

Neglected Rights of the Wife

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Abstract: Prior to Islam, wives were deprived of their rightful status. Even amongst Muslims who have clear guidelines about the rights of wives prescribed in the Qur'an, a wife's status is still today like that of a worthless object. Even today in some of the underdeveloped countries, the status of women is deplorable.

1. Responsibilities commanded by Allah for the husband to fulfill:

i. To "keep the promise or promises he made to the wife at the time he married her." This is an order of Rasulallah(S).

ii. He cannot order her to do anything that is against religion. A Hadith says:

"No obedience is due to creatures in disobedience of the Creator."

iii. The husband must exercise patience and be prepared to listen to her advice in every situation. Rasulallah(S) listened to the advice of his wives in matters ranging from the smallest to the greatest.

iv. Husband must respect his wife and pay attention to her needs so that she will return the respect.

v. Husband must control his passions and act in a moderate manner especially in the context of sexual intercourse. Remember that Allah has placed between you and her "affection and mercy" (30:21), not the gratification of your every lust; and that Rasulallah(S) advised young men to marry "because it casts down the gaze and walls up the genitals," not in order to stimulate sexual enjoyments.

vi. If she works outside the house, it is praiseworthy for the husband to hire house help to relieve her from too heavy a burden.

vii. Husband must protect his wife's honor and not place her in situations where it is compromised or belittled. Rasulallah(S) says that Allah will not ever let him enter Jannah who cares little or who compromises his wife's privacy. This includes the husband's brother, uncle, and nephew, let alone non-related friends, neighbors, and complete strangers.

2. A woman is a gift of Allah:

It is Islam alone which has granted an exalted status to the wife and conferred superior rights to her, compared to other religions. The West, especially Zionist Jews and Vatican funded NGOs, carry a vicious campaign against Islam and allege that Muslim women are deprived of their basic human rights but in reality their true agenda is to destroy the Islamic family system. In the name of liberalism and feminism they want to exploit Muslim women as “commodity of the Baz’ar” to fulfill their industrial and economic objectives. In their mission, anti-Islamic forces have been successful to a large extent with the help of the corrupt media and the entertainment industry who form part of and greatly influence popular culture.

A woman is a gift of Allah as she plays the role of a mother, sister, wife or daughter; therefore, she must be respected. She is the designer of the family tree of the future generations therefore the man must honour and cherish her. However, chauvinists tend to neglect the rights of the wife on her husband and don't discuss the issues related to women. Rights of the wife, according to the Shariah, can be traced in several primary works of Islamic literature. This topic requires in-depth discussion but due to the nature of an article, and to make it focused, only a few issues have been discussed.

The Qur’an says: [1]

“..... And consort with them with kindness.....”

Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar us Sadiq (as) informs: [2]

“One of the characteristics of the Anbiya is that they were all kind towards their wives”.

Rasulullah(S) says: [3]

“The best believer is one who has the best conduct with his family and is most kind to them.”

The husband should not confine his wife within the four walls of the house. She should be taken to her parents and relatives from time to time, provided these visits do not bring any nuisance to the peace of his house.

3. Wife: a Friend or a Servant?

In an Islamic family set up, a man certainly enjoys a superior position over his wife, but it does not give him the right to treat her like a servant and force her to do household chores beyond her capacity. If the husband insists that his wife does the work against her will, this would sour their relationship and ultimately their matrimonial life. A wife is not bound to wash her husband's clothes, cook meals or clean the house. If she does any or all these responsibilities for attaining eternal reward, the husband should be grateful to her for these acts and must acknowledge it. The husband should realize that his wife is also a human being. Marrying a woman is not hiring a servant or a slave-girl, but a selection of a life partner, the best companion and a sincere friend who would be able to live with him for the rest of his life. A husband should care for her and her legal desires. A husband is not the master of his wife; on the contrary, a woman has certain rights upon her husband. The Qur’an educates: [4]

“And women have rights similar to the rights of men in a just manner”.

It is desirable that the husband should strive hard to increase his income and thereby arrange for a better living condition for his wife. It is the duty of the husband that when he feels his wife is in a state of distress, anger or sadness that he tries to understand her as a friend. In order to bring peace and prosperity in the married life, both the wife and husband should take care of each other's sentiments and emotions. The anger of husband brings to the wife nothing but tension, depression and confusion. Similarly, the anger of the wife brings to the husband nothing but disappointment, pain, and bitterness. It is, therefore, advisable to both husband and wife to be patient and kind in their dealings with each other.

4. Trust your wife:

The husband should not spy on his wife and track her every movement. This brings nothing but distrust in the union. Rasulallah (S) says: [5]

"A husband must have good faith in his wife and must trust her".

According to the Talim of Islam, trust (Amanah) has a very broad sense. This word contains an ocean of meaning, but underneath it all is the sense of responsibility and accountability for one's actions before Allah. Trust connotes that you protect the rights of the one who shared their secret with you. And that you don't disclose such information to others. This expression provides enough guidance to a male spouse to keep faith in his wife and hold her to be trustworthy. The husband should never level charges of corrupt practices against his wife without any clear and tangible evidence. The relationship between a husband and wife is based purely on faith and mutual understanding. Any baseless suspicion and accusation against each other would ruin their peaceful relationship.

Once a Bedouin came to the court of Rasulallah(S) and submitted: [6]

"Rasulallah(S), my wife has delivered a child who is dark in complexion and does not resemble me. I am sure it is not my child".

Rasulallah(S) questioned:

"Do you own some camels?"

He replied:

"Yes, I have many camels".

Rasulallah(S) asked:

"What is the colour of those camels?"

He answered:

"They are brown"

Rasulallah(S) questioned:

"Are there some grey camels among them?"

He answered:

"Yes, a few of them are grey".

Rasulallah(S) said:

"Tell me how those brown camels gave birth to these grey camels?"

He replied:

"Some camel among the ancestors of my brown camels would have been of grey colour and these grey camels might have taken their origin from that particular camel ..."

Rasulullah(S) pronounced his ruling:

“Similarly, it is possible that anyone among your ancestors would have been of a darker complexion and your child might have inherited the genetic influence.”

A husband should express his full confidence and trust in his wife and, to prove this, he should hand over the control of the house to her so that she feels ownership of it.

Rasulullah(S) has said: [7]

“Woman is the guardian and caretaker of her husband’s house and Allah will take an account from her in this regard on the Day of Judgment.”

5. Directions of Helping Wife in Domestic affairs:

A husband must help his wife in the household chores and follow the Nabawi Sirah. Rasulallah (S) used to participate in the housework. He would at times even help his servants. A husband must also do his best to please his wife. This will bring affection into the relationship. It will also aid in building a strong relationship for a long time and remove the bitterness of unpleasant happenings. A woman has an important role in matters which contribute to strengthening the ties between the family members.

Once Rasulallah (S) visited the house of Ali (as) and Fatimah (as) and saw that Ali (as) was arranging the pulses and Fatimah (as) was busy cooking. Upon observing this Rasulallah (S) remarked: [8]

“Ali, I do not speak except what is revealed unto me. Anyone who helps his wife in her domestic affairs obtains a reward of one year of ‘ibadah equal to the amount of hair on his body. This year of ‘ibadah will be as if he has fasted during the day and offered Salaat during the night. Allah will reward him equally to all the patient ones, Dawood (as) and Essa (as).”

According to a Nabavi tradition: [9]

“O Ali! Whoever helps his wife and children in their domestic affairs and does not consider it an obligation upon them, Allah will count him among the Shuhada. The reward of 1000 Shuhada is written in his book of deeds (by the Malaek) each day and night. His one step bears the reward of one Hajj and one Umrah.”

Another Hadith says: [10]

“One who stays in his house and helps his family members in their domestic affairs, his reward is better than the one who has performed ‘ibadah for 1000 years, performed 1000 Haj, 1000 Umrah, released 1000 slaves, participated in 1000 battles along with Rasulallah(S), visited 1000 patients, spent 1000 Jumuah in ‘ibadah, participated in 1000 funeral processions, fed 1000 hungry people, clothed 1000 beggars, distributed 1000 horses in the way of Allah, gave 1000 Dinars (gold coin) to the poor, recited 1000 times each the Taurat, the ‘injeel and the Qur’an, freed 1000 prisoners and donated 1000 sheep to the poor. And the one, who helps his family members in their house affairs, sees his place in Jannah before departing from this world.”

A Hadith provides tidings: [11]

“To serve one’s family members helps in erasing the capital crimes and cools down the Az’ab.”

6. The Rights Of Wife Over Her Husband

Ishaq ibn Ammar questioned Abi Abdillah Al-Imam Jafar us-Sadiq (as): [12]

“What is the right of a woman over her husband?”

The Imam (as) replied:

“That she be fed, clothed and if she commits any error, he must forgive her.”

A Hadith states: [13]

“Anyone who has been provided with bounties but is strict and miserly with his wife and children is not from us.”

The principal duty of a husband is to provide food, clothing, shelter and all other basic needs of his wife according to his ability and capacity, as Qur’an says: [14]

“House them where you live, in accordance with your means, and do not harass them to put them in straits...”

According to the commandments, the wife is entitled to a minimum of four sets of clothes in a year, besides her other necessary needs. All this should be done with love and kindness by which their relationship will grow and become stronger. A Hadith sheds light in this regard: [15]

“The best men are those who live with their wives in harmony and worst are those who treat them harshly.”

Traditions of Ahl al-Bait (as) provide us with divine guidance that the husband should please his wife by offering presents. A husband should be generous towards house expenses. If one is financially well off yet acts niggardly when it comes to house expenses, the Naimah and Barakah showered by Allah on him would be withdrawn. Al Imam al-Sajjad, Ali ibn al Husain Zain ul-Abideen (as) declares: [16]

“If my family wishes to eat meat, I would be far happier to provide them with that rather than release a slave from the bond of slavery.”

Once a person approached Rasulallah (S) and presented two Dinars to buy a horse for Jih’ad. He instructed him: [17]

“With this amount you should provide some relief to your family”

A Hadith guides in this regard: [18]

“The more a Mumin loves his wife the more happy life they lead, to the extent that their Im’an shall be more firm”.

Another Hadith enlightens: [19]

“Whoever brings some gifts for his family members he enjoys the same status before Allah as the one who has helped the oppressed.”

Rasulallah (S) has explained the sequence of gift distribution: [20]

“First he should give to his daughters then to his sons. Whoever keeps his daughter happy will get a reward equal to the one who has freed a slave from the progeny of al- Ismail (as) and whoever keeps his sons happy his reward is like the one who has cried due to the fear of Allah and the reward of the one who cries due to the fear of Allah is a Jannah full of bounties.”

If the woman brings anything from her father’s house or prepares something and presents it to the husband, he should appreciate it to please her. The husband should never reject or discard or criticize any gift offered by his wife. Likewise, when a husband returns from a tour he should

bring some gifts for his wife. Consequently, a simple initiative on the part of the husband will win over the heart of his wife.

A husband should always support his wife so that she may feel a sense of security. Also, he must guard her chastity and modesty while overlooking her minor faults and errors which are inevitable. Some people enquired from Rasulallah(S) regarding the rights of a wife over her husband. He answered: [21]

“He should overlook her minor faults and if she commits a major mistake then he should forgive her.”

We all know that human life is not just confined to food and drink. Rather, love, affection and sacrifice are the emotions which take humanity to great heights and form the core of its civilization and culture. A woman expects to see the smiling face of her husband when he returns to his house. The learned author of “al Kafi” elaborates this point with reference to Rasulallah(S): [22]

A Hadith says: [23]

“The best among you is the one who observes the rights of his wife in the best possible manner and I am the best among you to observe the rights of my wives.”

Among the other rights which a woman enjoys over her husband is that he should fulfill her physical needs. The importance of these rights can be gauged from the basic expectation of the fairer sex that her husband treats her kindly and respectfully. He must give due importance to her rights and observe them.

7. Respect of the wife

Rasulallah (S) informs: [24]

“The words of a husband, who tells his wife, I love you truly, never leave her heart.”

He also says: [25]

“Whoever is our friend will express his gentleness to his spouse more”.

Rasulallah (S) says: [26]

“None would respect women except the magnanimous ones, and none would insult them except the ignorable. Whoever insults his family would lose happiness in his life.”

If a husband respects his wife, she will return that and so the relationship will continue to grow stronger.

Al Imam al-Sadiq (as) says: [27]

“Whoever marries, must respect his wife.”

Rasulallah (S) says: [28]

“There is no joy better than good behaviour.”

He further teaches: [29]

“Good behaviour is a part of religion and a sign of the utmost level of Im’an.”

Sirah Literature guides the husbands to show special consideration to their wives. Study the following Ahadith: [30]

i). “Jibra’el (as) has forwarded several recommendations in regard to a wife that I thought maybe Talaq would not be allowed”.

ii). “Laanah upon him who does not care for the expenses of his family”.

iii). “Woman is a bride and one who gets her should not lose her”.

Rasulullah(S) directed: [31]

“Women are like delicate glass so behave with them gently”.

This means that she will not be exactly bent the way you want her to be. She has her own way of working, which might be different from yours. Therefore, the husband should not try to mold immediately but groom the wife gradually if something needs correction. This does not mean neglecting of teaching the Shariah instructions if needed, but it means not trying to change her nature, by force.

Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) says: [32]

i). *“A woman has nothing to give except herself”*

ii). *“A woman is a flower and not very powerful”*

Al-Imam Jafar us-Sadiq (as) says: [33]

“Allah blesses that person whose behaviour with his family is pleasant and Allah has given his wife in his hand”.

8. Care of wife during Pregnancy:

If the wife falls sick, the husband should dedicatedly look after her. He should take extra pain in nursing and feeding her. This act will definitely win over the heart of the wife. Duration of the pregnancy is a very sensitive period for the mother and baby’s life. This period cannot be regarded or treated as ordinary. Once the pregnancy has started, the husband is also given great responsibility. Al-Imam Jafar us-Sadiq (as) says: [34]

“The food of a fetus is provided by the nourishment that the mother receives.”

A great responsibility rests upon the husband who should do his utmost to provide essential food for his wife. It is also a great responsibility of the husband to provide a peaceful, lovely and lively atmosphere through kindness and all possible means. A husband, who treats his wife well, will be rewarded by Allah.

A Hadith says: [35]

“The best man is one who treats his wife well and I, amongst you, am an example with regard to the best treatment to my wives”.

It is the duty of the husband, religious and human, to do their utmost for their pregnant wife to provide medical treatment, care and facilities for easy delivery. After delivery, the child’s father is bound to provide expenses for the nursing mother, as Qur’an instructs: [36]

“And their (nursing mothers’) maintenance and clothing must be borne by the father of the child with kindness.....”

Several Ulama have unanimously agreed on the issue that it is the moral duty of the mother that she breastfeed her child. If she wishes and asks for monetary benefits as a reward then the husband should pay her.

9. Maintenance of the wife:

A husband is legally as well as morally bound after Nikah to spend on his wife in accordance with his financial ability as Qur'an instructs: [37]

"Let the man spend according to his means, and he whose means are limited should spend of what Allah has given him. Allah does not burden a soul beyond what He has given it".

Qur'an guides us in this regard very beautifully that one should spend according to their means if he wishes to spend life peacefully, otherwise tension is the fortune. Every husband has the obligation to provide for the sustenance of his wife. She should be provided with adequate food, a comfortable home, suitable clothes and other basic amenities of life.

He should always bear in mind that this woman has left her parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends and has joined him to share all the ups and downs of life. Therefore, it is his duty to look after her basic needs and comforts. Those husbands who never care for their wives sustenance will be dealt with harshly in the Court of Allah. The Qur'an says: [38]

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means."

10. The rights of wife explained by the Imam of Ahl al-Bait (as):

"Risalah al-Haquq" (Book of Rights) is one of the most well-known works, dictated by Al-Imam Ali ibn al-Husain Zain ul-Abideen (as). In this Risalah, the Imam explained in clear terms all the Huquq (rights) which a human being is expected to fulfill in his life. Only the translation of "Rights of Wife" is presented: [39]

"You should know that Allah has made your wife for your tranquility and comfort (in worry) and a friend and a shield (against sins). Likewise, it is compulsory upon either of you to thank Allah for your spouse and to know that your partner is in favour of Allah upon you. And it is obligatory to have good fellowship with this favour of Allah (your wife), and to respect her and being kind to her although your (the husband's) rights upon her are greater and her obedience to you is more biding in your likes and dislikes so long as it is not a sin. So she has the right to love and fellowship, and a place of repose (a house). So that natural desires may be fulfilled, and this in itself is a great duty. And there is no power except Allah."

It is one of the rights of the wife upon her husband that he satisfies his wife's physical needs. The Shariah has not prescribed any limit for this, but he has to ensure that a woman's minimum sexual requirements are met so that she may not be inclined towards another person or commit a sexual crime in order to fulfill the need. There are certain men who, after marriage, do not take care of the sexual needs of their wives. Such men are the real criminals and they will face severe punishment as they became the cause of crime. Allah has granted women the right to conjugal relations with their husbands, therefore, men should find jobs where they don't have to live separately from their wife. Moreover, the husband should never share the secrets of his wife with others.

Rasulullah(S) warned: [40]

"Worst is the person before Allah who goes to his wife and then discloses her secrets and lowers her status in the eyes of others".

The husband should be neat and clean as he expects the same from his wife.

11. Torturing the wife is not allowed:

It is a fact that torture on the wife is more common in the first world rather than the East. Western media projects that Islam allows beating wife and often presents torture cases in which Muslim clerics (the mentally sick ones) damaged their wives faces. Brutal acts of clergy have no concern with Islam and its glorious Talim. Otherwise, it is a noted fact that in the western world where drinking culture is on the peak, the majority of the drunkards and addicts beat their wives brutally. Talim of Islam is very clear on this issue and a Hadith says: [41]

“I am astonished at a man who beats his wife, whereas it is he himself, more than his wife, who deserves a beating. O people! Do not beat your women with sticks because such an act has Qisas (reprisal).”

Therefore one should never torture his wife physically or otherwise because whoever does so has violated the norms set by Allah and His Rasul(S).

Ahadith says:

i). “Is there anyone among you who beats her wife and also embraces her?”

ii). “The husband should not beat up his wife without her committing a most severe crime.”

12. The Wife’s right to work

According to Shariah, it is permissible for a Muslim woman to go out for work providing the following conditions:

- i. The job is deemed permissible in Shariah and does not include anything that contradicts legal rulings.*
- ii. The woman guarantees safety for her person, chastity and religion (from temptation).*
- iii. The job suits the woman's physical and psychological nature.*
- iv. Consequently, a woman's work should not contradict Birr (righteousness) or oppose her guardian's responsibility over her.*

Sayyidna Jabir bin Abdullah al-Ansari (ra) reported: [42]

My maternal aunt was divorced, and she intended to pluck her dates [from palm trees]. A person scolded her for having come out (during her waiting period). She came to Rasulullah(S) and he told her: “Certainly you can pluck (dates) from your palm trees, for perhaps you may give out charity or do an act of kindness.”

Shariah established that it is permissible for a wife to work with her husband’s permission. If a wife goes out for work without her husband’s explicit or implicit permission, she will be blameworthy. There is no contradiction between a wife’s legal right to work and her husband’s right to prevent her.

No one, except the husband, can object to a sensible and adult woman’s legal right to engage in work that is lawful or to her right to be financially independent. For example, it is established in the Sharia that it is permissible for a husband to prevent his wife from performing Nafil Salaat and Sawm although they are both legally permitted. The husband’s unequivocal permission for his wife to go out for work involves him informing her of his consent, while his implicit permission involves showing no objection to her going out or if he had accepted to marry her while knowing that she is a working woman.

13. Concluding Discussion:

Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) says: [43]

“Certainly a woman is like a toy, whoever takes her (marries her), should advise her.”

Shahab Abd al-Rabbah relates: [44]

“I asked Abi Abdillah Al-Imam Jafar us-Sadiq (as) concerning the rights of a wife over her husband”.

The Imam (as) answered:

“He should fulfill all her basic necessities and must not terrorize her by becoming angry. If he follows this instruction and remains kind and affectionate towards her, then I swear by Allah, he has fulfilled his wife's rights.”

The husband should avoid discussing the beauty and merits of another woman apart from his wife. She would think that her husband may be inclined towards others and it is a poison that kills matrimonial relations. If a man cannot tolerate that his wife should wrongly be associated with another man, the wife also cannot tolerate the same. For a peaceful life, a husband should consider this couplet of Shaikh Sa'di of Shiraz. He advises: [45]

“Strictness and pampering are very good things but at appropriate times”.

For example, the surgeon cuts open the wound but it is for the benefit of that patient. Likewise, the husband should not be very strict or very soft. A middle path always brings good results.

The words of Al-Imam Jafar us-Sadiq (as) is the essence of my discussion: [46]

“May Allah bless a husband who maintains a good relationship with his wife because Allah has appointed husband to be the protector of his wife.”

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[44] "*Kit'ab al-Kafi*" is a famous Shi Hadith collection compiled by Muhammad Yaqub Kulayni. It is divided into three sections: *Usul al-Kafi*, which is concerned with the principle of religion, *Furu al-Kafi*, which is concerned with the details of religious law, and *Rawdat al-Kafi*, which is concerned with various religious aspects and includes some writings of the Imams

[45] Couplet, Muslehuddin b. Abdallah Shirazi (Shaikh Saadi of Shiraz), was a major Persian poet and prose writer of the medieval period and known as "Master of Speech". His "*Bust'an*" is considered as one of the 100 greatest books of all time according to Orientals.

[46] *An Imami Tradition*

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