

Islamic Perspectives with Reference to Health and Participation in Sports

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ABSTRACT

Playing is the natural phenomenon. The essence of playing is natural either it is in the case of birds, beasts or it is human being. Like human beings, all birds and beasts use to play as and when their living conditions favor it. Health is the prerequisite for affective participation in any activity either it is sport or any other undertaking of the life. The activity of playing is mainly subject to the state of health and fitness of the participant. Different Islamic principles and guidelines with reference to man's participation in sport and upkeep and maintenance of the health are examined in this paper. From the viewpoint of Islam, health and fitness are vital for properly performing the different religious obligations including offering five times daily's prayer, taking Ramadan's fasts, performing Hajj and going to Jihad (fighting for the cause of Islam. In addition to Islamic guidelines, medical as well as scientific principles with reference to the maintenance and promotion of health and participation in different activities of sport have also been taken into consideration.

Keywords: Participation, sports, Islam, health, fitness

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, an effort has been made to find answer to some of the basic questions related to Islamic thinking, participation in sport and its impact upon health. These questions include; (a) whether Islam guides us about participation in sport? (b) what are the guiding Islamic principles for participation in sport and (c) what does Islam says about health and health related different issues? In this regard, what do we find in the holy Quraan (the Holy Islamic Book) and in the "Seerat" of our holy Prophet Muhammad PBUH, (practices of the holy Prophet PBUH)?

In Islam, it is permissible to participate in sport rather it is *sunnah* (following the act of the holy Prophet PBUH) to play some sport activities like walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear-throwing horse-racing and camel-racing. Participation in sport is not against the spirit of Islam and "*sharia*" (Islamic code of life) provided a few Islamic guidelines with reference to participation are abode. These guidelines include,

1. To cover all the obligatory parts of the body during playing,
2. To avoid mixing of the male and female during the course of playing and
3. To pay due attention to offer five-times daily's prayer.

In Islam, female participation in sport is also allowed provided it is carried out in privacy and wherein no male interfere in the conduct and organization of the activity. With reference to female participation in sport, it is said that "*To participate in sports women need to be out of sight of men.*" [1]

For its believers, Islam encourages the life full of action. Islam encourages the activities which are health friendly and health promoting in nature. With reference to participation in sport, the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has said, “Any action without the remembrance of GOD is either a diversion or heedlessness with exemption to four acts; Walking from target to target (Archery), Horse Training, Playing with family and Swimming.” [2]

HEALTH

The Oxford student’s dictionary of English defines Health as the state of being well and free from illness. The WHO defines health as, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Health is also defined as “The quality of life that enables the individual to live most and to serve best”. About the significance of health, our holy Prophet is reported to have said, “No doubt, health and happiness are amongst the blessings of Almighty Allah”. This *Hadis* (the sayings of the holy Prophet PBUH) signifies vitality of health in the life of Muslims.

ISLAM AND HEALTH

The word Islam comes from an Arabic word “Salama” meaning peace and safety, whereas the word “Muslim” denotes the person who follows the way of Islam. Islam endeavors for having good health by following healthy physical activities, avoidance of unhealthy practices and taking a balanced diet. Highlighting the significance of character, behavior and deed, Almighty Allah says in the holy Quraan,

“...He prohibits them from all that is foul...” (Al-A`raaf: 157)

With reference to food, Allah says in the holy Quraan, “Eat of the good things which we have provided for you.” [3] As directed by the Creator, use of the wholesome and pure food is considered to be worthwhile with reference to maintaining health and prolonging life. In the same context the holy Quraan further says, “Eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth.” [4] Islam has clearly marked the lawful and unlawful things for the followers and has declared the things “*Halal*” (legal from the religion perspective) and “*Haram*” (illegal from the religion perspective) for the Muslims.

Health and healthy habits are indispensable to each other. Health does not come as a matter of chance; it does require abidance to following good manners and healthy habits. In this regard, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that, “I have been sent for the teachings and completion of manners”. The holy Prophet (PBUH) is also reported to have said, “Fear of God and good manners lead the Muslims to the heaven”.

Sayyiduna Zayd ibn Arqam (RA) narrates that the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to say (in prayer): “I seek your protection from powerlessness (*ajz*), laziness (*kasl*), cowardice (*jubn*), miserliness (*bukhl*), and weakness (*harem*).” [5] In the same context with reference to the protection and promotion of health the Prophet (PBUH) has further said: “Our bodies have rights upon us, our eyes have rights upon us, so give everyone his due right”. [6] At another occasion He (PBUH) has stated that, “Taking proper care of one's health is the right of the body.” [7] About the health and fitness of the holy Prophet (PBUH) Tabrani and Tirmidhi report “His (PBUH) stomach and chest were in line.” It reflects fit health and ideal posture of Him (PBUH).

Health is the product of healthy habits particularly with reference to pure and healthy diet, its amount of intake, cleanliness, proper routine of rest, sleep and exercise. Let us have a look at the Islamic stance about some of the health friendly elements related to everyday life.

Freshness and intake of the proper food is the initial requirement of healthy life. Food should be fresh and tasty to satisfy the taste and nutritional requirements of the person who eats it. In this regard we see that Allah the Almighty hosted Maryam (the mother of the Prophet Isa) with fresh dates.” [8] The amount of food we take is the next element with reference to its utility in the promotion of health. About the amount of food the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said: “Only a few morsels of food is sufficient that may keep the backbone of a person straight or in other words, one third of the stomach is for solid foods, one third is for the liquids and one third is for air.” [9] In light of the Islamic way of healthful living, minimum amount of the food should be taken avoiding overstuffing the stomach. Muslims of the post-*Hijrat* period practically manifested this Islamic approach by showing their good health standard. During those days, a health practitioner came to Madina for practice. After more than half a year of his stay in Madina he did not see any patient. Resultantly he came to the holy Prophet (PBUH) and explained his story. The holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to him, “We are the people who do not eat until we get proper appetite and when we eat we avoid overeating.” [10] This was His reply to the complainant which reflects golden Islamic approach towards the relationship between the dietary habits and maintenance of good health.

Cleanliness of the body, clothes and environment is another significant factor that plays vital role in the maintenance and upkeep of the normal health. With respect to importance of cleanliness Islam has very clear directions for the Muslims. The holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once said, “Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty.” [11] At another occasion the holy Prophet (PBUH) has stated that, “Cleanliness is part of the Muslim’s faith.” [12] These sayings reflect the value and worth of cleanliness and piouness in the everyday life of the Muslims.

Personal Hygiene encompasses overall cleanliness of the body. In personal hygiene, emphasis is placed upon care of hands, mouth, teeth, eyes, nose, scalp, feet, and proper clothing, regular bathing, balanced way of eating, exercise and sleep. In the same context, the Islamic practice of five time daily ablution is the best example of rendering the aforementioned organs of the body tidy, clean & healthy. About the importance of cleanliness the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Islam is clean, so you all be clean because no one will enter the heaven except the one who possesses clean mind and clean body”

SPORT

The term sport comes from a French word, *desporte*, which means leisure. Sport encircles the activities demanding some sort of strength, endurance and skill. In relaxed sense, the term sport refers to all sorts of entertaining activities but to be more specific, it is defined as the activity which has its own techniques and which is properly planned, supervised, and governed by its own traditions, customs and proper set of rules.

The Council of European Sports Charter 1993 defines sport as “*All forms of physical activities which, through casual or organized participation aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.*”

ISLAM AND SPORT

About the position of play in Islam, the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, “*Entertain [yourselves] and play, for indeed I dislike harshness to be seen in your religion.*” [13]

Participation in sport is the activity of healthy and fit ones. If a person is healthy, he/she can excel in sport and dominate in performance. But in the case of otherwise, outstanding performance is nothing more than a dream. Islam advocates in favor of good health and sound physique. Healthy and fit Muslim is considered to be better than the weaker one. Regarding health and fitness, the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said: "A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer." [14] About the significance of refreshment and revitalization of the minds and soul, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, "*Refresh your hearts from time to time.*" [15]

At the time of the advent of Islam, limited events of sport were common among the masses. Since then, a considerable number of new events of sport have come into existence which has been popular in different parts of the world. From the perspective of Islam, legality or otherwise of these newly invented sport events can be evaluated and determined by the scale of Islamic teachings. Meaning that participation in all those sport events that are in conformity of the spirit of Islam and wherein the participant does not violate the Islamic guidelines with reference to participation in sport like gambling, gender mixing, violating the Islamic cloth code and disregarding the "*Fard*" (obligatory religious practices like five times daily prayer, fasting in the month of Islamic month *Ramazan* etc), is allowed in Islam.

It is evident from the available sport record that the prominent events of sport in which, the holy Prophet (PBUH) himself or his companions participated in, were walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear-throwing horse-racing and camel-racing. These sporting events were carrying significance from the perspectives of health and fitness with reference to taking part in "*Jihad*" (the holy battle fought for the cause of Islam). These sport events were meant for improving the vital battle oriented skills of the masses.

Walking

About the significance of walking the holy Prophet (PBUH) highlighted upon the benefits of walking by saying, "Compete in archery, have a fit body and walk barefoot." [16]

Running

As reported by Ayesha, once the holy Prophet (PBUH) entered into the running competition with her (Ayesha), which she won but later on when I put on some weight, we ran again, and this time He won, the Prophet (PBUH), who won the race, said, "This is the revenge of the first race; now we are level." [17] With the objective of promoting health and fitness of the children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct running competitions among them, narrated by Abdullah bin Harith. [18]

Wrestling

Accepting wrestling challenge from the renowned wrestler Rukana bin Abdulyazid, the holy Prophet (PBUH) beat him in wrestling. [19] To see and determine the fitness level of the young children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) conducted wrestling competitions among them with reference to their participation in Jihad. [20]

Swimming

Swimming is the sport that is very much emphasized in the Islamic literature. Ata bin Abi Rabah (RA) narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct swimming competitions among the youngsters. [21] About the significance of swimming, Umar (PA) is reported to have said "*Teach your children how to swim.*" On another occasion Umar (RA) is reported to have said "*Teach your children swimming and archery, and tell them to jump on the horse's*

back." It is reported that in the young age, our holy Prophet (PBUH) used to swim in the pool situated in the garden of his maternal uncle. [22]

Archery

The skill of Archery was regarded as one of the basic and effective tools for participation in *Jehad*. The holy Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, "All of you should know the art of Archery." [23] The holy Prophet (PBUH) used to admire those companions who were expert in the skill of Archery. During the Battle of Uhud, Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas showed his excellence in throwing the arrows in target, the holy Prophet (PBUH) appreciated him with the remarks, "May my mother and father be sacrificed for you." [24] On another occasion the holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Archery is not simply an entertainment but it is the best thing that you do for entertainment." [25] About the importance of the skill of Archery, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever learnt the art of shooting then left it, is not from us." [26]

Camel-Riding and Horse-Riding

With reference to the significance of Camel racing, horse racing and archery as the skills of war for *Jehaad*, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that, "*There are presents for three things: Camel racing, horse racing and archery.*" He admired the position holders of aforementioned three events. [27] The holy Prophet (PBUH) is also reported to have said, "Every game a person plays is futile except for archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife." [28] According to the narration of Ibn Umar, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to train his horse and then He take part in competitions with it. [29]

Spear Throwing

Once the holy Prophet (PBUH) saw competition of spear throwing He said to them, "*Throw it (i.e. their spears), O children of Isma'eel, for your father was a (spear-thrower).*" [30] Abu Huraira narrates that once, in the presence of the holy Prophet (PBUH), a few Ethiopians were practicing spear throwing in mosque. Umar (RA) stopped them from doing so. But the holy Prophet (PBUH) directed Umar (RA) with the remarks "*O Umar let them play.*" [31] Explaining the justification of playing in a mosque, Imam Bukhari (RA) says that since spear-throwing is a skill of *Jehad*, and *Jehad* is the act of worship, therefore the holy Prophet (PBUH) allowed them to carry on spear throwing in the mosque.

Keeping in view the Islamic approach with reference to participation in sport it becomes evident that promotion and maintenance of the health, sound physique, vitality and fitness and the state of preparedness to meet any emergency in the life are all vital in Islam. In addition to having reward from Allah by following the *Sunnah*, (doing the act of the holy Prophet (PBUH)), the aforementioned sport events, which have been participated in or played in the presence of the holy Prophet (PBUH) and His companions, serve the objective of promoting health, having entertainment, getting physical fitness. Islam never refrains Muslims from getting and promoting their health and fitness.

HEALTH AND SPORT

To be healthy means much more than freedom from disease and discomfort. Health includes smooth functioning of all systems of the body resulting in physical strength, mental stability and satisfaction with the life. Health signifies the quality of life that enables the individual to live most and to serve best throughout the life. The state of wellness and absence of disease is regarded as the state of health. Its proper definition is offered by the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines health as: "*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*". This is comprehensive

definition of health that encircles the overall wellbeing state of the person with reference to sound physical & mental health.

Health is an asset and it is the prerequisite for participation and prompt performance in any walk of life including sport. Health and sport are indispensable. If a person is healthy he/she finds him/herself in a position to tolerate the pressure and face difficult situations coldly and calmly. Evaluating sport performance at world's level, it is revealed that the players and the teams who dominated in performance were having high standard of health and fitness. Healthy human hands play key role in achieving prominent performance in sport.

Participating in sports improves health of the participant from different angles. For becoming a good player, one must take care of his/her own health and fitness. It guides the person to take balanced diet, follow healthy habits, keep good company and pay due attention to the different factors responsible for promoting health. "*Sport activity has health benefits.*" [32] Latest literature widely confirms the overall health benefits of participation in physical activities and sport. "*Strong evidence confirms that there are many potential health benefits of physical activity.*" [33-34]

FINDINGS

Study of the literature reveals that there exists close propinquity among Islamic teachings, promotion of health and the nature of participation in sport. It is evident from the references (Quraanic verses & *Hadith*) quoted in the text that Islam favors all those actions and deeds which are pro-health and advantageous for the human beings. With reference to promotion of health and stability in life, Islam guides the Muslims to follow healthy habits and positive behavior in everyday life. Similarly, Islam gives the lesson of moderation with reference to eating in connection with the upkeep and maintenance of good health. Islam discourages over-eating and use of impure food which deteriorate health.

Cleanliness of the mind and body occupies important place in both Islam and in the process of promotion of health. Islam has declared health and tranquility as the blessings of God. With reference to promotion of health Islam favors participation in sport paying due regard to Islamic code of playing.

CONCLUSIONS

Participating in the sport activities which are once done by the holy Prophet (PBUH) is nothing less than a religious worship. In Islam, doing sport is encouraged as it is not against the real spirit of the Islamic teachings provided participation related Islamic code and guidelines including obeying clothing code, avoidance of gambling, joint playing session of the male and female and attention to *Fard* are complied with accordingly.

Different authentic narrations prove that the holy Prophet (PBUH) either participated in or encouraged some sport activities of that time like swimming, archery, horse riding, camel-racing, walking, racing, wrestling and playing with one's own family.

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