Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Islamic Actions and Social Mandates

Umar's Control Of Sexuality Laxity

In the days of ignorance sexual laxity was the order of the day. Islam stood for reform in the moral and social fields, and condemned sexual laxity in all forms. Under Islam a limitation was placed on the number of wives one could marry. Such number was not to exceed four, and it was enjoined that all the wives should be treated alike with due justice. Lapidation was provided as the punishment for those found guilty of adultery.

When Umar became the Caliph he took further steps to rid the society of sexual laxity.

In the days of ignorance poetry was pressed into service as an instrument of moral laxity. The poets indulged in ribald poems. They named their sweethearts in their poems and by indulging in poetic licence compromised the honour and integrity of ladies. Then where ladies were no party to love the poets in their imagination made their beloveds return their love in passionate terms. Such poetry did considerable social harm, and disturbed domestic peace in many a home. Umar took cognisance of this unsocial practice. He commanded the poets not to mention the names of ladies in their poems. He also issued directions that the poets should not indulge in any versification calculated to encourage moral depravity. Where some poets inadvertently or otherwise contravened these instructions they were flogged or punished.

Mutah in some form or the other was permissible or at least not expressly forbidden before the time of Umar. Umar felt that Mutah "hereunder a man married a woman for a specified number of days amounted to disguised prostitution and this led to moral laxity. Umar accordingly passed an order prohibiting Mutah. He declared that it was open to a person to divorce a woman after regular marriage for any valid reason, but a marriage which was stipulated to be dissolved after a specified number of days was repugnant to the spirit of Islam which stood for stability of domestic homes. Umar elaborated that the purpose of marriage was to set up homes with a view to getting children and Mutah negated such objects. Moreover in the case of Mutah the children born of such union were to be subject to social disability which was detrimental to social order.

Under the Islamic law divorce was permissible. The Holy Prophet however took pains to explain that divorces which disrupted family life were distasteful to God. People were enjoined not to be hasty in the matter of divorce. Divorce could be effective only when three divorces were given. The idea was to provide some opportunity for reconciliation. When under Umar more countries were conquered and women from other countries became available for the Muslims, some Muslims resorted to the practice of announcing three divorces simultaneously. In order to put a stop to this unsocial practice Umar laid down that if a person gave three talaqs simultaneously such divorce would be irrevocable.

With the conquest of Iraq and Syria, Iraqi and Syrian women became available to the Muslims. Attracted by the beauty of these women, the Muslims divorced their Arab wives. That created a social crisis which led to sexual laxity. Umar accordingly ordered that marriages with foreign ladies should be permitted under exceptional circumstances. Hudhaifa was the administrator of al Madina and he married a Christian beauty of Iraq. When this was brought to the notice of Umar he required Hudhaifa to divorce the Christian beauty, Hudhaifa said that he would not comply with the order unless he was told whether his marriage was unlawful or else; the Caliph referred to the authority under which he wanted him (Hudhaifa) to divorce his legally wedded wife. Umar wrote to say that the marriage he had contracted was not unlawful, but he had been advised to divorce the Christian beauty as it was bound to adversely affect the interests of Arab ladies. Moreover if the Muslims married non-Muslim ladies merely for their beauty that would encourage sexual laxity. Thereupon Hudhaifa divorced his Christian wife.
Besides four lawful wives Islam permitted any man to take over any number of slave girls to bed. These slave girls were to be the property of the Master and he could sell them any time. With the extension in conquests the number of available slave girls increased and Umar felt that this would promote sexual laxity. He ordered that Umm ul Walad that is such slave girls who bore children to their masters would stand emancipated. This had the effect that such women could no longer be treated as concubines and were to be given the status of regular wives or divorced when they could, as free women, marry other persons.

Source: Alim.org-Umar bin al-Khattab History