

The Status of Women, Keeping in View the Holy Quran, Verse 4:34

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Abstract:

This study was conducted with the intent to scrutinize how different interpretations of the ayah 4:34 have influenced the status of women and the behavior of men towards their female counterparts in Pakistan. Furthermore, to observe how variation in educational levels of the men and women has affected their understanding of the particular verse and their behavior towards woman. The sample was selected of 60 married people (30 females and 30 males) from three different towns of Lahore. The sample was selected through random sampling. The self made questionnaire was used to collect the data. Results showed that men were considered as Qawwam and best decision maker rather than female. Women have faced indifference because of their lower socio-economic status. It is recommended to create awareness among masses about the authentic interpretation of the ayah and they should be encouraged to follow the example of prophet (PBUH) in their normal day-to-day life. Hence, steps should be taken to revive true Islamic morals in the society.

Key words: Qawwam, common practices, decision making, family.

Introduction

"Men are (meant to be righteous and kind) guardians of women

because God has favored some more than others and because they (i.e. men) spend out of their wealth. (In their turn) righteous women are (meant to be) devoted and to guard what God has (willed to be) guarded even though out of sight (of the husband). As for those (women) on whose part you fear ill-will and nasty conduct, admonish them (first), (next) leave them alone in beds (and last) beat or separate them (from you). But if they obey you, then seek nothing against them. Behold, God is most high and great” (4:34)

This study based on how different interpretations of the same ayah have influenced female socio economic status in the society and the behavior of men towards their female counterparts. There are two basic interpretations of this ayah. One states “*Qawwam*” (*men*) as “guardian and maintainer” of females while the other considers “*Qawwam*” as “men are superior to women” while Islam believes in equality of both gender in dignity and rights, by recognizing the different biological conditions of both. Different biological conditions in fact justified different roles of men and women, who otherwise are equally dignified and productive persons as various Verses of Quran state:

“O mankind be conscious of your duty to your lord who created you from a single soul (Adam), and from it (Adam) created its mate (Eve) (of the same kind...)” (4:1)

“They are a vestment for you (man) and you are a vestment for them”. (2:187).

“Who so does good whether male or female, and is a believer, shall enter Paradise and they shall not be wronged a whit” (4:125)

“Whoever works righteousness man or woman and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life that is good and pure and we will bestow on such their rewards according to their actions” (16:97)

Another major objective of the research is to see how the concept of ‘Nashoos’ has been used by patriarchal societies as a refuge to justify their inhumane attitude towards women. In the last

part of the ayah beating is purely a symbolic concept and has been used to show the intensity of such steps to women and also to ensure a legitimate society. Otherwise, Islam considers men and women as equal dignified beings with different areas of responsibility and hence different rights and duties.

This research is a two-fold project. In the first part researchers would be considering various prevailing interpretations of the ayah and debating on the authenticity of these interpretations. The second part is the practical part in which questionnaires were used to infer the how people perceive through the prevalent interpretations and how it is reflected in their behaviors.

Meaning of Qawwam

The Arabic word *Qawwam* or *Qayyam* stands for a person who is responsible for the right conduct and safe guard and maintenance of the affairs of an individual or an institution or an organization². Thus man is governor, protector, director and manager of the affairs of women as it is mentioned in Lisan- ul – Arab³ *الرجال متكفلون بامور النساء*. Men are the care takers on women. In Alsafradaad *القوام اسم لما يقوم به التي اي يثبت كالعماد والسناد لما يعمد ويسند به*⁴، *قام الرجل المرأة اي قام متكفلا بامرها فهو قوام وقد يحى القيام بمعنى المحافظة والاصلاح*⁵

Thus men are the responsible and can order over women. As Amir Muhammad Akram Awan narrated the everyday system, organization or a government has a leader, who may be called a ruler or by any other such title. In a household man will be the ruler and women his deputy or associate his household affairs while following his instruction⁶. Allama Zemgashri explained the meaning of Qawwamiyat in such a way *يقومون عليهن امرين ناهين، كما يقوم الولاة على الرعايا وسموا قواما لذلك*⁷ It is mentioned in Tafseer e Jalaleen *الرجال قوامون لسلطون (على النساء) يود* because it is mandatory to have leader to run any institution and organization. Therefore, to run and maintain the family it is compulsory to have *Qawwam*. The

significance of Qawwam is thus explained by Taj- ul- Uros (قامه) (الرجال والمرأة وقام عليها) means he maintained and managed her affairs , having charge of her affairs; hence he is said to be her Qawwam i.e., maintainer. Hence by the men being Qawwam is only meant that they are maintainers of women and the reason given is that Allah has made some to excel at others like men excel in constitution and physique while the women excels in beauty and delicacy of structure⁹.

The Quran has explained this idea with great felicity of diction but men have a degree of advantage over them¹⁰. A family must have a single, proper leader. The reason is that a leadership upon a family accomplished by several of men and women in common. In this form of leadership either of husband or wife must be the chief of the family and the other should be his/ her assistant and under his / her governance. Here, by this verse, the Quran clearly announces that the guardianship of the family must be given to the men of the family¹¹. In Arabic Lexicography, the expression *Qama ala* means merely maintain her and attend to her affairs¹². The hadith also elucidates the meaning of *Qawwama* at the time of Prophet *A companion of Prophet explains that he chose to marry an older, experienced woman because he had young orphaned , sisters and he wanted a woman and he wanted a woman Taqumu Alayhinna and together them and comb their hair*¹³. Muhammad Abdul Haleem said that the *Qawwama* or stewardship of the family that is assigned to the husband does not give him open or unlimited authority to the principle of *Shura –Qawwama* is part of *Mu'ashara* (living together) ¹⁴.

Different Interpretations of Qawwam by various Scholars

There are different interpretations of word Qawwam by various scholars. There are basically two school of thoughts one possessing the idea of Qawwam as a manager, protector,

guardian, in charge, maintainers, supporter to women. On contrary, the other schools of thought believe that Qawwam means Hakim, Ruler and overseers.

Imam Hafiz Imam ud Deen said that men are protector and maintainers over women. But in interpretation he said that men are hakim, Rais (رئيس) and Sardar over women¹⁵ as stated in *والرجال عليهن درجة* means man have upper hand on Women Al.baqra 2:28. Allama Ghulam Rasool explained Qawwam as managers and maintainers¹⁶. Allama Hussain bin Muhammad Raghob also takes Qawwam as protector¹⁷. Allama Jimal ud din also gives the meaning of Qawwam as maintainers¹⁸. Abul Ala madudi said Qawwam means the person who is protector, manager and fulfill the needs of women¹⁹. While Karam Shah Ali Zahri Raqamtaraz said that who fulfill the needs , to protect , to maintain is called Qawwam in Arabic²⁰.

On contrary, there are some interpretations of Qawwam from other school of thoughts one says that Qawwam means the men are hakim over women²¹. The meaning of Qawwam is how Hakim , order to women. Because man has upper hand over women²². Maulana Ashraf ali Thanwi also interpret the Qawwam as a Hakim²³. Man has a natural ability to become Hakim and Sarbrah²⁴. Men have authority over women²⁵. A man has authority over women because Allah has made some of them to excel others²⁶. Men are overseers over women²⁷. Man and women are equal before Allah and their actions are to be judged by the same Yard stick. In the internal organization of the family, a man is in the position of the head and the overall supervisor. A man is in the position of the head and the overall supervisor. A man's major responsibilities lie outside the family. He is to support the family economically and materially, he has to look after the relations of the family with the rest of the society. A woman's major responsibilities lie within the family²⁸ the Quran says: men are those who support women, since God has given some persons advantages over others, and because they spend their wealth (Al-Quran 4:34) Women have

the same (right in relation to their husbands) as is expected in all decency from them, while men stand to step above them God is Mighty, Wise".(Al-quran,2:228).

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to implore the different interpretations of Holy Quran Verse 4:34 and its socio-economic impacts on family life of women.

Methodology

The research was basically a quantitative study in which the tool was a close ended questionnaire. A sample of 60 married people from three towns of Lahore namely: Johar Town, Awan Town and Iqbal Town. The questionnaire was based on three themes which are: 1) different prevailing interpretations of the Ayah 4:34, 2) the common practices regarding Ayah 4:34, 3) the socio-economic due to the practice of this ayah. The answered questionnaires were then coded and the results were tabulated and statistical method was used to derive results. However, it must be noted over here that this research has certain restrictions as the results cannot be implied to all the people because there are different classes residing in Pakistan at the same time while the sample taken in this research was not broad enough to cover each group.

Results

1. Male dominance in household affairs is seen in 43.3% of the cases.
2. Decisions about internal expenditures are also made by men in 57% of the responses.
3. External expenditure is also run by males according to 50% of the responses.

4. In 38.3 cases decisions are based on mutual understanding while in 48.3% of the cases males are on the decision makers
5. 70% of the people were believed that males are better than females.

Discussion

Men are superior to women in the sense that they have been endowed with certain natural qualities and powers that have not been given to women or have been given in a less degree, and not in the sense that they are above them in honor and excellence. Man has been made qawwam (governor) of the family because of his natural qualities and woman has been made his dependent for her own safety and protection because of her natural drawbacks.

While, Feminist theologians in Iran argue that as the only distinction made between Muslims in the Qur'an is that between the pious and the impious (Quran 49:13), the word taken to mean 'protectors and providers' in the verse above is more appropriately interpreted as initiator in affairs'.

Reading and thoroughly understanding the exact meaning of these interpretations was an interesting yet a tiresome task for the researchers. To check what are, our common existing practices regarding "qawwam" in Lahore; a sample of sixty respondents containing equal number of males and females was selected by the researchers. It was although an exciting task but at the same time it demanded extreme patience because some of the respondents were either reluctant to divulge their personal information or they were uncertain that this information would be used solely for the purpose of research.

The results unveiled some good practices which are a part of our society but they also revealed some draw-backs. The major reason behind these male practices have been identified

by the researchers as lack of awareness among people which is due to low literacy rate. The absence of awareness and sufficient education has steered people to rely heavily on ill-informed religious preachers instead of primary source of guidance i.e. Quran. It is the need of the hour to create mass awareness among people and to ensure that education seeps to the lowest levels of our society so we can bring about an effective change in the approach of our society.

Summary

The topic of research is based on Quran's verse 4:34 which states that men are the guardians of women, and thus responsible for earning livelihood for the family and female relatives. Women, however, are given complete control over their own income and property. Nevertheless, they are responsible for educating the children, as God has given the one preference over the other. Man is also considered to be the head of the family. The Qur'an recommends that wives be obedient and adaptable to their husbands. However we see a contradiction in the opinions and beliefs of people. According to them man is superior to women because they shoulder most of the responsibilities of the family and also because Allah has granted him with better faculties.

The researchers interviewed 60 respondents comprising equal number of males and females with ages varying from twenty to sixty years and incomes which started from a meager amount of Rupees 5000 to a handsome salary of Rupees 80,000. A variety of respondents were chosen so as to further authenticate the research.

After analyzing the responses, researchers realized that majority of the people still believe that men are superior to women on account of the fact that they uphold the economic burden of the family and because the mere presence of males in the family provides a sense of security to the whole family.

According to some of respondents the main reason behind this mindset are the deep-rooted social behaviors and taboos which have become a part of our social life. Because of this attitude men also dominate the decisions while in some cases women do have an influence on the choices. The researchers observed that the main reason behind conflict among illiterate and poor couples have been the financial constraints. However, as we go up the tier this disagreement changes to education preferences of their children. It is worth appreciating that the trend of physical violence is not prevailing extensively.

Conclusion

What comes out as a basic principle from this verse is that, no doubt the rights of men and women are similar as detailed in previous verses, yet great care has been taken to ensure that the rights of women are duly fulfilled and their status in the society is thoroughly explained. Cairo Declaration²⁹ had comprehensively described the status of woman in Islam, in article number six which states:

- a) Woman is equal to man in human dignity and has her own rights to enjoy as well as duties to perform, and has her own civil entity and financial independence, and the right to retain her name and lineage.
- b) The husband is responsible for maintenance and welfare of the family.

Cairo declaration has been composed by recognized and comprehensive scholars of Islam and it is an authentic document which holds great importance in the Islamic world as it has been agreed upon unanimously. Hence, proves that Islam considers both women and men as equal and dignified members of the society with different spheres of responsibility. However, the biases about the standing of women which we encounter in our society today; are mainly due to miss-interpretation of the Islamic philosophy, cultural influence and wrong precedents set

by our fore fathers or the reliance of uneducated people on misguided religious interpreters who mould Islamic beliefs according to their own ideology resulting in the degeneration of true Islamic morals. People tend to overlook the fact that man's role as the guardian is purely due to his anatomy and confuse the Islamic concept of man as guardian, which in Islam means that it is the responsibility of man to financially support woman, and believe that it contemplates man as superior to woman and hence is authorized to violate human rights of females in whatever way he deems right. Some misconception about Islamic teachings also prevails due to the concept of 'Nashoos'. However, while analyzing this part of the verse many people overlook the fact that this step is taken to ensure a legitimate society and is only taken when wife is having extra marital relations. Even in this case Islam does not believe in physical violation of women but it says that a man should first stop his wife politely, if she doesn't listen then admonish her and even if deferral of intimate relations doesn't stop her than man can physically beat her. Physical assault of women is not the Islamic intention here; it is the last resort which has been taken to make the women realize the intensity of her actions and the problems which would entail them. Islam also believes that if a woman reverts to her husband after this he should treat her with respect. These common perceptions are against Islamic believes and can only be eradicated from the Islamic societies of 21st century by creating awareness between both genders of the society by clearing up many of the misunderstanding clouding this Qur'anic verse and by further reflecting upon the rights and responsibilities of both ends towards each other and towards the society. Furthermore, to practice Islam Sauna of prophet (PBUH) should be kept set as a superior and ultimate example. In the last sermon Prophet (PBUH) reiterated the rights of women by saying this:

“Treat women kindly. Since they are your helper and not in a position to manage their affairs themselves. Fear Allah concerning women for you have taken them on the security of

Allah and have made their persons lawful unto you by the words of Allah".⁽³⁰⁾

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