

# Linkages of Sports Activities with Spirituality and Religiosity of Community: The Case in Muslim Majority Country

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**Abstract**—sports and physical exercises have historical linkages with Islam. Spirituality and religiosity in Islam goes hand to hand in Islam. Islam advocates strong connection between spiritual well-being of Muslims and sports. In this article emphasis was laid and an effort was made to find out how spiritual education and sports can benefit Muslims in preserving their faith and religion. This article will discuss the Prophetic injunctions regarding the importance of physical fitness in our lives. The opinions of the great scholars of Islam regarding physical fitness and eating habits will also be touched in here. Sports is now a days an important aspect of life of an individual and communities are devoting considerable time on sports and exercise. In Islam to be physically active and fit has number of religious, spiritual and social benefits. Sports and spirituality has very strong relationship in Islam. Person who are involved in sport possess the strength to undertake physical acts of 'ibadat like salat or hajj. There are number of studies that shows spirituality and religiosity are very important and effective to improve overall health of a person. Spirituality should be included and integrated with the lifestyle of a person; it should be embedded in soul. However spirituality and religiosity is an individualistic concept which enables a person to connect himself and his soul to the creator the Allah.

**Keywords**—Spirituality, Religiosity, Islam, Sports

## I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion which has grown tremendously in the history of the world [1]. Islamic culture refers to the lived experience of being a Muslim. The code of living is expressed through Islamic laws laid down in the Shariah. These codes imbue Islamic culture, giving meaning to the way in which Muslims make sense of their lives, behave, dress, eat and drink' [2]. There are common concerns shared between Islam and physical education of which the core issue is to be in control of your body, the space and time, in rituals and cleanliness and to be in control of diet in pursuit of healthy body.

Every Muslim by his faith has ultimate wish for the goal that brings him more closely to the God, and allows him to pursue Allah's commandments and guidance. All these

provisions of Islam including prayers and other social obligations have a close relationship with sport. In Islam there are great respects for sport and athletes through sports strive to achieve human perfection and values of Islam. There is strong emphasis on healthy life in Islam. The one who believes and practice Islam should not be a weak person. He should be spiritually and physically strong enough to practice Islam. Regarding physical fitness, the Prophet (SAW) said: "A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer" [3].

Here it's not only the faith and character which are important but the physical strength. The optimum levels of health and physical fitness are imperative in Islam and God has given us various ways of acquiring the required strength especially through sports. Those who believe in Islam and its values must make sure that they are in a position to take due care of their spiritual, emotional and physical health. God has trusted and given us a beautiful gift in the form of our bodies, and we must give respect to it. Our bodies should not be abused or left neglected rather it should properly maintained in good order. Prophet Muhammad advised his followers, to work, to be energetic, and to start their day early, all of which are conditions for a healthy, energetic and fit body. Many times our bodies do not cooperate with us while we want to wake up for the fajr prayer early in morning and it largely because we don't take care of our bodies and it becomes weak. The Prophet (SWA) said, "Our bodies have rights upon us, our eyes have rights upon us, so give everyone his due right" [4].

In Islam well-being of its believer is given a great importance in the religion itself. Not only Islam gives moral guidelines and to its followers but it also instructs them how to live a healthy and active life in as best possible manner. To perform prayers it requires certain kind of postures from its followers which itself is viewed as from the perspective of physical exercise and that effects on all major muscles of the body. Therefore, performing prayer five times a day is a physical activity and keeps the body healthy. To perform worship and prayers to Allah it is essential that we the believers in Islam remain physically fit. In order to pray five times in a day and to effectively fast during the Holy month of Ramadan and also in order to perform Hajj, physical fitness of

the believer becomes very important. Performing five prayers in day is itself a great form of exercise. While doing prayers various movements of joints and muscles are involved and these movements along with concentration relieve mental stress and relaxation.

## II. SPORTS AND EXERCISE: INTEGRAL PART OF MUSLIM'S LIFE

In Islam to be physically active and fit has number of religious, spiritual and social benefits. Sports and spirituality has very strong relationship in Islam. Person who are involved in sport possess the strength to undertake physical acts of *'ibadat* like *salat* or *hajj*. These active people who are either involved in different form of physical exercise or in sports can undertake various task in an efficient and productive manner which enables them to support themselves and their community. People involved in sports and physical exercises can travel and engage themselves in variety of social activities and such social benefits would not be achieved in the absence of physical fitness.

In a hadith narrated from Hazrat Ibn Umar (R.A) in which our beloved Prophet said **“Teach your children swimming, archery and horse riding”**. In Sahih Muslim, the Prophet(s) said, “Practice archery and horseback riding.” The Prophet(s) said *“Any action without the remembrance of Allah is either a diversion or heedlessness except four acts: walking from target to target (during archery practice), training a horse and learning to swim.”* (Reported by al Tabarani on good authority) [5] In Islam holistic approach towards life is provided. According to Islam stronger has more capacity and it is more able to fulfill the obligations towards life and the religion. Islam does not promote any activity that will make the body weak and incapable. Therefore sports and exercise becomes very important in the life of a Muslim. Actually most of the rituals in Islam are based on spirituality and Physicality.

## III. SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOSITY AND SPORTS

There are number of studies that shows spirituality and religiosity are very important and effective to improve overall health of a person. Spirituality should be included and integrated with the lifestyle of a person; it should be embedded in soul. However spirituality and religiosity is an individualistic concept which enables a person to connect himself and his soul to the creator the Allah. Sports spirituality and religiosity in Islam go hand to hand. Sports and exercise enable individuals to able to attain goals of life. As discussed, Islam promotes the holistic way towards life which in turn integrates spirituality in each and every aspect of Muslims life. Spirituality integrates physical health with the overall well-being of heart mind and soul of individual. Both spirituality and religion are so imbedded in the daily lives of Muslims and there religious rituals, that it cannot be detached from their lives. Worshipping in Muslim is a valuable act which connects their soul to the creator. Through worshipping Muslims are constantly reminded the need of this sacred connection of their soul to the creator. This not only ensures the spiritual and psychological well-being of a Muslim but it also help and promotes mental and

physical aspects of health which takes away the evil ideas and thoughts and our minds clear and free from stress and worries. [6]

Pure life is what everyone wants to live and practice in Islam. Physical realm is on important dimension of pure life. And the main aspect of spirituality in childhood educations is the physical care. Good hygiene, athletics and good food is what included in physical care. With regards to athletics, it is recommended that children should be trained in different kinds of sports. For example the Prophet Muhammad has also said; *“Train your children in swimming and archery”*. Swimming and archery are just an example as being related to history and culture. We should expose our children to all types of sports. Therefore the important point to consider here is that sport and physical exercises are important features of physical care which part and parcel of child's spiritual education even though we might see the effects of these activities in later stages of the individual's life. [7]

## IV. SPORTS IN ISLAMIC COUNTRY

Islam is a widely accepted ideology which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah [8]. Curiosity in sports in relation to Islam has been growing since the 1980s. There is lot of literature available in relation to Islam and its teaching physical activities and sports [9, 10]. After going through all the literature available, it was found that there is a consensus among people which reflects that in Islam its followers are instructed to get involved in sports, physical activities and other form of recreation activities.

Many Muslims used the religious materials (*sura*) and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings (*Hadith*) very often to display positive side of sport from the perspective of Islam [11]. There are many examples of it, Islamic literature suggests that the Prophet and second caliph, Omar Ibn Khattab, recommended that Muslims should “teach (their) children swimming, archery, and horseback riding” [12], at the same time also encouraged them to get involved in competitions having physical exercise and discipline. Islamic principles regarding physical body & sports has been widely explored by many scholars. For Instance, if we look at the western sports and the way they practiced disciplined body along with controlling your food and fluid intake is quite in line with requirement for Muslims as stated in Islam in order to take suitable care of body and also focus tracking their health [13]. They are also supposed to achieve higher standards of strength and physical fitness [14], and they should be working towards the purification and cleanliness of their soul along with mind and body [15]. Some studies have even try to find out how closely physical aspects and body are linked with Islam. In Islam people view the physical body which is entrusted upon them by Allah which has very specific requirements and needs and should be therefore taken care of properly [11].

## V. SPORTS, PHYSICAL SELF AND ISLAM

There are also large number studies which reflect sports and exercise as perfect way and mean by which Muslims can fulfill and can take care of the needs required by the body

within the realms of Islamic religion [12, 16]. Even in Dar-ul-Islam Physical Education and sport were given very high priority. In the school curriculum physical education is second largest subject in term of allotted time. Every child gets 6 hour of exposure to physical education. While interviewing the children it was noticed that physical education and sports was accorded second most importance after religious studies.

After going through interviews with different children at various levels it was revealed that physical education is considered as integral part of school system and it has specific place in their everyday activities through and where they can actually apply their religious beliefs. As also reported by Farooq and Parker (2009) [17], that with interpretations and understanding of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, pupils in their interview have positively argued that sports and physical exercises was equally significant to them as it is in line with the instructions from Allah, the Prophet and the Khulafah. One of their responded also believed that his body was a "gift from Allah" and it is his responsibility to take care of it.

Physical education and sports is seen where pupil find their self and reaffirm their values. Sports and physical activities provide an effective and unbiased environment where youth can channelize their negative energies and emotions as also reported by [18]. When interviewed engineering students in a university, respondent referred that how effectively a rigorous game of football refreshed their mind and body as they are able get away with negative emotion and bad feelings which make them at calm and ease. And this was so important for them, as with clam and peaceful mind things become very clear and they are able to focus on Allah, the almighty.

Controlling ones negative feelings and emotions is important from the point of from Islam and physical activities help an individual to release there negative energies and channelize them in a positive way. This was also reflected in a study done by Farooq and Parker (2009) [17] where responded revealed how getting involved in sports and physical exercises enable them to "relax their mind and bodies. Therefore the time spends during physical activities and sports are constructive and worth as it allows the release of negativity and refreshing body and soul. These principles were also reinforced in classroom teaching where in physical education teachers motivate students to take care of their bodies and activity and were asked to actively involved in sports and physical exercises and take care of social, mental and physical well-being. "Allah Rewards Muslims Who Take Care of Their Bodies". These endorsements from the students across various disciplines and levels are very important and invaluable as they help themselves to establish their relationship with their faith and Allah.

## VI. SPORTS, DISCIPLINE AND ISLAM

Discipline is the one key thing that one gets from sports and physical education activities. These activities bring in a

sense of responsibility and loom things in more rational way. Many responded in different interviews in university in Saudi Arabia as also reiterated by Farooq and Parker (2009) [17] considered sports as part of their lifestyle and gave priority to it largely because of the importance of rules and regulations in sports. It is these rules which make them disciplined in their lives. Rules in sports forced us to control ourselves in adverse situations, even if we have negative thoughts and urge, the rules keeps us in control of all these...and this is so important stated by many respondents that they want to be good Muslim men and Allah rewards discipline.

This clearly reflects sports and games can regulate and control our bodies. Sports have the potential to involve the whole body in rule-bound activity which is bound to rules and that regulate how is conducted [19, 20]. Many young Muslims believe that sports help them to control and regulate their bodies. Especially they considered teams sports very important which can curb and control their emotions and negative feelings which otherwise would release in less appropriate way. They feel that by participating in sports or playing a game they can restrain their body from exerting aggression and violence and it provides them appropriate platform to release their aggressions in more appropriate way by setting the goal and learning to control ones inner self.

Many young Muslim cite the quote and references made in *Hadith* where the Prophet had stated, "A strong Muslim is better and more beloved by God than a weak one, even if both are good" [16]. For these group of young Muslims, the relation and link between "being strong in one's faith" and their involvement in the sports and physical activities was very important. These men feel that engagement in physical exercise is the better or only way through which they can achieve strong faith. Therefore we can assume from the response of these young Muslim men that they are willing to seek and nurture more self-disciplined life and strict and tough regulations of their physical bodies was indispensable for that purpose. We can therefore argue that many of them feel that through participation in exercise and sports they can be what Allah wanted them to be. When you actively get involved in sport and exercise, it becomes your routine and you eventually follow it without fail. And this in turn makes you more disciplined; more disciplined with your body and one's self.

Sports and physical exercise are process that promotes and build strong and muscular body which is important for controlled and disciplined Muslim. Young Muslim believes that a strong muscular body is reflection of controlled and discipline life, as it requires a strict protocol and daily routine to develop a strong body. These views are also supported by other studies which suggest how body can serve as physical axis point for both behaviors and roles defined in society [21]. Another researcher too found that physical aspects of bodies may be used as tool to express and to portray an image of valued social self [22]. And this happens because of the fact that exercise and sports has advantage which can enable the habits and behavior which can be connected with more visible aspects i.e. body appearance, a physical self



[23]. Therefore social self and physical self are connected to each other.

## VII. SPORTS, SOCIAL SELF ISLAM

Islam promotes peace, living in unity with each other especially with your neighbors irrespective of your differences. Muslims should line in harmony in according to their religion and faith and also in harmony with other Muslim brothers along with close and immediate surroundings. Physical activities and sports in particular especially team games and activities promote these cohesive characteristics [24, 25]. Young Muslim is of view that sports are a way to socialize and through these social settings we can rely on each other for their help and support and also to Allah for his spiritual guidance. All these can be achieved because of unique relationship with in the players, team and almighty Allah especially in team sports. It was felt that there is some kind of link or connection between our self and the members of the team and we rely on team members for each other's support. And since we all are part of team, as attributed by some young Muslims, there is always a touch and link between you, team and the almighty Allah. They even feel that this touch and connection is just because of the fate and your fate no doubt in the hands of Allah. Most of the people understand and accepts that it's God, the Allah who control ones fate and it is applicable to all aspects of Muslim's life. Muslim men look to Allah for his valuable guidance during the time struggle or uncertainty. And this belief is the actually in built with Muslim identity. This what they believe that adherence to religion has so much positive impact on sports in terms of values such as fair play and sportsman spirit, for them winning is not that important. It's the religion and Muslim identity which is the driving force behind them and sports is one of the medium to achieve that.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Sports participation as it was once performed by the holy Prophet (PBUH) is nothing less than a religious worship. This article did find out how young Muslim used physical activity and sport to adopt various aspects of spirituality and religiosity. It was quite evident from various responses and discussions held that sport sand physical activities was important in Muslims life where young Muslim can actively and consciously practice values of Islam. The respondents felt that their motivation to participate and get involved in sports and physical activities was largely due to the understanding these sporting activities honorable as they are line with their boarder religious faith and beliefs. Sports and physical activities as perceived with a point of view from spirituality and religiosity has a specified meaning and interpretations which different young Muslims feels that the value linked to the sport, in actually served many of purposes and it was used by different individuals in different ways. Playing sport is encouraged in Islam and Muslim majority countries and it was never against spirituality or Islamic teachings and spirits. Different authentic quotes and citations proves that Prophet (PBUH) did participated different sporting activities for example, swimming, archery, horse riding, and camel racing, walking, racing, wrestling . Sports and physical activities is not just a event rather it was

an opportunity to young Muslim which offered them much required physical and social space through which they could create and regulate their religious and spiritual beliefs. It was felt that physical bodies are of paramount importance which is integral part of their self and acts an anchor to perform their defined roles in the society, control their behaviors, expression and interaction. These social self are connected with their physical self, and sports played a significant role to integrate and correlate different aspects of their spiritual and religious life. And by devoting a significant amount of time to sports, Physical activities and the study of Islam, they are closer to the creator Allah.

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