

REFLECTIONS ON THE OBJECTIVES OF PROPHETIC HADITH ON WOMEN BEING THE MAJOR DWELLERS OF HELLFIRE

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Abstract

Hadith on women being majority of the dwellers of hellfire is a popular one that has generated hot arguments on the inferiority position of the female-folk in Islam. It has been considered a reference point for depicting female gender as inherently unintelligent, less religious and evil. These perceptions subject Muslim women to perpetual abuse in both private and public domains. This study examined the purpose of the statement and pointed out the lessons that could be derived therein. This was done by clarifying the subject matters of offences of women in the hellfire, denotation of woman as less intelligent and deficient in religion, women's manipulatory power on husband and purificatory nature of sadaqah. The study revealed that the women are not condemned to hellfire because of their gender but because of the act of cursing, ungratefulness, and misleading husbands who expend much on them. These acts are part of negative human characters but which the female gender is more prone to due to her innate dispositions. This study concluded that these are multifaceted characters of women which when used with Islamic caution, could earn them paradise and when abused, could lead them to hellfire.

Keywords: Cursing, Dwellers of Hellfire, Sadaqah, Ungratefulness to Husband, Women's manipulative Power

Introduction

Hadith on women being majority in hellfire is a famous one that has generated a lot of assertions, arguments, misinterpretations and misconceptions in different quarters. This hadith is perceived by many people as giving credence to cultural denigration of women as inherently evil, unintelligent, deficient in religion, etc. In addition, the hadith has been used by some Muslim men to exert dominance over

the female gender, while viewing them as less intelligent, irreligious and naturally ungrateful to be disciplined by them (Ali 1-10). These perceptions subject some innocent women to shades of psychological, physical, and financial abuse among others.

Scholars of Hadith equally hold divergent opinions regarding the statement that ‘women are seen as the majority of the dweller of hellfire. As some emphasis on numbers of women in both hell and paradise are higher than their male counterpart (Al-Harawi 532), others assert that, the women of the Jahiliyyah were the one being referred to (Kashmiri192), among others. Notwithstanding, these submissions, the authenticity of the hadith cannot be contested based on the narrators, text and its popularity (Mitter 443-473). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad who uttered the statement doesn’t say anything out of his own volition but under divine guidance (Qur’an53:3-4) and he is also renowned for his best treatment of women. The aforesaid spurs this study to examine the inner dimension (*maqasid*) of the hadith in relationship with the female gender and the Islamic worldview of the issues there in the hadith. Hence, the paper perused the subject matters of offences of women in the hellfire, denotation of woman as less intelligent and deficient in religion, wife’s manipulative power of misleading husband and purificatory nature of *sadaqah*. The study is exegetical and phenomena relying on the Qur’anic and hadith text together with related study on the subject matters.

Hadith Text

عن أبي سعيد الخدري قال: خرج رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في أضْحَى أو فطر إلى المُصَلَّى فَمَرَّ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ فَقَالَ: يَا مَعْشَرَ النِّسَاءِ تَصَدَّقْنَ فَإِنِّي أُرِيكُمْ أَكْثَرَ أَهْلِ النَّارِ فَقُلْنَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: تُكْفِرْنَ اللَّعْنَ وَتَكْفُرْنَ الْعَشِيرَ، مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْ نَاقِصَاتِ عَقْلِ وَدِينٍ أَذْهَبَ لِلْبَّ الرَّجُلِ الْحَازِمِ مِنْ إِخْدَاكُنَّ. قُلْنَ وَمَا نَقَصَانُ دِينِنَا وَعَقْلِنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: أَلَيْسَ شَهَادَةُ الْمَرْأَةِ مِثْلَ نِصْفِ شَهَادَةِ الرَّجُلِ؟! قُلْنَ بَلَى، قَالَ فَذَلِكَ مِنْ نَقْصَانِ عَقْلِهَا. أَلَيْسَ إِذَا حَاضَتْ لَمْ تُصَلِّ وَلَمْ تُصُمْ؟ قُلْنَ بَلَى، قَالَ فَذَلِكَ مِنْ نَقْصَانِ دِينِهَا.

Narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri: On *Id ul Fitr* or *Id ul Adha* Allah’s Messenger (SAW) went out to the *musallah*. After finishing the prayer, he delivered the sermon and ordered the people to give alms. He said “O people give alms”, then he went towards the women and said “O women give alms, for I have seen the majority of the dwellers of Hell fire were you(women).” The women asked, “O Allah’s Messenger (SAW) what is the reason for it?” he replied “O women you curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husband. I have not seen anyone reduced in intelligent and religion, yet capable of leading a cautious wise man astray than you.” The women asked “O Allah’s Messenger (SAW) what is reduced in our intelligent and religion?” He said “is not the evidence of two women equal to witness of one man?” they replied in affirmative. He said, this is the reduction in her intelligent. Isn’t it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses? The women replied in the affirmative. He said this is the reduction in her religion (Al-Bukhariyy Book of Menstrual Period, Hadith 301).

Offences Capable of Landing Women in Hellfire

Hellfire is a place of eternal pain and agony prepared for the disbelievers as punishment for their disobedience to Allah's injunctions. To avert this, Muslims are warned severally in the Glorious Qur'an and *ahadith* to desist from acts that leads to such awful abode. Some of these acts, as contained in the above hadith are presented below:

i. Cursing

From the above hadith, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) mentioned cursing as an offence that leads to being condemned to hellfire. This utterance shows the gravity of cursing as a condemnable act in Islam. By way of definition, cursing can be referred to as execrating and using offensive, vulgar or unethical language against another person. Cursing also includes the act of imprecating evil upon others out of anger or who probably offended or causes emotional injury to one. Cursing is an emotional crisis usually induced by temper, anger and the intention of abusing someone (Utz 81-82). Cursing, though temporarily gave psychological relieve but, has great damage that may not be redeemable. This is why Islam condemned cursing in all ramifications along with other unguarded speeches of backbiting, slandering, etc. as asserted in Qur'an 49:11,

O you who believe! Let not a group scouf at another group it may be that the later are better than the former, nor let (some) women scouf at other women it may be that the later are better than the former nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nick names. How bad is it, to insult one's brother after having faith (i.e. to call your Muslim brother (a faithful believer) as: O sinner or O wicked etc.) and whosoever does not repent then such are indeed *zalimun* (wrong doers).

Islam preaches proper emotional management and control of anger (Ayoob 69- 215). Believers are encouraged to check their emotion even when provoked to prevent transgressing the limit set by Allah and compounding the matter. Allah says, "... those who control their anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good (to others) (Qur'an 3:134). The Prophet was once requested to pray against the idolaters as they inflict serious harm to Muslims, but he said "I was not sent to invoke curse but I was sent as a mercy (Ibn Hajjaj Book45, Hadith111). In another hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said; "O Aisha have you ever seen me speaking a bad and dirty language? (remember that the worst people in Allah's sight on the day of resurrection will be those ones the people leave in other to save themselves from their dirty languages or from their transgression (Al-Bukhariyy Hadith 6032). Similarly, Mua'th Ibn Jabal narrated that the Prophet (SAW) said: Is there anything that throws people into the Hellfire upon their faces or upon their noses except the harvest of their tongues? (al-Qazwini Hadith 3973).

The above texts show how grievous the act of cursing in Islam is. Unfortunately, cursing is most rampant among women who use it often advertently or inadvertently

due to anger, stress, frustration to gain relief from such anger and infuriate the offender. Cursing might not even be intended to cause any harm to the person being cursed and hence, such women most times, do regret saying such words after calming down. Other type of cursing is casting a spell. It is the most grievous as it is from evil eyes, and black magic. They are those that curse others so that evil will befall them or so that they commit a crime. They do the cursing and perform black magic to cast a spell or bewitch other, jettisoning the Islamic warnings.

From time immemorial, cursing offered nothing but disaffection, hatred, evils, etc. which erodes peace and orderliness in the home and society. Worse still, if the wife curses her husband, its more destructive, because it breaks the fabric of the home and extends to those around them and the society at large. Thus, the justification for warning the womenfolk, including their male counterparts who embrace the habit of cursing or expressing condemnable speeches to sustain peaceful living. Interestingly, Almighty Allah unequivocally mentioned in the Qur'an that nothing changes His plan or decision even when man and the Jinn combined effort (Qur'an).

ii. Ungratefulness to Husband

Another offence that leads women to hellfire as contained in the hadith under consideration is their ungratefulness to their husbands. Further explanation is given by the following hadith on what ungratefulness to husband entails,

Narrated by Ibn Abbas: The Prophet (SAW) said: I was shown paradise, I saw that most of its inhabitant were poor and I was shown hell, I saw that most of its inhabitant were ungrateful women. The Prophet was asked "were they ungrateful to Allah?" he replied "they were ungrateful to their husband and for the favour and the good done to them. If you show benevolence to one of them and then she sees something in you not to her liking, she will said; I have never seen any good in you (Al- Bukhariyy Vol.1 Book2, Hadith22).

It is explicit from the above hadith that ungratefulness to husband encompasses lack of acknowledgment of the care performed on the wife as well as the inability to tolerate him when he errs or annoys her. Ungratefulness to husband is considered disobedience to Allah who unequivocally orders wife to be submissive to his husband in the Qur'an (4:34). This order is not in any way denoting the inferior status of women in Islam. Rather, it is reciprocal to Allah's command on every husband to fend for her wives. A husband is mandated to house, feed, cloth, and oversee the total wellbeing of his wife and correspondently, a wife is commanded to be submissive, humble, and supportive to her husband (Beshir 36- 48, Al-Jibaly 1-96). These qualities are exemplified by Hajarrah (Prophet Ismail's mother), Bilqis (Prophet Sulaiman's wife) (Kathir 105-109, 350), Khadijah (Prophet Muhammad's wife) (Jaffer) among other.

Ingratitude is however a common human habit as evident in numbers of Quranic verses, for instance Allah said, “Allah is He who made for you the night that you may rest therein, and the day to see, most surely Allah is gracious to men, but most men do not give thanks” (Qur’an 40:61). This ugly trait is a form of arrogance and transgression which Allah equates to disbelief. Gratitude in Islam is not confined to thanking Allah for His mercy but also being thankful to one’s benefactors especially women to their husbands. Abu Hurairah reported that The Prophet (SAW) said “whoever does not thank people does not thank Allah (Abi Dawud Hadith 4811). Nevertheless, women are more predisposed to this habit when their spouses failed to fulfill their expectations. They act impatiently and nagged them as if they have never offered them any good. Sometimes, their displeasure to their husband presents the impression that they easily forget the goodness done to them at the slightest err of their husbands, and even goes to the extent of denying receiving any goodness from them. The aforesaid attitudes are condemned in Islam (Ayoob 69-215).

Gratitude on the other hand is a beautiful and rewarding habit enjoined by the shariah. It attracts Allah’s love, mercy, blessings, among others. Allah says: “And remember me I will remember you and be grateful to me (for my countless favour on you) and never be ungrateful to me” (Qur’an 2:152). Allah also said; “Give thanks O family of Dawud! And very few of my servants are grateful.” (Qur’an 34:13). Islam enjoy Muslims to be grateful in times of prosperity and patient in times of adversity, for gratitude multiply one’s blessing as it is like a seed that yields great fruits from God or Husband. When a woman is appreciative of every good done to her, she earns the pleasure of her husband, which also opens more goodness from her husband.

Patience is extolled in numerous verses of the Glorious Qur’an for Muslims regardless of the gender to imbibe (Qur’an 11:115, 16:127, 2:45, 41:35, 3:200, etc.) This habit fortifies human against frustrations of hard times and people’s transgressive behaviours to him or her. The recognition of the Islamically hierarchical in the family suggest that wife must act patiently, dutifully, and surrenders to the will of her husband as a religious obligation. The recompense for a wife’s best disposition and treatment of her husband is paradise as asserted by the Prophet (SAW) in several *ahadith*.

Denotation of Women as Less Intelligent and Deficient in Religion

The hadith’s denotation of women as less intelligent and deficient in religion (*naqisaati aqlin wa deeni*) is clarified by the Prophet (SAW) to be contextual and limited to the circumstances of the need for two women to bear witness in place of a man’s evidence; thus it does not denote reduction in their intellect; while abstaining from salat and fasting during menstruation (Qur’an 2:222) is where they have reduction in their religion. The *nuqsan* is not a general reduction on her

personality but related only to some legal obligations and religious rites as decreed in the Qur'an. Concerning Qur'an 2:282,

And bring in to witness from among your men two witness but if there are not two men, then one man and two women from among those whom you choose to be witness so that if one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other.

Some scholars are of the view that two women are required in a place of one man because of an ontological difference between the two genders as, in most societies, women are not fully involved in the conventional economic sphere of life, so, whenever one of them bears witness to a contractive agreement another one should corroborate her evidence by bearing same witness thereby, reinforcing the first woman's statement. Others say she needs another woman to reinforce her evidence so that one woman will not be coerced or pressured into giving false witness. Meanwhile, there are other areas of law where evidence of a single woman is enough and even preferred as she is familiar with such. Instances of these are giving legal testimony related to private domain such as nursing, childbirth, menses, chastity, physical defect, etc. because she is more experienced in such areas (Egypt's Dar Al-Ifta).

Also, in hadith studies, which is a very significant area of Islam, no gender distinction is made concerning the narrators. The general requirement is only integrity (*adalah*) and reliability in memory (*dabt*). Interestingly, the Prophet's wife Aishah was one of the five top hadith narrators. Though some scholars disagree on comparing hadith narration with giving testimony as testimony giving could affect the life of a person. (Ridah 124–125). To other scholars, making dichotomy between political, normative, public and private cases is irrelevant. To them, referring to judicial evidence as more sensitive and delicate over hadith narration, hence the hadith under consideration refers only to recording contractual agreement. Ibn Al-Qayyim notes:

There is no doubt that the reason for a plurality (of women in the Quranic verse is only) in recording testimony. However, when a woman is intelligent and trustworthy in her religion then the purpose (of testimony) is attained through her statement just as it is in her transmission (in) religious (context) (95).

He further mentions that the degree of certainty that will be attained in the witness of prominent Muslim women like Aisha, Ummu Salaama, Ummu Atiyah and the likes, is more reliable than the witness of a common man (Ibn Qayim 415). Moreover, there is no religious source backing the fact that one gender has more memory than the other. Instead, research has proved that each of the gender is more accurate and less suggestible about its gender-oriented items, or better say has strong memory on matters that are of importance to them and to which they

are more involved. Since each of them have different interest and devote more attention to different items (Saliha and Lakhvi 13).

Other scholars believe that the Qur'anic directive is based on the prevailing custom that women are unfamiliar with socio-economic realm not because of a universal untheological or biological difference as this cannot prove women incapable; (Al Wahidi 150) for that, the view is not tenable and is therefore rejected in *Ilmur-riwayah*. Consequently, many modern scholars maintain that since the socio-cultural and economic inferences of modern women have changed and with the intervention of many means of recording transactions: receipt, invoice, Closed-circuit Television camera (CCTV) and many more, women witnesses could not be less reliable nor less trustworthy than those of men.

Be that as it may be, no human expression can match that of Allah! Besides, He has the chemistry of all beings and their needs. He equitably designed for the two genders duties based on their peculiarity and treat them equally in worth to complement each other (Qur'an 67:14). Hence, the hadith's denotation of women as less intelligent and deficient in religion does not imply her degradation but a manifestation of Islamic leniency towards women. Islam recognizes women's state of mind and concern at menstrual and post-natal bleeding time and does not want to over burden them with religious duties.

Innate Manipulative Power of Women

The hadith under discussion is referring to women's manipulative power with which many women have explored to lead their husbands astray. It is a known fact from the time immemorial that women manipulate with tricks, pretense, brainwash, among others to misguide their victims, inculcating in them many bad attitudes and making them misbehave even to their parents and relative. In this circumstance, many men have forsaken their kinsmen due to their wife's whisper. This side of the female gender personality is even not contested by those women who are present with the Prophet as evident in the hadith under study. They neither challenge nor deny the statement.

Interestingly, Allah in His wisdom bestows on every female this special gift to facilitate her natural roles and placement in life. This quality enables her to control, guide/misguide, demoralize/stabilize. For instance, it is this power that enables a mother to meet the intricacies of naturing of a child to ensure rectitude (Upal 97-96, Al-Hashimi 215-230). Similarly, Asiyah, through astuteness was able to free Prophet Musa from her wicked husband, Firaon (Lamrabet). Khadijat was able to calm Prophet Muhammad after his encounter with Angel Jibril (Jaffer) Zulaykha used same gift to mislead her husband (Qur'an 12:24-28). Hence, where this manipulative power is put to positive use, it earned them reward, and where it is negatively used, it earned them punishment, as the case of the hadith under consideration.

Purificatory Nature of *Sadaqah*

The first message in the hadith is the Prophetic order to give charity. Charity itself refers to righteousness either in cash or kind with the intention of pleasing Allah. The hadith enjoins Muslims to make sincere charity. This is not a novel call in Islam as the Qur'an has instructed Muslims to give charity in up to thirteen places (Said Abdul Aziz et al. 145). The Prophet, as well, prescribes charity as a remedy to the foreseeable calamity women could come across later because of its great benefits. He has mentioned a number of these benefits in other *ahadith* to include, healing many sicknesses, purifying heart from all sorts of sins such as ungratefulness, abuse, greed, malice, etc. (Ten Insightful Hadith on the importance of Charity in Islam). Allah says, "and spend, it is better for your souls; and whoever is safe from the greediness of his soul, these it is that are successful" (Q64:16). *Sadaqah* elevates the giver's spirituality, elongates giver's lifespan, averts his/her calamity and sins, then, earn him/her paradise (Ten Insightful Hadith on the importance of Charity in Islam). It also creates socio-economic benefits such as increasing giver's wealth since it is a form of investment with Allah (Q2:245), enhance wellbeing of vulnerable people in the society, raising economic situation of the community and leading to social cohesion, harmony and eradication of class-conflict (Q2:215).

Sadaqah equally enhances stable society at all levels. Since economic irregularity is the major cause of many societal problems, as it has always prompt lawless. Adequate alms giving is thereby believed to be an efficient means of curbing several vices like, theft, robbery, fornication, homosexuality among others. Hence, the manifestation of the magnanimity of Allah on mankind with the provision of *sadaqah* which erase human omissions and commissions for the sincere repentant. This is one of the objectives of the hadith under study.

Findings of the Study

The following are the findings from the study:

- i. women's reactions to little provocation are often characterized by curses or abusive languages as sources of relief;
- ii. nagging is one of the known characteristics of women to express dissatisfaction with provisions made available by the husbands;
- iii. the gender ratio of two to one is meant to protect the female gender from possible harassment and coercion while giving evidence and not a signifier of weakness;
- iv. women by nature are trickish and capable of persuasion in order to attain their goals either positively or negatively; and
- v. to provide a guard against the calamitous consequences of the negative attributes associated with the female gender, the Prophet (SAW) prescribes frequent arm-giving.

Lessons from the Hadith

Lessons derivable from the analysis of the hadith understudied are:

i. Gravity of unguarded Utterances and Unruly Behaviours of Wife to Husband in Islam

The hadith fold the implication of inherent reactions of women when provoked or stressed, through cursing and or ungratefulness to husbands. Though, women are more predisposed to frustration based on their social placement and domestic engagements or becoming stressed giving the multifaceted assignments before them than men. Be that it may be, any act of cursing or ungratefulness is condemned in Islam and could lead to hellfire as contained in the hadith. The graveness of the slips of the tongue cannot be contested. A single word can cause outrageous sedition and irreparable destruction of life and property. In the spiritual sphere as well, it is capable of leading to incurring the wrath of Allah and hellfire. Thus, the many warnings against the slips of the tongue (Ayoob 213-215). Hence, the need to think twice before uttering any words.

The unruly behaviour of wife to husband is considered a grievous sin in Islam. This is logic beyond the religious dictates. Since every husband is under obligation to cater for the wellbeing of his wife (Al-Jibaly 25-59), it is reciprocal for such wife to be grateful to her husband by revering him as an obligation (Al-Jibaly 61-95). While the failure of the husband to fend for his wife is equally a punishable sin. Gratefulness is a laudable act that Islam enjoins believers to embrace regardless of their gender in numerous verses of the glorious Qur'an. The evils of counting heavily on peoples' wrongdoings, and inability to forgive could lead to ingratitude acts to one's benefactors. Though the hadith gave the instance of wife to husband, but it is applicable to all humans. More importantly, the act of overlooking human errors proliferate peace and love; and is highly cherished by Allah as evident in the Qur'an.

ii. Women's Physiological Nature is not Degradational

The statement of, 'evidence of two women equal to witness of one man' is Allah's command which is born out of the fact that women are mostly preoccupied with domestic assignments and are less involved in the public domain (Ibn Qayim 155). This statement has no bearing on their intelligence and memory capacity. Similarly, the biological nature of women's menstruation and her exemption from *salat* and fasting do not make her less religious than her male counterpart. Rather, it only showcases the consideration Islam has for her inconveniences during the period. Interestingly, she earns same reward as her male gender for good doings as asserted in numerous verses of the Glorious Qur'an (16:97, 3:195, etc.).

Innate Power of Women on Husband

The hadith draws attention to the hidden strength of woman on her husband. Notwithstanding the fact that husband is the leader, and with final say on any familial matters, the wife can influence him positively or negatively. So, women who fear Allah and guide their husbands to righteousness would earn paradise.

And if they act wickedly and mislead their husbands, earn hell as was the case of the women in the hellfire.

iii. Potency of Sadaqah

The purificatory nature of *sadaqah* is emphasized among other benefits derivable from it. It purifies a sinner from his/her sin and shields him against hellfire as averred in the hadith. Allah promises those who spend their wealth by night and day, secretly and openly, rewards from Himself, they shall not fear, nor shall they grieve (Qur'an 2:274).

Conclusion

This study has drawn attention to the purpose of the statement on the hadith of women being the majority of the dwellers of the hellfire. This was done by clarifying the subject matters of offences of women in the hellfire, denotation of woman as less intelligent and deficient in religion, women's manipulatory power on husband and purificatory nature of *sadaqah*. It is apparent from the discourse that the women are not condemned to hellfire because of their gender, but because of the act of cursing and ungratefulness to, and misleading their husbands who expend much on them. These condemnable acts are part of negative human characters but which the female gender is more prone to due to their innate dispositions. The paper also justifies the contextual woman's limitation as expressed in the hadith to be physiological rather than degradational. Waiving observance of prayer and fasting during menstruation is a blessing in recognition of the inconveniences associated with it. Similarly, the innate manipulative power of women is special gift to enable woman to navigate this world with ease. However, this gift can be negatively and positively used on husband as shown in the study. This study opines that the hadith is cautionary to women of all generation and concludes that the aforesaid are multifaceted characters of women which when used with Islamic caution could earn them paradise and when abused could lead them to hellfire.

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