

Family as the Pillar of Society: An Analysis of Ibn Sina's thoughts in *Al-Siyasah*

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Abstract

Ibn Sina (980–1037 AD), also known as Avicenna, is a prominent figure in the history of Islamic and global intellectual traditions, renowned for his mastery in diverse fields such as philosophy, medicine, and governance. Beyond his scientific and philosophical contributions, Ibn Sina held the position of vizier and demonstrated a profound interest in societal welfare, particularly emphasizing the family as the cornerstone of nation-building. This study examines his perspectives on family and governance through an analysis of his book *al-Siyasah*. Findings reveal that his views on family dynamics, morality, and leadership remain pertinent in addressing contemporary societal challenges. By revisiting Ibn Sina's intellectual legacy, this paper seeks to underline the relevance of classical Islamic thought in modern social discourse.

Keywords: Ibn Sina, Family Institution, Societal Welfare, Governance, *Al-Siyasah*.

Introduction

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) is a towering figure in the annals of Islamic scholarship, whose influence extended beyond the Muslim world to Western intellectual traditions. Born in Afshana near Bukhara in 980 AD, he demonstrated prodigious abilities from a young age, memorizing the Quran by the age of ten and mastering medicine and philosophy by his late teens. His intellectual contributions encompass a wide range of fields, including medicine, mathematics, astronomy, music, and poetry (Smith, 1980). Among his most notable works are *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine) and *Kitab al-Shifa'* (The Book of Healing), which solidified his reputation as a scholar of unparalleled depth (Goodman, 2006).

Although Ibn Sina is primarily celebrated for his contributions to philosophy and medicine, his role as a statesman and thinker on societal governance remains less explored. He served as a vizier, a position comparable to that of a prime minister, during his lifetime, providing him

with practical insights into governance and societal welfare. Central to his philosophy is the belief in the interconnectedness of individual, familial, and societal well-being. This paper focuses on his views concerning the family institution as articulated in *al-Siyasah*, emphasizing its role in fostering a prosperous society and state.

Brief Introduction to *Al-Siyasah*

Al-Siyasah is part of Ibn Sina's writings on ethics, political philosophy, and governance (Wan Suhaimi, 2008). In this text, he discusses the principles of ruling and ethical governance. The work *al-Siyasah* (translated as "On Governance" or "The Book of Politics") is one of his less commonly discussed texts, compared to his more famous works like *The Canon of Medicine* (*al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*) or *The Book of Healing* (*Kitab al-Shifa*).

The date of the composition of *al-Siyasa* is unclear (Idris, 2012). Gutas (1988) explained that this obscurity happens to most of Ibn Sina's work, involving "their number, nature, transmission, present state, and most important, their relationship to each other, both in time and subject matter, and to Avicenna's work in general". Gutas blames Ibn Sina because he rarely kept second copies of his commissioned pieces. A number of his works were lost in fires or damaged (Gutas, 1988).

Al-Siyasah has been edited by Louis Cheikho, Taysir Sheikh al-Ardhi al-Ardhi, Abd al-Amirz Shamsuddin, Fuad Abd al-Mun'im Ahmad, and Kamal Yaziji (Idris, 2012). Idris (2012) also mentioned that some scholars have discussed the text. Among them are Omar Farrukh, Afnan, Hanna al-Fakhury, Erwin I.J Rosenthal, Ridwan al-Sayyid, Hisham Nashabat, and Fauzi M. Najjar.

Al-Siyasah is arranged in six chapters as follows:

- i) *Ikhtilaf Aqdar al-Nas wa Tafawut Ahwaluhum Sabab Baqaihim* (The Difference among Men as a Cause of their Survival)
- ii) *Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Nafsah* (On Self-Management)
- iii) *Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Dakhlah wa Kharjah* (On Man's Management of His Income and Expenditure)
- iv) *Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Ahlah* (On a Husband's Management of his Wife)
- v) *Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Waladah* (On Man's Management of His Children)
- vi) *Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Khadamah* (On Man's Management of His Servants)

In *al-Siyasah*, Ibn Sina discusses the principles of ruling and ethical governance emphasizing the moral responsibilities of rulers and the importance of justice, virtue, and the welfare of the state (Zainal Abidin, 1974). Based on his ideas in *al-Siyasah*, it clearly showed that Ibn Sina's political philosophy is deeply intertwined with his ethical and practical teachings. He categorized philosophy into theoretical and practical sciences, with the latter addressing morality (*'ilm al-akhlaq*), household management (*'ilm tadbir al-manzil*), and political governance (*'ilm al-siyasah*) (Nurizal, 2016). He argued that a harmonious society begins with individual moral discipline, extending to family structures and culminating in effective governance. His insights provide a holistic framework for understanding the symbiotic relationship between family and state.

The Family as the Foundation of Society

Ibn Sina viewed the family as the cornerstone of social and political order. He argued that the health of a society is determined by the well-being of its families. In *Kitab al-Siyasah*, he emphasized that harmonious familial relationships foster moral virtues, a sense of justice, and collective responsibility, all these qualities are indispensable for societal stability.

For Ibn Sina, the family was not merely a private domain but an institution with public significance. He likened the role of the head of the family to that of a ruler, whose governance shapes the character and behaviour of its members. By fulfilling their responsibilities within the family, individuals contribute to the larger goals of social harmony and national prosperity (Zainal Abidin, 1979).

In today's world, the erosion of family structures is often linked to broader societal challenges, such as youth delinquency, mental health crises, and rising crime rates (Nuraimirah et al., 2019; Jagdeep, 2021)

Ibn Sina's emphasis on the family as the first institution of socialization underscores the need for policies and programs that strengthen familial bonds. Initiatives such as parental education, work-life balance measures, and community support networks reflect the enduring importance of his vision.

Components of a Prosperous Family According to Ibn Sina

Based on his discussion in *al-Siyasah*, it can be concluded that several components are essential in building a prosperous family:

1) Having A Good Spouse

Ibn Sina regarded marriage as sacred and essential for societal continuity. He emphasized mutual respect, adaptation, and love between spouses as the foundation of a harmonious household.

Ibn Sina discusses a quality of a good wife in *al-Siyasah*. He states that a good wife can act as a husband's partner in managing his property and guarding his wealth. She should also take care of the household when he is away. Therefore, a wife must be a good woman.

A good woman according to Ibn Sina is she who has characteristics such as a wise and religious woman (*al-aqilat al-dayyinat*) intelligent and bright (*al-hayiyat al-fatana*), lovely and fertile (*al-wadud al-walud*), cooperative (*al-mutawi'a al-inan*), a good adviser (*al-nasihah al-jaib*), faithful woman (*al-aminah al-ghaib*), nice woman (*al-khafifah*), a good manager of the house (*tuhassinu tadbiraha*), she relieves her husband's anxiety through her gentleness (*tusalli humumahu bi latifi madaratih*) (Idris, 2012).

Ibn Sina also highlighted the importance of preserving the dignity of both partners. He emphasized that a husband must first uphold his own honour to set a good example for his wife, as this is essential for earning her respect. Simultaneously, he should take care to protect and uphold his wife's honour as well.

2) *Provision of Shelter*

A secure and stable residence is vital for a harmonious family life. This aligns with Islamic teachings, which obligate the husband to provide adequate housing for his family. Ibn Sina emphasized that a home provides not only physical shelter but also a space for nurturing familial bonds and instilling moral values.

Ibnu Sina described a home that functions as the centre of family life encourages a husband to return promptly after work, enables a wife to manage the household and care for her husband's property more efficiently, and provides children with a nurturing environment where they learn to respect their parents and support them in their later years.

3) *Leadership in the Family*

The husband, as the designated head of the family, bears the responsibility of providing for and guiding family members. Ibn Sina advocated for exemplary leadership, urging husbands to maintain their own honour and dignity as a means of earning respect within the household. He outlined three key principles for preserving a wife's honour: regulating her behaviour, ensuring modest attire, and avoiding unnecessary jealousy.

4) *Fostering Warmth and Love*

Love and compassion are integral to a thriving family. Ibn Sina highlighted the importance of mutual understanding and adaptation between spouses, particularly during the early years of marriage, which he identified as a critical period.

In fostering good behaviour in a child, Ibn Sina advised parents against using harsh or painful force. When caring for small children throughout the day, parents need to handle them with great gentleness. He believed that hitting or hurting children could harm their emotions and lead to negative feelings or prejudices toward their parents.

He emphasized patience and tolerance as essential qualities for overcoming conflicts and fostering familial harmony.

5) *Financial Responsibility and Expense Management*

Ibn Sina urged the head of the family to fulfil the family's living needs. This responsibility can be fulfilled effectively if the head of the family has a stable source of income to meet the expenses and necessities of its members.

Ibn Sina stressed the significance of managing household finances prudently. He recommended dividing income into three parts: for daily expenses, charitable contributions, and savings for emergencies. Effective financial management, he argued, is pivotal for maintaining household stability and preventing crises.

6) *Moral Development of Children*

Ibn Sina underscored the importance of inculcating noble morals in children from an early age. His commitment to nurturing the morals of young children is evident in his advice regarding the careful selection of a nursing mother. According to Ibn Sina, newborns should be breastfed until the age of two. If the mother is unable to breastfeed due to health issues, a nursing mother should be sought. Importantly, the woman chosen should possess noble

character, as the milk that nourishes the baby also influences the development of the child's morals.

He advocated for careful selection of wet nurses and educators, as their influence significantly shapes a child's character. Parents, he insisted, must provide a nurturing environment to ensure the holistic development of their offspring.

Conclusion

Ibn Sina's reflections on family governance in *al-Siyasah* offer valuable insights into fostering societal and national welfare. Its emphasis on justice, balance, and education resonates with contemporary discussions on leadership and societal harmony.

By addressing contemporary issues such as marital discord, financial mismanagement, and moral decline, his ideas underscore the enduring relevance of classical Islamic thought in modern contexts. Strengthening family institutions, as Ibn Sina argued, is a prerequisite for cultivating prosperous communities and states.

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