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Recreational Activities in Islam & Muslim Women

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ABSTRACT

Islam is complete, comprehensive, and harmonious religion, addressing all aspects of human lives and its needs, including the need for diversions and recreation. It provides us lawful means to fulfill this need. In the heavenly teaching of Islam, all natural and innate human needs have been regarded. It has given paths of perfection, happiness of worldly and otherworldly success. Recreation is something completely natural. Without it, a person cannot be productive in life. It is related to psychologically positive, constructive and purposeful happiness. It releases the routine and boredom life. For a short time, it removes the burden of responsibility and compensates the exhaustions caused by work. This research study will explore and elaborate the Islamic concept of recreational activities generally and for woman specifically in the light of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. This study aims to determine the position of Islamic Recreation lifestyle. The results of the research study reflect that Islam has set necessary criteria for quality recreations that if these conditions or criteria are met those recreations are good and favorable. Though recreation and entertainment are essentially lawful in Islam, it is necessary for us to keep the following in mind: Time is precious, our work and our efforts will be counted, Benefits for both worlds, never cause us to neglect our obligatory, and Entertainments' must be completely free from anything that is unlawful in Islam. Qualitative methodology has been adopted for this study.

Keywords: *Recreation, purposeful happiness, entertainments, Joyful, Islamic lifestyle*

1. Introduction

The Recreation, Meaning and Definition

According to an English dictionary, recreation means pastime and relaxation. “Tafreeh” is an Arabic word. It means happiness, smile and recreation. In Urdu, it means walk, amusement and happiness, spend spare time for relaxation. All the sociologists, psychologists and physiologists are agreed that Recreation, play and fun are the basic needs of human being. Play is essential for the development of physical health and skills. The weekend is usually a time for recreation of all cultures. Holidays are common time for recreation, though recreation may take place at any place and any time but it can commonly occur during an individual’s discretion or free time in the



modern world, the concept of recreation has been so vast, today; chatting on Internet, playing card, music, video games and mobile phones, all are recreations. All the kinds of amusement such as games, picnics, hiking, swimming and company of nature etc are necessary for balanced growth of human personality and physical freshness. We feel happiness, when we spend some time in any recreational activities.

Many Muslim women experience considerable difficulties accessing programs and services that meet their religious requirements, and consequently feel systemically constrained in their recreation participation. Critical engagement with issues of equity and access as they relate to recreation opportunities is a key component in exploring the ways in which dominant groups interfuse society, legitimate particular cultural structures which serve to meet their needs, and in the process, disadvantage or marginalize other groups.

2 Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to broaden our awareness about the place of recreation within the lives of Muslim women. This research also highlighted the fact that many Muslim women like to use recreation services, but felt that the, services provided are not able to meet their requirements. Furthermore, recreation providers had a minimal understanding of, and held many misconceptions about, the recreation needs of this population. The research study narrates an analytical appraisal of the social construction and practice of recreation is presented by Islam. This research also aimed to create a better understanding about the recreation needs and requirements of Muslim women. Additionally, the study highlights inclusive participation, strategies and opportunities to improve health and well-being for women who freely engage in activities that are also concordant with the Islamic identity.

3 Methodology of Research

Methodology for this research determined through careful consideration of a number of issues raised in literature focusing on recreation. Material based on the social, environmental, and systemic conditions that affect women's involvement and hurdles in it. The methodology chosen had the capacity to explore these issues in depth and without restraint. Qualitative methodology was chosen to construction of meanings about recreation in the lives of Muslim women.

4 Islam & Recreation

Islam is complete and comprehensive religion, addressing all aspects of our lives and all of our needs, including our need for diversions and for recreation. It provides for us lawful means to

fulfill this need. Man requires rest and recreation that is completely natural. However, it is a means towards Allah in the first place since a Muslim is eager to make all his/her daily activities in line with the Islamic teachings. Allah says: "Say, Indeed my prayer, my rites, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds".¹ The prophet says, "Whatever you spend counts as good deeds for you on the Day of Judgment even the bite you put in your wife's mouth"². The Companion Abû al-Dardâ' said:

*"I seek recreation in something that is neither useful nor unlawful, and this makes me stronger on the truth."*³

The Holy Qur'an describes in Sûrah Yûsuf the brothers of Yusuf (AS) appealed to their father, the Prophet Yaqub (AS), on the basis of this fundamental human need. The recreation that these brothers were referring to was either foot racing or archery. They said: "Send him along with us tomorrow so he may engage in revelry and play. We will indeed keep him safe."⁴ There is no real objection to this type of recreation. A man engages in play with his family, as well as engaging in horse riding, archery, and in any other form of recreation sanctioned by the sacred texts. It is authentically related to us that the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Jabir when he married a mature widow: "Why did you not marry a virgin whom you could play with and who would play with you?"

The Prophet- peace be upon him- said, "Allah considers physically strong believers better than physically weak ones. He loves strong physically believers more, but both strong and weak believers are good"⁵ Hazrat Abu Bakr, rebuked two woman servants singing songs and beating drums on the Slaughter Day. However, the Prophet asked him to leave them because they were celebrating the Eid of the Slaughter Day⁶. Moreover, Hazrat Aisha herself used to play dolls.⁷ The prophet himself sometimes used to kid his companions but he said nothing except for truthfulness. Ibn Serene used to joke and laugh and even giggle.⁸

The Holy Qur'an forbidden to joke and laugh about other people's values and honor by saying: O you who believe, let not some people mock at other people; it may be that they are better than thee...⁹ Nor is it appropriate for the Muslim to tell jokes based on what is untrue in order to make people laugh. The Prophet (peace be on him) warned against this, saying, "Woe to the one who says something which is false in order to make people laugh! Woe to him, woe to him!" (Tirmadhi) Rights of Women embodied under the Holy Quran. In order to elevate women, glorify them, giving them the full rights on everything, erase their misery and save them from adversity, abjection, ruction and lowness, discrimination, intimidation and all terrible things that had ever happened to them, various verses on the rights of women were revealed from time to time.

5 Permissible Sports

There are many kinds of games and sports, which the Prophet (ﷺ) recommended to the Muslims as a source of enjoyment and recreation which, at the same time, prepare them for worship and other obligations. Hazrat Aisha, one of the prophet's wives, said, " We arrived at Medina, I swear I played there on a swing made between two palm trees"¹⁰. These sports, which require skill and determination, and which also involve physical exercise and bodybuilding activity, are related to the martial arts etc. The prophet used to say, "Oh Bilal, call for praying and let's feel contended"¹¹. Among them are the followings.

5.1 Foot Racing;

The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ used to race on foot and Prophet ﷺ encouraged them. It is reported that 'All were fast runners. The Prophet ﷺ himself raced with his wife 'Aisha in order to please her, set an example for his Companions. 'Hazrat Aisha said, I raced with the Prophet ﷺ and beat him in the race. Later, when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won.¹²

5.2 Wrestling;

In an incident, the Prophet (ﷺ) started wrestling with *Rukanah*. As the fight was hard, said, "A sheep for a sheep." (This must have occurred before the prohibition of gambling, or perhaps the Prophet ﷺ did not accept the bet and hence did not enforce its terms.) The Prophet ﷺ then threw him three times. The man then said, "What shall I tell my wife? One sheep was eaten by the wolf; one ran away, but what about the third" Then the Prophet ﷺ said, "We are not going to defeat you and take something from you as well. Take your sheep!"¹³

5.3 Archery, Spear Play

Once the Prophet ﷺ passed by a group of his Companions' they were competing in archery. He encouraged them, saying, shoot, and I am with you (Al-Bukhari). He realized that archery was not just a hobby or a sport but, more importantly, constituted that kind of force which Allah has commanded to be mustered: And make ready for them all thou art able of (armed) force.¹⁴ The Prophet (peace be on him) said, "The missiles (arrows) are the force," repeating it three times. He also said, "Practice archery; that is good for you".¹⁵

He cursed act of torturing and unnecessary killing of an animal and a human being has no right to have fun and sport at the expense of a living creature. For the same reason the Prophet (Peace be on him) forbade making animals fight each other.¹⁶

Spear play is similar to archery. "Teach your children how to float, and your fighters how to throw arrows and spears."¹⁷ The Prophet (peace be on him) allowed some Abyssinians to display their skill with spears in his mosque; he let his wife 'Aishah watch their show and encouraged them by saying, "Carry on," Muslims congregate in the mosque not only to worship; However, this play is not merely for fun but involve physical exercise and some sort of training a well.

5.4 Riding;

Allah Almighty says in surah Al-Nahl-8, "And (He created) horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and as adornment" ¹⁸and the Prophet (peace be on him) said, "There is blessing in the forelocks of horses" (Ahmad). He also emphasized to Practice archery and horseback riding" (Muslim). Hazrat Umar Said; "Teach your children swimming and archery, and tell them to jump on the horse's back." Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet (peace be on him) organized horse races and gave a prize to the winner.¹⁹ All this was done by the Prophet (peace be on him) to encourage competition in sports involving physical exercise and discipline.

5.5 Hunting;

Hunting is among the beneficial sports, which are encouraged by Islam. It is a sport, an exercise, and also a means of livelihood, regardless of whether it is done with weapons or with hunting animal such as dogs and hawks.

5.6 Playing with Dice;

Any sort of game played with money, which has an element of gambling, is haram. The Qur'an classifies gambling in the same category as drinking, idolatry, and divining with arrows. The Prophet (peace be on him) said, "He who plays with dice is like who handles the flesh and blood of swine" (Muslim, Ahmad and Abu Daoud.) The same scholars cite the Hadith from Abu Musa al-Ashari in which the Prophet (peace be on him) said, He who plays with dice disobeys Allah and His Messenger.

5.7 Singing and Music;

Singing is recommended on festive occasions²⁰ such as the days of 'Eid, weddings receptions, births, 'aqiqah. Hazrat Aishah narrated that when a woman was married to an *Ansari* man, the Prophet (peace be on him) said, "Aisha, did they have any entertainment? The *Ansari* are fond of entertainment"²¹ There were some companions who were well-known for their nice singing such as Al-Bara' Bin 'Azib who used to sing for men and Anjasha who used to sing for women, both had nice voices.²²

5.8 Gambling, the Companion of Drinking;

While permitting a variety of games and sports, Islam prohibits any game which involves betting, that is, which has an element of gambling in it. We have already quoted the saying of the Prophet, "He who says to his friend, 'Come, let us "amble,' must give charity." It is not lawful for the Muslim to seek relaxation and recreation in gambling, nor is it lawful for him to acquire money through it. What is known as the lottery or raffle is likewise a form of gambling. There should be no laxity or permissiveness toward it in the name of "charitable institutions" or "humanitarian causes." Those who consider it permissible in relation to such causes are similar to people who raise it.

6 Healthy Receptions

Healthy Recreation has value as a part of life and human age and recreations in Islam with special conditions is legitimated and even is necessary and its territory is to the extent that does not harm the other essential parts of human life and it causes to help the quantity and quality of other sections of the human life. It also seems the Islamic recreation criteria are as following an overview:

- Free from guilt and sin
- No harassment
- Free of games and toys
- Cooperation with moderation
- In line with the original part of human purpose

From these reports concerning the Prophet ﷺ, jurists have deduced the permissibility of foot racing, whether it is between men against each other or between men and women who are their Muharammat or wives. They have also concluded that foot racing, wrestling, and sports of this type do not compromise the dignity of scholarship, piety, or age.

7 Recreational Activities for Muslim Women.....Need of the Time

It is needed to examine the existing scenario in connection with Muslim female participation in Recreational activities in relation to its conformity with the religious, socio-cultural and psychological perspectives of the society. Despite the considerable cultural variations in religious practice amongst Muslim women, they are often conceptualized as "a vision of heavily veiled, secluded wives, whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children and the other women in the immediate kinship circle. This stereotyping of Muslim women into a single image is indicative of the lack of knowledge and understanding about the tenets of Islam, and contributes too many of the problems Muslim women face in adequately accessing recreation opportunities.

In examining the recreation needs of Muslims it is essential to understand that Islam be seen as more than just a religion. It is the dominant identifying factor that provides the basis upon which an individual's social environment is built. Recreation is generally not a core contributor to a Muslim woman's identity; her religious identity shapes her recreation choices. Religious requirements, therefore, must be met in order for participation to be possible. For instance, physical education of Muslim woman, students encountered many institutional practices that compromised their participation. This ranged from physical education teachers excluding girls from classes for wearing tight track suits instead of a sports uniform, to teachers allowing males to impinge on their space thus affecting their ability to actively participate. Women are specifically affected by age,

employment, marital and family status. This list also needs to acknowledge the influence of a woman's cultural background too.

8 The Constraints in Recreational Activities

In our Pakistani society, nearly all married women emphasized family responsibilities and care as significant constraints to their recreational engagement. They spend all time in fulfilling family responsibilities such as housework and childcare. The other constraint identified in this study was related to social support and approval. Many women and lower-class women in particular, were constrained in their leisure pursuits by the lack of family and social support. The second constraint was time, which was often linked to the ethic of care. Time was highly related to family and work responsibilities. Preserving the values related to the ethic of care “care for and about the needs of others” is a priority for women.

Recreation participation opportunities are usually constrained by feelings of being different, standing out, or not being able to effectively communicate. Such feelings can facilitate one's desire to engage in activities with others who share the same cultural, linguistic, and religious background. As a result, women may prefer to engage in informally structured recreation with people they feel comfortable around, such as their family. Women usually preferred to spend time with people of the same background because of their shared interests, and language rather than due to any feelings of alienation.

Many Women Associations and NGOs are providing a range of recreation programs for women. They also have been active in lobbying both local and state governments to ensure that publicly provided facilities and programs are accessible to females. Most of the women felt a sense of extreme satisfaction when they could actually participate in recreation activities that met their needs but some feelings of unhappiness at not being able to find appropriate programs to join.

Some sport and recreation activities are not viewed as suitable pursuits for girls by their parents because where the uniform prerequisites did not comply with religious dress requirements. They are asked for enclosed spaces; no male present; female instructors; religious considerations of time of year, and time of day (around prayer times). Swimming, horse riding, and archery are recommended in the holy Quran but there are few opportunities for girls and women to pursue these activities. Muslim women wearing the “hajib” stand out in the community even in an Islamic republic. Their clothing symbolizes their difference, is often perceived by others in the community as indicating social and cultural distance from mainstream values and practices. Consequently, Muslim women often recognized stereotyped by recreation providers as having quite different recreational needs leading to informal exclusionary practices.

Personal experiences and interpersonal factors also need to be taken into consideration. Muslim women experience both opportunities and constraints that are shaped by cultural background and individual personal circumstances. Since each woman has her own unique set of circumstances, the impact of religion and culture on leisure choices will vary between women? Lack of appropriate venues and programs obviously plays a large role in their choice of recreational activities.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

These experiences of Muslim women trying to access meaningful and fulfilling recreation experiences indicate that there is plenty of room for improvement in recreational activities. Most of the problems in service provision derive from a lack of knowledge and understanding about this population's needs and requirements. This, coupled with a limited exposure to group members, few past experiences to draw upon and the prevalence of incorrect stereotypes that suggest Muslim women do not want to engage in many recreation activities, results in informal exclusionary practices that deny many women the right of participation. There is need to go beyond stereotypes and find out what the women's needs and requirements are and aim to address these accordingly.

It is evident that it is the way in which recreation activities are organized and not the activities themselves that are the main limiting factor. The provision of programs that meet women's requirements, such as female-only environments, dress code, will assist in meeting recreation needs. These initiatives, however, must be more than isolated attempts to deal with the issue, which ignore the entrenched systemic concerns identified by this research. For example, the apparent absence of Muslim women holding sport and recreation administration positions, or enrolled in leisure and recreation tertiary education programs is indicative of the extent of their exclusion in all spheres of recreation.

A multifaceted approach is necessary whereby current providers restructure services to be more inclusionary and more Muslim women become involved in the provision process. Muslim women need to be targeted and encouraged to become actively engaged in all dimensions of recreation provision from personal participation, to local community planning and development. In developing their careers in recreation, Muslim women can use insights gained from their own experiences to forge a new more inclusive future for recreation provision. Muslim women should not have to subvert their identity to enjoy the benefits of recreation participation.

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