

“Quality” Versus “Quantity” of Children: Towards Achieving the Objectives of Marriage in Islamic Family Law

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ABSTRACT: *There is no gainsaying the fact that Muslims are permitted to get married for the purpose of procreation and sexual satisfaction. Similarly, it is also a duty incumbent upon Muslims to maintain their family and ensure moral upbringing of their children. Thus, Islamic law has enjoined Muslims to marry and give birth to children who become ambassadors of the religion and community here on earth, as well as the pride of the parents in the life hereafter. However, it is not the sole aim of the religion to only advocate on having a large number of children, but also to have a qualitative Ummah (community). It is in view of this, the paper juxtaposed the two concepts, namely: “Quality” and “Quantity” under Islamic family law, with a view to striking a balance between the two in order to achieve the real objectives of marriage as contained in Islamic family law.*

KEYWORDS: *Children, Quality, Quantity, Objectives of Marriage, Islamic Family Law*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Almighty Allah has made a union between male and female as a means of attaining peaceful of mind and tranquility. By way of his wisdom, Allah the Almighty has created different races and ethnics through the unionism of male creature and a female, in order to sustain the existence of human generation on the earth. To this effect, Islam has called upon and encouraged the believers to marry from the women of their choice who are fertile, so that the objectives of marriage (lawful sexual satisfaction and procreation) can be effectively achieved. However, it is not the intent of or wisdom behind the objectives of marriage under Islamic family law to just give birth to a huge number of children, but to also have qualitative children who can be good vicegerent and ambassadors of the Almighty Allah here on earth as well as pride of the parents on the Day hereafter. In recent times, it has been observed that some people are facing difficulties to distinguish between reproduction or procreation as an objective of marriage in Islam on one hand, and the need or requirement to have pious and morally up right children on the other hand. It is against this backdrop, the paper analyzes and clarifies some issues bedeviling the objectives of marriage with a view to striking a balance between having a “quality” and “quantity” children. In doing so, the paper discusses some selected objectives of marriage under Islamic family law. Examination has been equally made on the significance of children under Islamic family law and the need to equip them with moral upbringing. Finally, the paper ends with conclusion.

II. DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS:

A. Quality and Quantity

The definition of the term “Quality” is a subjective matter. It has always been defined in line with individual affiliation or discipline. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term Quality is defined as the degree of excellence of something or the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind. However, that is not the case in terms of Business studies, where “Quality” can be referred to as meeting the needs and expectations of customers. Similarly, from the Islamic law perspective, the term “Quality” has been also used in contracts as a fundamental element of achieving *itqan* (a quality-related term used by Prophet Muhammad [s.a.w.] to denote continually improving performance by the parties in any task, activity or function). On the other hand, the term quantity can be defined as the amount or number of a material or abstract thing not usually estimated by spatial measurement. It can also be defined as a physical property that can be quantified. In Islamic law, the term quantity has been described in different issues and circumstances, for instance, in a hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.), the volume of water used by the Prophet (s.a.w.) in ablution (*wudu*) and ritual bath (*ghusl*) has been quantified as equivalent to *mudd* (water that could fill a medium cupped hands or medium-sized soup bowl) and *sa'* (four times quantity of *mudd*) respectively. This explains the quantity (i.e the volume of water) needed to perform ablution and ritual bath in Islam. Hence, this further implies that the term quantity could be understood as the amount of material that can be measured.

Marriage: In Arabic language, the term marriage has been referred to as “*nikah*” (to insert something or put something in). Thus, the word is used to connote the piercing or absorbing of a thing into another thing. For instance, it has been said, *Nakahat al- hasat akhfaf al- ibil*, (pebbles has entered the camel hoof). Technically, according to Shari‘ah, the term *nikah* refers to cohabitation (*mubasharat*) between male and a female after a valid Islamic marriage contract. Hence, it is a contract based on mutual consent of spouses, with a view to becoming husband and wife. Among the merits of the cohabitation and unionism between husband and wife is to support each other within the bounty of Shari‘ah. In fact, among the fundamental objectives of marriage in Islamic family law are satisfaction of sexual desire and procreation.

Children: There is no unanimity and uniformity as to the age of majority or maturity amongst people. However, the term Children has been defined by various scholars to mean persons who have not attain the age of puberty (majority). According to Islamic law, a child (children- in a plural form) is a person who has not attain the age of puberty (majority). But in case the signs of puberty have not been manifested, the age of majority or maturity in Islamic law could be determined by age. Thus, in Maliki School of Islamic thought, the age of majority is 15 years for both male and female. Similarly, the same opinion upheld by Shafi’i and Hanbali schools. However, Hanafi School upheld the view that the male maturity could be attained when he attends the age of 18 years old, while that of the female is 17 years old. According to the International law, specifically the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child can be defined as every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

III. OBJECTIVES OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW

Marriage is a social phenomenon that has so much significant impact on human lives. It gives spouses comfort, joy and peaceful of mind. In addition to protection of human morals, marriage also serves as an institution that preserves and sustains the human lineage on the earth. To this end, scholars have unanimously agreed that marriage play so many roles to humanity, which among other things include:

(1) Satisfaction of sexual desires: It is a fact and a natural phenomenon, that when a male and female person gets married, both of them will experience a kind of sexual satisfaction. Consequently, they would be able to protect themselves from committing any illicit affairs outside wedlock. To this end, the Prophet (s.a.w.) was reported to have said:

“O Young people Whoever of you can afford marriage, let him get married, for marriage helps restrain the looks and preserve their chastity, He who cannot afford it, let him observe fasting, for fasting is a deterrent.”

In view of the above hadith, one can realize that marriage plays a very important role in preventing spouses from having any extra-marital affairs, as they are obviously bound to be confined within the purview of their wedlock. To this end, we will therefore link our discussion to the next point.

(2) Protection of human morals: Marriage is an institution that protects people from committing immoral acts, thereby making the spouses to be confined and restricted to themselves. To this end, the Almighty Allah after describing certain prohibited degrees of women says: “...Except for those, all others are lawful, provided ye seek (them in marriage) with gift from your property, desiring chastity not fornication...” This provision implies that acquiring a natural and mutual benefit by spouses will guard human morals, hence it can be protected through the institution of marriage. As extra marital affairs between male and female causes a mischief not only to their persons, but it also causes a stigma and humiliation to the family at large.

(3) Procreation: Another important objective of marriage is the establishment of a responsible and morally upright family or society. It is obvious that a lineage, family and society can be established only if there is perpetual procreation, and such can only be sustained if there is a practice of lawful marriage amongst people in the society. The Almighty Allah Has made the institution of marriage as a natural and conventional phenomenon, which sustains the continued existence of human generation. To this end, the Almighty Allah says while praising the Prophets preceding the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w): “And surely We sent Messengers before thee and appointed for them wives and children.” In yet another verse while praising the habits of good believers, he said: “And those who say, Our Lord, grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes . . .” in a hadith, the Prophet (s.a.w) was reported to have said: “Marriage is my recommended custom (sunnah). Whoso-ever turns away from my recommended custom are turning away from me”. In yet another hadith he was quoted to have said: “Get married so you multiply. I shall indeed be proud of your multitude on the Day of Resurrection”. Furthermore, in another hadith, he says: “O you young people, men and women! Whosoever can

bear the burden of marriage, let him or her get married. It [marriage] is indeed contentment to the eye and a protection to the modest parts”.

The procreation objective of marriage has further aimed at fulfilling the will of God; seeking the love of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.); and making parents to benefit from the prayer of their children. In fact, procreation through marriage is also a means of seeking the pleasure of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), who is believed to be alive in his grave and to whom the deeds of the members of his nation are regularly presented. The Prophet (s.a.w) has called upon his nation to marry and generate so that their number increases, and it would be of proud to him on the Day of Judgement. Hence the practice of marriage is an answer to his call. However, such is not the sole aim of the Prophet’s call to encourage Muslims to have children as many as possible without making recourse to their moral upbringing and their future. Children should be accorded with due care so that in the end, they will be Good Samaritan. Thus, the prayer of a child is believed to be beneficial to his late parents, right from their first abode (*barzakh*) up to the Day of Resurrection (*yauwm al -Qiyamah*). To this end, on the Authority of Abu Hurairah (r.a) who reported that the Prophet (s.a.w) was saying:

“When a man dies, his acts come to an end but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him (a deceased).”

The above hadith has, apart from exploring the significance of having children, also emphasises more on the merits of having a pious and morally up right children who can reciprocate the parental duty of their parents, thereby making prayers to them even after their demise. Of course, there are two implications involved herein: firstly, it is a recommendable sunnah to get married and have multiple of children in Islam. Secondly, if one is blessed with children, it is a duty incumbent upon him to train the children in line with the teachings of Islam. This parental obligation is a generic one. It does not distinguish between a parent who has a large number of children and one who did not have, nor does it excuse parents who are poor. Hence, whether it is only a child or hundred children he has, the obligation is all the same. However, one thing is certain and it is indeed a fact that the level of parental responsibility is always proportionate to the number of children parents may have. That is to say, the more number of children, the higher the responsibility and the more expenditure incurred. Thus, it has been always a challenge to the low-income parents, who may find it difficult to give their children adequate moral training and support due to lack of sufficient fund to cater their needs. Of course, the result should always be in the negative, i.e the moral decadence of the children.

Worthy also to note, the significance of having children is not limited to only when children have survived the parents, but even when the children have died in their early stage. Thus, parents can still benefit from what they have harvested. In a hadith, it was reported that if a child died before attaining the age of majority can still be beneficial to his/her parents. To this end, the Prophet (s.a.w), was reported to have confirmed that a child who dies before attaining puberty leads his parents to *al-Jannah* (Paradise). The Prophet (s.a.w.) says, “A child will be brought [on the Day of Judgment] and told, "Get into Paradise." But he will stand reluctantly and angrily at its gate and say, “I am not going to enter Paradise without my parents.” It will then be said, “let his parents enter Paradise with him.” However, according to Islamic jurists, this opportunity can only be possible and actualized to the parents when they have died in the *Millah* (The righteous Religion) as believers of Allah. Similarly, in a hadith narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ud (r.a), “The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) was reported to have said, ‘Who do you reckon to be the childless among you?’ They said, ‘They are those who do not have any children. ‘No,’ he said, ‘The childless are those who have not sent any of their children ahead’ (i.e. none of their children have died).”

In another narration, it was reported that:

“An unmarried man of good conduct who lived in the early past shouted when he was rising from sleep one morning. Help me to get married! Help me to get married. May be God will give me a child who will be useful to me on the Day of Judgment. He was asked, What has happened? He said, I dreamt that the Day of Judgment had come, and all mankind was raised and brought together in one place with the burning sun close over their heads. Everyone became very thirsty and I was dying of thirst. Suddenly, children appeared among us, lively and handsome, covered with protective light and carrying silver ewers and golden goblets. They offered drinks to some but left out most. When I stretched my hand to one of them and said, 'Give me to drink, I am exhausted because of thirst,' he said, 'You have no child among us.' I asked, Who are you? He said, 'We are Muslim children; our parents lost us when we were young!’”

All the aforementioned traditions implies the significance of giving birth to children and the role they play (as saviours) to their parents on the Day of Judgment. Even without anything other than that, it is a sufficient ground for a Muslim to have children. However, the question that will come to the mind is, what happens if you have them (children) many and you are unable to give them the required training (*at-tarbiyyah*)? In view of this therefore, some scholars (such as Dr Yusuf Al-Qardawi) have opined that Muslims need to be wise and civilized at all times but in line with the teachings and objectives of shari‘ah. Similarly, Shariati is of the view that Islam is dynamic and it needs to go always with time. And people are the key and major players in ensuring the dynamism of the religion, as they are considered as *khulafa’* vicegerents of Allah (s.w.t) on the earth. Muslims should therefore plan how to control and manage their family from day one up to the end of their lives. There are various means and methods to be followed in family planning without violating the principles of Shari‘ah. By so doing, the wisdom behind procreation could be effectively attained. More so, the essence of marriage in a whole is to have peace of mind and tranquillity. And this can be effectively achieved if the spouses know how to control and manage their marital lives. Most of the Quranic verses suggest that tranquillity is an important purpose of family life and is achieved through marriage. Similarly, while procreation is expected in marriage to maintain the human race, qualitative children is also required in order to have a vibrant community. Thus, from the Islamic point of view, it has been confirmed that when procreation takes place, it should support and endorse tranquillity rather than disrupt it. Hence, contraception is one of the acceptable methods in shari‘ah that assists families to achieve tranquillity thereby having children when they want them and when they are prepared to have them.

Technically, the concept of family planning is entirely different from the pre- Islamic practice of infanticide. The former can be understood as taking of practical steps by a husband and his wife whatever they think can result in the betterment of their family. Such inter alia include so many aspects such as the health care of the family, education and discipline in the family, as well as other basic necessities to be incurred by the family, from day one of marriage up to its end. The latter (infanticide) is a pre- Islamic Arab practice of killing innocent female children due to fear of poverty and humiliation attributed to female children at that time. With the advent of Islam, the practice was declared forbidden, and in the alternative, the concept of family planning has been introduced. The term family planning is a broad concept in Islam, as it connotes different constituents which inter alia include: the responsibility of parents to ensure that their families have been accorded with the basic needs of life; and ensuring the physical and mental fitness of the reproductive health status of the mother in consideration with the minimum period of gestation and weaning (at least 30 months).

In addition, distinction between infanticide on one hand and practice of contraception on the other hand could be outlined as follows: the latter does not amount to infanticide in Shari‘ah and therefore not illegal. The Qur’an provides: “The mothers shall give suck to their children for two years (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling...” in yet another verse:

“And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship. And she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty months till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he says, “My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for your favour which you have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I do righteous good deeds, such as please You, and make my offspring good. Truly I have turned to You, in repentance, and truly I am one of the Muslims (submitting to Your will.)”

Similarly in several *ahadith*, the Prophet (s.a.w) was reported to have allowed some of his companions to practice *azl* (*coitus interruptus*). To this end, according to Jabir, "We used to practise *azl* in the Prophet's (s.a.w) lifetime while the Qur'an was being revealed." In another *riwayah* (version of the same *hadith*), "We used to practise *coitus interruptus* during the Prophet's (s.a.w) lifetime when the Qur'an was being revealed." That is to say, news of this reached him and he did not forbid us." In yet, another tradition while responding to Jews' criticism about the Islamic concept of *coitus interruptus*, according to Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, “A man said: Apostle of Allah, I have a slave-girl and I withdraw the private part from her (while having intercourse), and I dislike that she becomes pregnant. I intend (by intercourse) what the men intend by it. The Jews say that withdrawing of the private parts (*azl*) is burying the living girls on a small scale. He (the Prophet) said: The Jews told a lie. If Allah intends to create it, you cannot turn it away.” However, despite the legality of *azl* in shari‘ah, it has been also confirmed that the practice of *azl* should be done with the agreement between husband and wife. That is to say, the consent of the wife (provided she is not a slave) must be sought. To this end, it has been narrated by Imam Malik in a *hadith* that:

“Yahya related to me from Malik from Humayd ibn Qays al-Makki that a man called Dhafif said that Ibn Abbas was asked about coitus interruptus. He called a slave-girl of his and said, "Tell them." She was embarrassed. He said, "It is alright, and I do it myself." Malik said, "A man does not practice coitus interruptus with a free woman unless she gives her permission. There is no harm in practicing coitus interruptus with a slave-girl without her permission. Someone who has someone else's slave-girl as a wife, does not practice coitus interruptus with her unless her people give him permission."

According to Imam Al Ghazali (a Shafi'ite jurist), *azl* is lawful under Shari'ah, and of course, there should be no basis for prohibiting *azl* since its permission emanated from the explicit provisions in the *ahadith* of the Prophet (s.a.w). Although, in some methods of contraception other than *azl*, there is no explicit provision or any principle on which to base their legality, but still, it does not affect the legality of the concept. In clarifying the concept of *azl*, Imam Al Ghazali has made a distinction between infanticide and contraception. He made the following observations as follows: a child could not be formed merely by the emission of the spermatic fluid, but by the settling of semen in the woman's womb; for children were not created by the man's semen alone but of both parents together. So contraception could not be compared with infanticide which is the killing of an existing being while contraception was different. He therefore, summarized his discussion based on the differences of opinions of Islamic jurists to the effect that *azl* is unconditionally permitted in Islam; that the wife's permission and consent is paramount and a condition precedent to *azl* (this is according to the views of majority jurists in the Hanbali and Maliki Schools of Islamic thoughts); that the concept of *azl* is prohibited (this is a view of Ibn Hazm and his followers of the Zahiri school). According to his own humble opinion, Imam Al-Ghazzali accepts prevention or contraception if the motive for the act is any of the following: a desire to preserve a woman's beauty or her health, or save her life; desire to avoid financial hardship and embarrassment; avoidance of other domestic problems caused by a large family. However, he did not accept avoidance of female birth as a legitimate motive for contraception. Similarly, according to Ibn Taymiyah, *azl* is lawful in shari'ah, for withdrawal does not prevent pregnancy, if God wills a pregnancy to occur, nothing can prevent it, because there can be involuntary pre-emission of semen.

IV. CHILDREN AS PRODUCT OF MARRIAGE AND ASSEST OF THE UMMAH (COMMUNITY)

A child is one of the beneficial products of marriage. He plays an important role in the family and the society at large. To this effect, children should be handled with due care and utmost respect, as they are the future leaders of their community tomorrow. It is not an absolute objective of marriage to sluggishly give birth to children, but to have qualitative and productive children. In view of this, It is therefore important for Muslim parents to always be cautious and go about their parental affairs in a more reliable and practicable manner. This may require so much sacrifice in terms of time, fitness and capital. The task of children upbringing starts from their birth until they attains the age of majority. It connotes the provision and means of livelihood; co-ordination of their activities through out the childhood period; and subjecting them with good culture and morals. To this end, there are many authorities from the Qur'an and sunnah that enjoins parents to be dutiful to their children, as they are trial and trust (*amanah*) given to them by the Almighty Allah. Thus, Allah says: "And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial, and that surely with Allah is a Mighty reward." In yet another verse: "Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah! with Him is a great reward (Paradise)." Allah says: "O you who believe! Let not your properties or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whosoever does that, then they are the losers." In yet another verse:

"And Allah has made for you mates (and companions) of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best: will they then believe in vain things, and be ungrateful for Allah's favours?"

This implies that any parent who is able to handle the trust given to him, with due care and in accordance with the teachings of Islam, certainly will pass the trial. Hence, his abode will going to be *al-jannah* (Paradise).

Similarly, in a hadith, the Prophet (s.a.w) says:

"Whoever performs his prayers correctly, and spends on his children in spite of his modest means, and does not speak ill against others, will be in Paradise as close to me as these [two fingers of mine]. He also says: Whosoever is given three daughters and spends on them and treats them well . . . surely God will reward him in Paradise."

In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah (r.a), the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) said, “Trials will continue to befall the believing man and woman, with regard to themselves, their children and their wealth, until they meet Allah with no sin on them.”The above authorities have therefore confirmed the significance of children to parents, family as well as the society at large, especially when the children are morally upright. In a similar manner, the authorities have equally charged and cautioned the parents to live up to expectations in controlling the affairs of their children.

V. CONCLUSION

The institution of marriage under Islamic family law has a significant role to play in sustaining the continued existence of human lineage on the earth. Marriage is a lawful way of reproducing children, who can stand as ambassadors of their communities tomorrow. Children are indeed pride to their parents and community here on earth and in the life hereafter. In view of this, Islam recommends that Muslims who are opportune to get married and capable of maintaining family should do so, for it will give them the opportunity to generate and multiply in accordance with the commandment of the Prophet (s.a.w.). However, it is not an absolute objective of marriage in Islam to just give birth to children as many as possible. In fact, the Islamic wisdom behind procreation is not just to have a large quantity of children who may not be useful to the community, but to have qualitative and vibrant children whom the *Ummah* (community) will be proud of. To this end, the paper concludes that instead of relying on the vague idea of “multiplicity of children”, recourse should be made on how to go about having a qualitative product that could assist in achieving the real Islamic objective of marriage.

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