

## Gender Discrimination and the Role of Spouses in a Family System: An Islamic Perspective

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**Abstract:** Gender discernment is generally related to woman and children. There is no doubt that women face inequality in access to obtain their rights and they come across multi-dimensional problems, but in eastern countries, men's rights are also being exploited when they are not getting their right status in a family as prescribed by Islam. It is the basic composition of the family system which is proven to be the foundation of a happy and prosperous family that men are the guardians of their families as *Qawwām* while women are obedient to them in following the right commands and fulfilling their responsibilities according to Islamic teachings within prescribed parameters mentioned by Islam. The present-day society is discriminating the status of both men and women; there is a misbalance among the rights and duties of these genders in a family resulting in the disturbance of standards and philosophy of fundamentals of family system. The current status for both the genders is the deprivation of their rightful status within their families, causing an unstable relationship with other family members. Moreover, they both are not aware of their responsibilities; hence they misuse their authorities towards their families. The discrimination against both the genders causes insecurity of a family system; it also creates inequality and injustice in society.

## **Introduction**

In the present age, gender discrimination is seen about to women only. There is no doubt that today's women are suffering a lot from gender discrimination and their rights are not being fulfilled in many aspects of life, they are being violated by men. Modern women are equal to men in every walk of life, but still, in our society, gender discrimination does not allow women with abilities and qualities to advance and move ahead for a better living. Gender discrimination with women is increasing in Pakistani society. It is particularly notorious in terms of domestic oppression and violence. Murder, activism, acid attacks, domestic abuse, mental torture. Despite entering the 21st century, our woman is vulnerable. Contrary to Islamic teachings, there is every bad form of gender inequality, found in our family system. Pakistan is ranked at the bottom of the list of countries with gender inequality regarding women.

Gender differences have been found in every era since day one. Every society is subjected to discrimination by dividing the gender roles of men and women. In every age, the social norms have changed depending on the cultural basis of the people. If women are suffering from gender discrimination at one side, there are many forms of oppression and exploitation with men on the other side also. What's more, they've never been mentioned.

In today's modern age, where gender equality is focused, and rights for women are being voiced on every platform, it is also worth noting that gender discrimination and division cover only women's gender. Why the male victim of gender discrimination is not being

highlighted. Although our society is called a men's society where men have social, economic and political status. But despite all this, men are falling short of the standards that considers to be their rights.

In Eastern families, the patriarchal mind set develops a sense of authority and dictatorship among men. They are misusing their powers in their family, hence losing their position in the family. A domestic ordinary woman who suffers from the oppression of men cannot give a man the position and privilege he has in the family. Plus, she dis-fellowshipped the children and family members from her male partners, resulting in losing the status of man's authority in a family with later time. It disturbs the peace and harmony of family. However, the working and educated woman is seen as defiant in comparison to the male. And she is indifferent to male's sovereignty and not restricted to his obedience. The economic independence makes the working woman more liberal and unconcerned about man's authority. The feminine slogans of rights and feminism are doing the trick for her and economic autonomy is raising her morale and she is constantly on the verge of rebellion. The above quoted claims can well be understood by considering the following examples: In many households, daughters are not allowed to study further after matric or intermediate, even if they are intelligent and want to continue their education. This is a clear example of gender discrimination against women. Despite having the ability, they are forced to stay home while their brothers are sent to universities without question. On the other hand, men also face gender-based pressure in society. For example, a man is expected to earn money, take care of the whole family, and never show weakness or

emotions. If he fails to meet these expectations, people start calling him “useless” or “not man enough.” These unfair demands also hurt men, but such issues are often ignored.

### **Men’s Gender Stereotype in Society**

In our society, there are many causes of inequality between men and women. Such as Hindu cultural impact, ignorance of religious doctrine, and lack of Islamic consciousness, etc. All such factors have influenced men's patriarchy behavior. One more reason for this attitude of men's gender stereotypes is in nurturing and training by family. It is not taught to our boys to respect women. They are brought up by observing the ill treatment of their elders to the women in their families and not respecting the opinion of women. In their training, women are not taught to be respectful, and they are reinforced by the feeling that boys are given priority over girls. Also, they are not taught their roles and responsibilities towards their family except to be bread earners. In eastern families’ boys are not educated with their accountabilities and liabilities as guardians, as a result, they are not fulfilling their duties towards their families as caretakers. Instead they forcefully get the authority over the women by their powers given to them by Allah and by society norms. They misuse their supremacy and authority in their own paradigm affected by norms and culture of society.

### **Women’s Gender Stereotype in Society**

On the other hand, women's education and economic independence, make them exposed to femininity and women’s rights. They seek the equality of men, regardless of their positions and status

in the family and society, in all walks of life. they practice to challenge the authority of men and at the same time, they want to ignore the obedience of men.

Our society not only lacks the Islamic education and training of man, but its half also goes far beyond Islamic understanding. It is one of the worst forms of gender discrimination for men that men are forcibly deprived of their status, unlike their actual religious, social and family standards.

### **Imbalance of Male and Female Status in Society**

Nowadays, in our society, men are not playing a positive role despite their capacities and are oblivious to their responsibilities. Women play a vital role in managing the house chores, with economical support also, they want to get sovereignty in their house management and decisions. Despite all efforts done by women to gain sovereignty, men want to maintain their sovereignty. They do not want to be forced or undermined by women in any way. In this regard, they are making every reasonable and unlawful effort to achieve their goals. They take forcible power and authority over women, subjugates them with physical and mental torture, and impose self-made rules and laws on domestic and family matters. For the maintenance of their superiority, they use their God-gifted capacities against women. These matters are funding new stories of gender discrimination and oppression in our family systems. In all these situations, men and women are the victims of mutual conflict, resulting in the destruction of the family system. The family members suffer a lot from this disastrous situation.

## **Islamic Balance Concept among Male and Female in a Family**

Islam's paradox is embroiled in the concept of family. Islam offers solutions to all these social conflicts and problems in the form of gender equality, as well as coded the family rules for balancing family issues. The stability of the family lies in the sovereignty of the man and the obedience of the woman.

Almighty Allah has made no distinction between man and woman. Man and woman are two branches growing from the same seed and two sexes that grow from the same soil. Allah Almighty has created both genders for a specific purpose. Both are honorable, having rights and duties, and deserve reward based on piety. Men and women are the people of Allah's family, according to their nature, have particular strengths, abilities, needs, and demands. Similarly, Allah has set the limits for both genders according to their abilities and tendencies. Islam demands discipline in all matters of life. All the functions, worship, and dealings of human nature are subjected to discipline. Family is the basic institution of human civilization where human birth, nurturing, upbringing, training, and protection is possible. The stability of society depends on the discipline of a family. It is the basic unit of society and is the first human capital institution to achieve the prosperity and affluence of the society.

Islam's gifted family system not only explains the nature of the relationship between the spouses, but also explains the spouse's status, responsibilities, powers, limitations and scopes in a family.

Islam determines the authority and limits of the spouses based on human nature and ability. It also considers the accountability of authorities and duties which have been assigned to both spouses. According to Islamic system of life, the rights and duties of both genders in a family must be performed with justice.

## Status of Men in Islam

The doctrine of Islam clearly mentions the division of authority in a family organization, on the capabilities and skills of the family spouses. Allah Almighty bestowed upon the man the responsibility of family leadership and supervision, conferring upon him special abilities and administrative skills. According to these skills and capabilities he should be a sponsor of all his family's material and spiritual needs, protection and earn a livelihood. That is why Allah has given men the status of a *Qawwām*. The Quran describes it:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا نَفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالٍ﴾<sup>1</sup>

Translation: Men are in charge of women by (right of) what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend (for maintenance) from their wealth.

The status of a man is like a ruler for a family that guarantees family safety, supervision and sponsorship. Here the word *Qawwām* is used for man, who is responsible for the family. The word *Qawāmmūn* is plural which means safety and supervision. As stated in the Qur'ān:

﴿كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ﴾<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>- Qur'ān 4:34.

<sup>2</sup>- Qur'ān 5:8.

Translation: Be persistently standing firm for Allah, witness's injustice.

As men are the guarantors of the safety of women. They are also the guardians of their affairs and morals. According to Hans Wehrs Dictionary: *قوام* means Manager, director, superior, intendent, caretaker, keeper, custodian and guardian.<sup>3</sup>

According to Arabic-English Lexicon:

*قَامَ الْمَرْأَةَ*, and *عَلَّهَا*, He undertook the maintenance of the woman; or he maintained her; *الرِّجَالُ يَقُومُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ* the men govern the women or are mindful of them, and act well to them, or take care of them.<sup>4</sup>

In *Tafsīr al Jalālyn*, Allama Saūyūtī explained the meaning of *Qawwām* as:

Men are considered as in charge of women, they have authority over women, disciplining them and keeping them in check, because of that with which God has preferred the one over the other, because God has given them the advantage in knowledge, reason, authority over women and because of what they spend, on them [the women], from their property.<sup>5</sup>

Maulana Maudoodi writes in his commentary on *Qawwām* as: "The *quoum* or *qawwām* refers to the person who is responsible for running

<sup>3</sup>- J. Milton Cowan, *Hans Wehr: A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1976), 800.

<sup>4</sup>- Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 7, accessed June 25, 2025, [https://lexicon.quranic-research.net/data/21\\_q/229\\_qwm.html#qawaAmN](https://lexicon.quranic-research.net/data/21_q/229_qwm.html#qawaAmN)

<sup>5</sup>- Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tafsīr al-Jalālyn*, trans. Feras Hamza (Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2007), 91. <https://www.altafsir.com/AI-Jalalayn.asp>



the affairs of an individual or institution or system properly and protecting and monitoring and providing for its needs.<sup>6</sup>

The wisdom of making a man valuable and chief lies in the fact that Allah Almighty has given man dominion over women, that is, men have the physical and mental strength over women. The Qur'an states this:

﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِلرِّجَالِ نَوَيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَوَيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبْنَ وَلَسْئَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ۝۷﴾<sup>7</sup>

Translation: And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for a woman is a share of what they have earned and asked Allah of His bounty. Indeed, Allah is ever, of all things knowing.

By virtue of this, Almighty Allah has dominated men with strength, maturity, understanding, toughness, hard work. He is not affected by physical conditions nor is he emotionally overwhelmed. As well as the spirit of war and conflict is also part of the nature of men. Prof. Suraya Batool Alvi writes about research that the difference between man and woman is congenital and natural. Men are better at solving problems, while women are dominant in their emotional thinking's. Men are superior to women in strength and bravery. Men have hardness, power, and determination, while women have kindness, resilience, and gentleness. Men are better than

<sup>6</sup>- Syed Abul A'la Maududi, *Tafhīm-ul-Qur'ān*, accessed June 25, 2025, <https://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=4&verse=34&to=35>.

<sup>7</sup>- Qur'aan 4:32.

women in targets achievements and goals settings. They can lead ahead, with problem solving ability. They have more leadership skills than women. The hormones of men and women are different; which play an important role in developing the difference between the two sexes. Men's brains are 100g larger than women's brains. The heart, lungs and liver of woman are smaller than the male. Men are born to earn livelihood for a family. They work hard in industry, agriculture and other fields. Their ability to fight and overcome stress is greater than women.<sup>8</sup>

Men have a sense of natural sovereignty; they can easily carry and manage all the responsibilities that have been assigned to them in social and civil life. And that's why they want to stay one step ahead of the women by nature. Akshay Abdul Manan al-Tayyebī says about the authority of man that man is naturally capable of being the ruler and head, the man has strong plans and strategies, man bears the burden of responsibilities in the field of life. The leadership of the warriors and the management of the government are assigned to the man from nature. The leadership and supervision of the man cannot challenge the honor of the woman. Qur'an points out the most appropriate word "*qawamūn*" for men, means reformers and just who are not controlling through oppression and domination. The authority of the man about family is granted by the authority of God. It relies on persistence, determination and doings of duties.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>- Suraya Batool Alawi, *Modern Movement Feminism and Islam* (Lahore: Manshoorat, 2000), 78.

<sup>9</sup>- Altayyebi Akshaya Abdul Manan, *Tohfattul Azwaj* (Karachi: Institute of Islamic Studies, 2005), 202.

The Doctrine of Islam also sets the responsibilities into a family organization. Allah Almighty has bestowed upon the man with the privilege of leading and supervising the family. While the opposite sex was created fragile and the responsibility for its protection and dependence was also placed on man. A woman can never be deprived of the guardianship and supervision and sponsorship of a man during any period of her life. The responsibility of a man is not limited to the earnings only; his responsibility is to direct and governs the matters of his dependents lives also. Even though a woman can be economically independent in the society at present, but still she does not have the responsibility of self-sufficiency because of Islamic law, all her economical duties are towards responsible men, the woman is entitled to *mahr* and inheritance portions from her close relations. On this basis, sometimes woman gains economic superiority over the male counterpart, but this doesn't mean that she is deprived of the authority of the man.

For the sake of discipline and peace in the family, Almighty Allah has applied the principle of sovereignty of man in a family, with a condition that he has nothing to do with dictatorship, repression, and domination, nor does it mean government and dominion and infinite powers. According to Islamic teachings, it is merely the distribution of male positions and powers in the family management unit so that the family is protected from corruption, chaos, and exploitation.

## Status of Women in Islam

Allah Almighty has defined the existence of a family in the formation of a society. The establishment of the family depends on the obedience of the woman and the sovereignty of the male. In the creation of the family, the obedience of the woman to the man is never a foregone conclusion. That a woman is inferior to a man, but in fact, it is a rule of law for woman that defines the boundaries and the scope of obligations for her and removes the unnecessary burden placed on her. Islam not only gives a woman an honorable position but also gives her all the privileges and rights she deserves. In any case, she is not lesser than a man to be treated and exploited as a slave. Man's sovereignty does not allow any form of unjustly towards a woman, or any kind of cruelty should be imposed on her. It is not just behavior that a man uses his administration and leadership skills against the woman. But Allah blessed man with extra abilities and qualities to fulfill their extra responsibility towards a woman. That he can monitor and manage the domestic affairs of woman and the house very well. The purpose of *Qawwamiāt* deals with extra responsibility, not extra authority.

It has provided ease for the woman that she has been exempted from many responsibilities. Allah has blessed women free of the burden of social, economic and political responsibilities. By assigning the scope of the house to her, the nurturing of children and the husband's obedience guarantees her success. The best treatment of man towards a woman is described as her virtue.

## Examples from Prophet's Life

Many examples of Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) marital blessings are found in his life, which are the best way to lead as a *Qawwām*. Depending on the nature of his wives, he was well acquainted with their behaviors and treated them accordingly. The long association with Hazrat Khadija (RA), or the example of Hazrat Ayesha's younger age, whether it be incident of *Ifk* or incident of *Tahreem*, he showed great love, compassion, gentleness, and tolerance in all pleasant and unhappy situations. There is no precedent in the life history of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that he had misused the powers as a *Qawwām*. He never interfered in the affairs of his wives. Neither did he ever unnecessarily favored any wife, never rebuke them, or raised his hands over any wife, and neither did any deed as a husband to displease them. We find the best examples of good behavior with wives in *Seerat un Nabi*. He was very kind to his family, cheerful, joked and entertained with them, as well as shared his work with them. He never harassed his family members by his sovereignty, and never complained about the hardships he suffered by them. Therefore, by following and leading the *Uswā e Ḥasana*, we can overcome the misbalance of genders in our society, our prophet's life is the best example of gender equality for all the people. Gender equality from the life history of our Prophet gives us the rule of a balanced society, this balance requires that men and women should not be subjected to discrimination in rule and obedience.

## Summary

Allah has given men the status of a clan in the family, which, in turn, conferred on the man the privilege and administrative abilities of the family, with the responsibility of the family's leadership and supervision, and he was qualified All of the family's material and spiritual needs should be sponsored, as well as their safety and livelihoods. While the notion of male supremacy and sovereignty at the family and social level in contemporary time is quite contrary to Islamic teachings. Men are forcibly deprived of their status, unlike their original religious, social and family status. One of the main reasons is that man is unable to perform its positive role being oblivious of its responsibilities, while despite all social and economic efforts done by woman, he never accepts them and wants to maintain his sovereignty. He does not want to be forced or undermined by a woman in any way. In this regard, he is making every reasonable and unlawful effort to achieve his goals. Beside all the exertions by woman, he takes forcible treatment of women, subjecting them to physical and mental torture. In all these situations, men and women suffer from mutual conflict and the basic family system of society suffers from destruction. The concept of an exemplary family of Islam is beginning to blur. Islam offers solutions to all these social conflicts and problems in the form of gender equality for men and women, as well as coding the family law for balancing family matters, where the stability of the family lies in the Governness of the male, and in obedience of female.

## Conclusion

It is not permissible for a man to be an absolute ruler for a woman by his ethnicity, and forbid women to abide by unlawful orders. Nor is it permissible for a woman to establish a front of rebellion and disobedience against man, and to commit non-Sharia orders which are contrary to the commands of Allah and His Messenger.

The principle of *Qawammiāt* and obedience are the basic components of the family system, on which the society and civilization stands. These rules are revealed by the Almighty Allah, the goodness and success of human beings lie in obeying them. Under which a man's sovereignty is to be responsible for the doings of his rights, while kindly treating the woman, ignoring her mistakes and shortcomings. And for a woman, obedience to her husband is not merely the pleasure and consent of the husband but for the will of Allah to be submissive and obedient to her husband, and to remain vigilant for her duties and husband's rights.

## Suggestions

The adherence to Islamic principles is a necessary condition for the success, sustainability, and stability of the family life. Islam offers Gender equality in a family to maintain the discipline and justice in a family. It is imperative that if men and women are trained under Islamic rules and regulations, the gender discrimination can be eliminated from our society. Otherwise, our society would not only

suffer from deprivation and economic inequality but also many social evils raise in our society which will lead to an unbalanced living.

Islamic principles should be implemented in a family, where parents should be the best role model for their kids, they bring up their children with gender equality, teach them to respect each other, and there will be no superiority of boys over girls in a family, then there will be no doubt that gender discrimination can be eliminated from society and a balanced Islamic society will be established, where all opportunities will be provided for men and women to move ahead in every walk of life.



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