

behaviours referred to border on delinquency. And as everyone knows, any delinquent behaviour cannot be corrected by sweet communications! Disciplinary measures need to be taken.

Why has this privilege only been given to men and not to women? The wisdom of this is in the unseen knowledge of the creation. This faddal or benevolence given to man also demands that in taking this authority, he is accountable to Allah. All we can see is that having a consistent authority figure, only brings order and harmony in the family.

Of course, not all men and women are following these teachings of the Quran in their relationships. Rather than looking at the verses holistically, they only focus on the ones to their advantage and exploit them. **Men exploit and women rebel.** Where men have done so, and women have remained ignorant, injustices have taken place even to the point of physical abuse. And women in their ignorance have taken this as their “Islamic” plight. For their own benefit, women need to acquire knowledge from the Quran, become more aware, rally around it, and assert themselves for fairness and justice.

Men must understand the Quran with a fair & just mind without cultural filters & communicate with each other about these so that they can strive together for betterment in their spiritual path. Women too!

Women of all religions & all cultures criticize their husbands to the point of torment. “But my husband is a jellyfish. He makes Charlie Brown look like the Rock of Gibraltar. How can I submit to him and lean on him?” We should learn that words like “submission” and “obedience” are **not** dirty words. We do exactly these same things in a work environment for money. In the home where we paid with something far more valuable, “love,” we show gross disrespect. Express some confidence in his abilities instead of running him down, ridiculing him, belittling him, or comparing him with other men. He will be able to bear a great deal more hardship in the workaday world if he knows that he has a wife at home who admires him, trusts him, and stands by him, whatever happens. If he gets the same sort of treatment at home that he gets in the working world, he will be tempted to try some form of escape which will lead to unhappiness for all concerned. But the **thought of a smile** coupled with a little admiration &

encouragement will draw him to his home like a magnet. Do not dominate/manipulate him. You would lose him.

At the conclusion of this dialogue, the Western woman says to the Muslimah: “I can now see from whence you get your clarity, consistency, confidence and self-worth as a woman. Whereas I from the West feel so confused about my identity – Am I a woman or a man in my sexuality? Should I be responsible for my sexuality or indulge in it inconsequentially? Do I think of the rights of my body, before the inception of my baby, or after the inception? Is the role of care taking of my children to be given to society or to myself? Do I really need to compare my intellectual competencies and wisdom used in mothering as inferior to those in a career or are they contextually and equally relevant? Do the norms of this society dictate the fads of my behaviour, or a code of ethics concerned with the welfare of humanity?”

Also those biased movies “Not without my Daughter,” “Obsession,” and those popular films ranging from Hollywood blockbusters to children’s cartoons are depicting “crude and exaggerated” stereotypes of Muslims and perpetuating Islamophobia. For there is a direct correlation between media portrayal and the social experiences of exclusion, hatred, discrimination and violence. Suppose there were Muslim blockbusters depicting our Western, “free” unmarried pregnant daughters; our adulterous Presidents; our actors/actresses and their many affairs – how would it feel? We certainly are in no position to lecture Muslims, especially Muslim women, on morality. We have deformed images of ourselves in our hypersexualized pop culture. Imagine a poster promoting abstinence: “Virgin: it’s not a dirty word,” it said. You won’t have such posters in Muslim communities, would you?”

The Muslimah smiled: “The Quran that we read regularly, puts it this way; ‘And come **not** near to unlawful sexual intercourse. **Verily, it is a sin and an evil way.**’ (17:32) With a voice that portrayed guilt and disappointment, the Western woman said: “Why didn’t they tell us that when we were 13?” The nervous laughter that followed this remark quickly degenerated into a pensive silence and a marked note of frustration. **Young bodies abused by lust leads to souls wracked with regret!**

An **Obedient**  
wife **commands** her husband

# The Preference

An  
**Unrestricted**  
value is attached  
to this concept of

(Faddal)  
**Advantage**

and men  
generalize  
it to all aspects  
of life claiming  
**superiority**  
over women

**A** Muslim woman is walking in a library. A non-Muslim comes to the same aisle. She gives a “look,” “a smirk” to the Muslimah. Questions arise. She begins, “When I see you in hijab, my mind sculpts an image of you. An image created by the filter of Western perception. The mystery behind the hijab takes form, and the picture I get is of one who is medieval, fossilized, repressed, discriminated, victimized, a slave of man, illiterate...

“And yet, when I look at you over time I get glimpses of you as stable, calm, unwavering, full of undaunted convictions, ready to fight for your beliefs. Who are you? Curiosity possesses me. Let me see if my projections match your reality. Before the delusions of my superiority possess me, let me check the real you.”

So the woman asks a controversial question of the Muslimah, and this is the answer she gets:

**Q.** Do men have an ascribed advantage over women? Western reports from Muslim countries have indicated that men have a definite advantage over women and additionally they have the authority to demand obedience from their wives. And that men are also permitted to beat women. Is this true?

**A.** To answer this question it is important to separate practices in Muslim countries from Quranic beliefs. First beliefs. It is important that both men and women have their beliefs straight. Undue generalizations by men have made them subjugate their wives, and simultaneously, ignorance by women has made them either unhappy victims of unfair treatment or totally rebellious toward all of Islam – thereby unjustly turning away from it.

A careful scrutiny of these two most cited verses that give this advantage to men over women are the verses from Sura 2:22 and from Sura 4:34.

The first verse refers to the concept of “darajat” meaning step, degree or level, and the second verse refers to “faddala” meaning preference as a benevolence of Allah. We need to understand these concepts before we interpret these verses.

“Darajat,” (step, degree, or level) is something that is earned (43:32). “Darajat also exists

between the Hereafter and Earth, and between various levels of Heaven and Hell.

When darajah are given to male or female on the basis of their good deeds or piety, there is no discrimination as demonstrated by the following Quranic excerpts:

“Unto men a fortune from what they have earned and unto women a fortune from what they have earned.” (4:32)

“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him/her will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure. And We will bestow on such their rewards, according to their actions.” (14:97)

“Whosoever does good, male or female, and is a believer, will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them.” (4:124)

So when it comes to who has greater advantage with Allah in terms of deeds, there is no level or degree given to the male or female.

The darajat for men over women occurs in the Quranic verse thus “...And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable. But men have a degree of advantage over them. Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.” (2:228)

This verse is the last verse in a series of verses referring to the required period of separation before claiming a divorce. The degree of advantage refers to man’s being able to individually initiate divorce, whereas a woman can seek divorce only after intervention of an authority. **So, importantly, the advantage is limited to the circumstances of divorce only.** Why this advantage? Most likely it is because it is he, who supports the wife and the unborn baby, and the previous verses, mentioned earlier, are referring to the possibility that during separation the woman may be expecting, and if so, the man needs to give due consideration to taking her back because of his responsibilities towards the unborn child. Hence, he has the responsibility/decision about validating the divorce or taking his wife back.

Yet, in Muslim cultures, an unrestricted value is attached to this concept of advantage and men generalize it to all aspects of life claiming superiority over women. This form of unrestricted value for all circumstances contradicts the equity established in the Quran, that each “nafs” (man or woman) is responsible for what it earns. (4:32)

Now the concept of “faddal.” The verse reads: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given one more preference (faddal) over the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them first, then refuse to share their beds and lastly beat them. But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance. Allah is Most High, Above you.” (4:34)

This is an often quoted verse for exemplifying the ruthless dominance of patriarchal males demanding obedience from their wives – to the point of disciplining them through physical punishment!

But let us analyze it with Quranic wisdom. Firstly, the faddal or preference is related to responsibility. So there is reciprocity between this privilege and responsibility. The fact that it is through Allah’s benevolence that he gets this faddal, should make a man God-conscious. So, if he is given this authority, it must attach a heavy mandate and responsibility. He cannot abuse the faddal. The purpose of this faddal could be attributed to the fact that a family functions harmoniously when there is leadership and authority in it. Can you imagine a family where everyone goes their own way – including children? It would not be a family but chaos.

This subtle sense of authority is always constant in the entire family when it is attributed to one person. So, if you see it from the filter of a power struggle – obedience would be a bad word. But if perceived through the filter of harmony and cooperation, it is a non-issue. Also an obedient wife commands her husband.

Looking at the second part of the verse. If a woman is disloyal to her husband or shows bad conduct, men are asked to warn them first, then to separate their beds, and lastly, to beat them. These are drastic disciplinary measures, but these are done gradually in three steps. Why such measures? The

**Men** have a degree of **Advantage** over women

**This verse is not to be generalized... Applies only in a specific condition**

(Quran 2:228)