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Research Article

Islamic Ruling of Consuming Meat-Birds that Go through the Contemporary Scalding and Evisceration Process

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Abstract. Islam requires the consumption of meat that has been sourced from an animal that has been slaughtered, processed, and delivered according to the Islamic requirements. The lawful status of meat is notified to the slaughtering only. The processes of plucking feathers, removing entrails, etc., all have to be taken into consideration before the meat can be deemed lawful (*halāl*) and wholesome (*tayyab*). The nominal process in Islam to avoid impurity and contamination of the meat is to remove the entrails before immersing the chicken in hot water to soften the feathers for plucking. However, the current industrial practice switches this process. The mechanical plants are designed to immerse the chicken in hot water and pluck the feathers before gutting the chicken.

This has given rise to inquiries and doubts to the Muslim consumers whether the meat of such birds are lawful or not. In order to provide an Islamic response to this issue, this paper is looking into, first the scientific and industrial perspective of the scalding and evisceration processes. Second, the paper is evaluating the scientific-industrial practice in the light of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*).

Keywords: Fiqh, Islamic Ruling, Meat-Birds

INTRODUCTION

Scalding and Evisceration in Poultry Processing

Poultry processing involves several meticulous steps crucial for ensuring the quality and safety of the final product. Two of the most vital stages in this process are scalding and evisceration, each playing distinct roles in preparing poultry for consumption. After slaughtering, scalding involves immersing the bird in hot water to facilitate feather removal. This process is governed by specific temperature and duration parameters tailored to different bird types and their feather characteristics.

S.M. Jafari and others deliberate that scalding serves to loosen the feathers for easy plucking. It is essential to remove the chicken's entrails before scalding to mitigate the risk of impurities contaminating the meat during this process. Prolonged exposure to hot water can cause impurities to permeate the meat, making it impure and resistant to cleansing through washing. This occurs due to the opening of the meat's pores under heat, facilitating penetration of impurities from the entrails into the meat (Jafari et al., 2022). In contrast, the industrial plants are designed to immerse the chicken in hot water for easy plucking before removing the entrails. This makes it necessary to understand the common methods of scalding used by the industry in order to investigate whether the current industrial practice leads to contamination and impurity of the meat.

Three common scalding methods are utilized in poultry processing (Jafari et al., 2022):

1. Soft Scalding (or Semi-Scalding):
 - Water temperatures: 50–53°C
 - Duration: 1–3 minutes
 - Suitable for: Young broilers and turkeys
2. Medium Scalding (or Sub-Scalding):
 - Water temperatures: 54–58°C
 - Duration: 1–2 minutes
 - Suitable for: Mature birds with tightly attached feathers
3. Hard Scalding:
 - Water temperatures: 60–63°C

- Duration: 0.75–1.5 minutes
- Suitable for Waterfowl such as ducks and geese

Evisceration involves the meticulous removal of internal organs from the bird's body. This step is crucial for maintaining meat's cleanliness and safety. If the birds are placed in hot water before the evisceration process, there's a risk of contaminating the meat with impurities. This risk arises primarily due to the potential rupture of organs when exposed to boiling temperatures for an extended period (Knowles, et al., 2022). To minimize the risk of contamination, the temperature of the hot water must not exceed 52 degrees Celsius (125.6 degrees Fahrenheit), and the chicken should not be submerged for more than two and a half minutes. Proper evisceration procedures, where the organs are removed intact before any exposure to hot water, are crucial for minimizing contamination risks during poultry processing (Lelieveld et al., 2023).

We can see here that in theory, the food scientists clearly understand the risk of contamination if the meat-birds are exposed to hot water before evisceration. The high temperature of the water and long duration of immersing can rupture the entrails and lead to permeating the impurities into the meat from within the chicken. The industrial practice seems to ignore this concern of the scientists because the plants are designed to scald before evisceration. However, to avoid compromising the cleanliness and safety of the meat, the scientists pay attention to the temperature of water and the duration of immersion. The higher the temperature of water, the lower the duration of immersion. The duration is longer up to 3 minutes if the temperature of the water is lower (50-53°C).

Scalding and Evisceration in Islamic Jurisprudence

Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn Humam (d. 861AH) is the pioneer when it comes to the discussion of impurity and purity of meat. His words in this matter is the pivot on which later jurists (fuqahā) based their discussions. In his magnum opus *Fathul-Qadīr*, he deliberated that if the chicken is immersed in boiling water before evisceration for the purpose of plucking the feathers, such chicken will never be pure according to the majority of Hanafi jurists. He then mentioned the opposing opinion of Abu Yusuf who deemed such chicken to be pure provided the chicken is boiled three times with drying the chicken after each boiling. Ibn Humam in response to Abu Yusuf's opinion elaborated on the cause ('illah) behind the impurity of the chicken in question. He wrote that due to the boiling temperature of the water, the impurity within the organs permeates the meat of the chicken. Based on this cause, it became popular that the meat of the plucked chicken (samīṭ) in Egypt was impure and not purifiable. Ibn Humam clarified that the cause he stated is not established

for the plucked chicken of Egypt for two reasons. One, the hot water in which the chicken was immersed in Egypt did not reach the boiling point. Second, the immersion time was not long enough to allow the permeating of the inner impurity into the meat of the chicken. In Egyptian practice, the chicken was immersed for a period that only allowed the heat to reach the surface of the skin to soften the pores of the feathers for plucking. Ibn Humam also advised that it is preferable to wash the plucked chicken thrice because the water in which the chicken was immersed made the surface of the chicken impure. The people were not wary of this. And this was the advice of the scholars when it came to

chicken and its feathers including the plucked chicken of Egypt (al-samīṭ). (Kamal al-Din Ibn Humam, Fathul-Qadīr 1:211)

If we read between the lines, the conflict between Imam Abu Yusuf and majority Hanafi jurists is reconcilable. Imam Abu Yusuf's opinion pertains to meat which is already impure. In order to purify it, he suggested boiling the impure meat three times and after each time the boiled meat had to be drained and dried. Coming back to the scalding process, if the chicken is immersed in boiling water for a long time leading to permeating of internal impurity into the meat, such chicken will become impure. In order to purify the meat that became impure due to scalding in boiling water, Imam Abu Yusuf's opinion can be applied as a solution.

Another important point, Ibn Humam highlights is the doubt and confusion of the people in Egypt in his time regarding the plucked meat bird (al-samīṭ). Just because the chicken was immersed in the hot water for plucking before gutting in Egyptian practice, people started to deem the plucked chicken impure. Ibn Humam clarified that the cause ('illah) behind the impurity ruling was not established in Egyptian plucked chicken. This is because the hot water in which the chicken was immersed did not reach the boiling temperature and the duration of immersion was only sufficient for the heat to reach the surface of the skin and not the internal entrain. This scenario is quite similar to our current Muslim consumers. The laymen just with the partial knowledge of an Islamic ruling (hukm) make their own conclusions. They do not care whether the cause ('illah) behind the ruling is fully established or not. The processing steps i.e. scalding before gutting is not the real cause ('illah) behind the impurity ruling, rather its the immersing in boiling hot water for long duration consequencing the heat to reach the inner entrails of the meat-bird.

The last crucial point Ibn Humam shedded light on is washing the chicken thrice after scalding. Often people are not wary of this. The hot water in which the chicken is immersed is impure due to the impurities from the feathers. So once the chicken's feathers are plucked after taking out from the hot water, it should be washed thrice to wash off any impurities left on its skin surface.

Analysis and Resolution

We have seen both the Industrial practice perspective and the Islamic Jurisprudence perspective of scalding and evisceration. Both perspectives show a common concern which is meat safe for consumption free of any impurity and contamination. The parameters set by both to achieve the objective of safe and pure meat are in harmony as well. Ibn Humam's text written in 9th Hijri century is emphasising the main cause of impurity and contamination to be immersion in boiling temperature water for a long duration. Long duration of immersion allows the heat to reach the inner organs of the chicken that can result in permeating the impurities into the meat. Interestingly, taking this into consideration, the current industrial scalding methods make sure that the water temperature does not reach the boiling point. They also control the duration of immersion according to the temperature of the water and also wash the chicken after plucking the feathers to make sure no impurities are left on the skin surface.

We also see in this issue that science is supplementing Islamic Jurisprudence rather than opposing it. As a tool, it is assisting with the development of the parameters that facilitate the application of the

Islamic ruling (hukm) in a logical manner. Science in scalding is facilitating to maintain the heat of the water below boiling temperature and at the same time providing water temperatures that can ease the plucking of different types of meat-bird feathers. It is also providing a safe duration of immersion that does not allow the heat to reach the inner entrails of the meat-bird. A recent fatwa issued by the Darul Iftā of Jamia Uloom al-Islamiyah Binori Town included the scientific parameter in their fatwa stating that the consumption of the chicken is permitted if the water temperature for immersing is kept below 52 degrees Celsius and the chicken is not kept immersed for more than two and a half minutes. (Jamia Uloom Al Islamiyyah Binori Town, Fatwa n.d.) This approach makes the fatwa clear and applicable.

In our recent visit to a chicken plant in New Zealand, we saw a scalding process that first immersed the slaughtered chicken first in 40°C water to wash off the impurities from the feathers, then immersed the chicken in 59°C water to soften the pores of the feathers before the chicken went into plucking machine. Once the chicken came out from the plucking machine, it was washed with water to clean off any impurities on the skin surface. Both immersions were for 90 seconds each. Then after this the chicken went through the gutting process.

In resolution, we can resort to the cause ('illah) explained by Ibn Humam behind the impurity ruling of the chicken immersed in hot water before gutting. If this cause is established the meat-bird will be impure and contaminated for consumption. The cause is: Immersion of the chicken in boiling water for a long

duration that will lead the heat to reach the inner organs resulting in permeating the inner impurities into the meat. The parameters provided in the three scalding methods assure the cause of impurity will not be established in meat-birds that go through scalding before gutting. As a precautionary measure, the meat-birds after scalding should be washed to clean off any impurity on the skin surface. And Almighty Allah knows the best.

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