as a blessing or a curse. Moreover, the way she is treated over the course of her life, and the sociological factors, will be discussed in this regard. The remaining half of the chapter describes how Islam envisages the birth of daughters, along with its significance.

Social Construction and Daughters

Pakistan is predominantly a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal society. The patriarchal system refers to male domination over women. In a patrilineal society, the property is passed down from father to son, or a male heir, whereas patrilocality refers to a household arrangement where a couple (and other family members) resides at the male's house. Studies have shown that patriarchal structure is commonly found in many parts of South Asia; sons inherit property from fathers, and families mostly live in the man's house.[1] Parents in these countries tend to invest more in a male child, compared to a female. The main reason for this differential behavior associated with the two genders primarily relates to future rewards expected from sons. In many parts of these countries, females are not even sent to school and discouraged from attaining any formal education; the

reason being that young girls are expected to leave their parents' house after marriage, and to continue to play their traditional roles, primarily consisting of household activities.[2] Male members of the household are usually considered breadwinners, therefore, they usually remain involved in outdoor (or indoor) work for earnings.[3]

One can take the example of an Asian country, China, where parents prefer to live in their sons' houses in their old age.[4] For this sole reason, parents tend to have more social, emotional, and economic, investment in their sons, and also take pride in the birth of a male child. As there are no such future rewards being expected from daughters, any type of investment appears to be in vain.[5] These (sons) later get control over various resources, have greater physical mobility, and tend to take decisions independently.[9] Girls are considered a burden, whereas boys are assets.[6] Men are provided with better economic, political, and social resources, as these are considered fruitful and rewarding in the later part of their lives.[7] There has been less investment in girls' education for the aforementioned reasons. Furthermore, academic curricula in schools also contribute to stereotypical gender perceptions.[8] It implies that the school curriculum, and the way it is taught, reinforces prevalent gender notions and underlying inequalities.[10] Not only do fathers take pride in the fact that they have a male heir, mothers perceive a son to be a prized resource as in their old age, women can suppress conjugal ties of young couples to keep the mother - son bond strong.[11]

In Asian countries, the head of the household is mostly a man, who is responsible for taking care of financial matters along with taking the major decisions.[12] In Pakistan, in-egalitarian gender relations can be witnessed, due to structural inequality and differential investment.[13] The birth of a son brings happiness to the family, they distribute sweets among relatives and friends, and slaughter an animal to provide a feast for them.[14] The exchange of gifts is also customary practice on the birth of a child, but that too is mainly determined by the sex of the child.[15] The number of sons is another determinant of the social status of the family in Pakistani society.[16] Sons provide social and economic support to their parents, particularly in their old age.[17] Daughters are considered as liabilities from the day they are born in the social-cultural set-up in many parts of Pakistan. An Asian study has revealed similar results; it found that parents rarely rely on their daughters, however, daughters remain in touch with their elderly parents.[18]

There are various factors which cause a negative attitude towards daughters, and almost all of them are socially constructed and traditionally practiced. The dowry is one such consideration which burdens parents and

makes them less happy at the birth of a female child. A popular tradition which is commonly practiced in the subcontinent, the dowry comprises material goods which are given to daughters on their marriage. These might include household items such as furniture, electronics, and utensils etc., and also expensive possessions, like gold jewelry. It is also one factor which causes a father or brother to deny the property rights of the daughter, claiming or justifying that they have already invested enough in her marriage. One can understand that all these arguments somehow get associated with financial issues. In these cultures, men always wish to keep hold on the property and income, as this gives them a sense of power and domination.

Having discussed the social practices and plausible reasons behind this, it is also important to consider the religious side. There has been a distorted image of Islam which is reflected in many social practices. If we talk about education, Islam stresses the importance of education for both men and women without any discrimination.[19] In a sociological context, feudalism and patriarchy are the two major obstacles to female education.[20] Furthermore, a common practice among the feudals of Sindh is that young females are married to the Qur'ān, so their property can be detained and held by the male members of the family. Males have also affiliated the concept of honour with the females of the family; men over protect their women, restrict their movement, and also their life opportunities; this can be observed in many Muslim societies.[21] Religion plays an important role in any society, as it shapes the minds of people; there are various provisions in Islam which emphasize women's rights.[22] These religious guidelines are not practiced with true spirit, which leads to many social misconceptions about gender. Education is an obligation for both men and women, as per Islamic ideology.[23] With time and growing awareness, many scholars are also emphasizing education as one of the fundamental rights of women.[24] However, this may not include a large body of the Pakistani population. The following section discusses this phenomenon, mentioning various religious provisions to have a better and more comprehensive understanding.

Islamic Guidelines about Daughters

In this section, the issue has been discussed in the light of the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions. The exegetical literature has been referred to, and opinions of some scholars of the Holy Book and Sunnah have also been quoted.

The Holy Qur'ān and Birth of Daughters

The Holy Qur'ān tells that Allāh Almighty creates a human being as male or female as He intends. Belonging to either sex is a Divine plan, not a sign of inferiority or superiority in any way. The following verses elucidate that the process of procreation of human beings, embryonic development and sex differentiation is divinely willed. The Holy Book describes that the process of reproduction is in accordance with the plan and knowledge of the Almighty Allāh:

"وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ۚ وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا"
"بِعِلْمِهِ ۚ وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِن مُّعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنقَصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ"²⁵

"And [remember]: God creates [every one of] you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm; and then He fashions you into either of the two sexes. And no female conceives or gives birth unless it be with His knowledge; and none that is long-lived has his days lengthened - and neither is aught lessened of his days - unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree: for, behold, all this is easy for God".

Elucidating the meaning of the verse, 'Abdullāh Yusūf 'Alī states: "Things that appear most secret and mysterious to man are all known and ordained by God. They are all subject to God's laws and decrees. The mystery of human birth, the mystery of sex, the mystery of life and death and many other things, seem to man inexplicable. But they are all ordained by God, and their reasons all fully known to Him."²⁶

At another place it has been underlined as follows:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِندَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ"²⁷

"Verily, with God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs".

'Abdullāh Yusūf 'Alī states that the wombs are the sites in which mysteries of animal life, embryology, sex and other things remain hidden. It hides in itself the realities of a potential human being, the duration of pregnancy, the sex of the fetus, and his other characteristics.²⁸

About pregnancy, it is further underlined:

"إِلَيْهِ يُرَدُّ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ ۚ وَمَا تَخْرُجُ مِن ثَمَرَاتٍ مِّنْ أَكْمَامِهَا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا
بِعِلْمِهِ"²⁹

"In Him alone is vested the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come. And no fruit bursts forth from its calyx, and no female ever conceives, nor ever gives birth, save with His knowledge".

The process of embryonic development takes place according to the will of the Creator. In spite of all advancement, embryologists cannot assure pregnancy, and further, the features and sex of the baby are not in