



Family Management in Islam

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Abstract

In Islam, family is considered one of the most vital social institutions and its management is rooted in values of compassion, justice, and the prioritization of familial bonds, which contribute to the overall well-being of society. The main aim of this research paper is to examine family management from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing the integral role of man in this regard. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical method that includes the examination of Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and interpretations of the Quranic exegetes, the study uncovers the necessity of a manager and head within the family. The findings therefore show that based on certain endowed superiority of men over women, man is designated as the manager and administrator of the family. The study concludes that by adhering to these Islamic principles, families can foster a healthy environment that not only nurtures individual growth but also strengthens community and social solidarity, highlighting the timeless relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary family management practices.

Keywords: Family management, Family system, Management, Endowed superiority, Acquired superiority

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Introduction

Islam, in line with the system of creation and the wisdom behind man's sexual desire, has placed great emphasis on marriage and has also, in this regard, encouraged the youth to hasten towards its enactment. With the establishment of this bond between a man and woman, the family core is immediately formed. This formation brings about important questions regarding the manner of the couple's relationship, questions such as, does the core of the family require a manager? If so, who should it be? What are its criteria and conditions? What will be the consequences and effects of giving this management position to either the husband or wife? And numerous other such questions.

Islam, with wisdom and consideration for the interests of the couple, has determined the system for family management. It has also provided satisfactory answers to those important questions. If this was not the case, and the affair of family management remained vague and undetermined within the religious teachings, the family environment would have faced a wide range of problems and crises.

The Glorious Quran in answering these important questions, mentions that the management of women is entrusted to men, and in addition to mentioning the reason for this decree, it has also provided suggestions for resolving marital conflicts. This decree comes in the following verse:

‘Men are the managers of women, because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others, and by virtue of their spending out of their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and watchful in the absence [of their husbands] in guarding what Allah has enjoined [them] to guard. As for those [wives] whose misconduct you fear, [first] advise them, and [if ineffective] keep away from them in the bed, and [as the last resort] beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek any course [of action] against them. Indeed, Allah is all-exalted, all-great.’¹

This verse presents one of the most important discussions that relate to the family, i.e., the method of its management. It also shows that family and the discussions that are concerned with it, hold a great significance for all strata of society. Hence, this verse

1. Quran 4: 34

can be said to be the most socially relevant verse of the Glorious Quran, whilst simultaneously, also being the most controversial verse on the subject of the family.

The present article, by focusing on the first part of the above-mentioned verse, aims to answer the following three questions:

1. What is the meaning of management in this regard and why is it necessary for a family to contain a manager?
2. Does the scope of management of women by men go beyond that of the family, i.e., does it include other social affairs?
3. What is the philosophy and reason behind this decree?

In order to answer these questions, the opinions of the exegetes of the Glorious Quran will first be discussed. Thereafter our own opinion will be presented.

1. Meaning of Management (*Qawwāmun*¹) and the Reason for its Necessity

Management is the translation of the Arabic word *qawwām*.² *Qawwām* is the intense noun form from the root *Qām, yaqumu*,³ which means head, representative, manager and executor. Furthermore, something which stands by itself is termed *qaim*,⁴ whereas something which supports something else is called a *Qayyum*.⁵ If this support is of an intense and extreme nature, it is then called *qawwām*. (Rāghib Iṣfahāni, 1362 SH, 417)

Ibn Manzur believes that *qiyām* at times means protection and reformation and it is this meaning that is intended in the verse. (Ibn Manzūr, ND, 12/497)

Ṭurayhi believes that the word *qawwām* in this verse, means policies, planning and the organization of affairs. (Ṭurayhi, 1367 SH, 518)

The lexicographers have clearly stated that *qawwām* has the meaning of something which supports, management and planning. In addition, the exegetes have also mentioned that this word also means to take the responsibility of management and to

1. قوامون

2. قوام

3. قام يقوم

4. قائم

5. قيم

administer the affairs of women. Similarly, Balaghi has defined *qawwām* as being a person who makes intense efforts in the correction and planning of affairs. (Balāghi Najafi, ND, 2/59)

Regarding this word, Zamakhshari writes:

“Men are responsible for managing and administering the affairs of women, i.e., they can command and prohibit them, just as governors do so for their citizens. It is because of this, that they are called a *qawm*¹.” (Zamakhshari, ND, 1/525)

Jassās writes:

‘Men are the managers of women. Their management entails the discipline, planning, protection and support of women.’ (Rāzi, 1415 AH, 2/236-237)

Baghawi states:

“The meaning of the verse, ‘*men are the managers of women,*’ is that men have authority over the discipline of women. *Qawwām* and *Qayyum* have the same meaning. However, *qawwām* alludes to a more intense meaning, i.e., one who is responsible for their interests, planning and discipline.’ (Farrā’ Baghawi, 1413 AH, 1/422-423)

Rāzi, Ibn Kathir, Ālusi, and Ibn Āshur are other exegetes who also propose this meaning for management.

The following deductions can be made from the views of the Quranic exegetes regarding the meaning of management in the blessed verse:

- a. The general consensus amongst the exegetes is that *qawwām* means men have authority over the positions and affairs of women. As such, men are appointed to the position of head and leader of women.
- b. In order to clarify the meaning of management, the exegetes have made use of three approaches:

Some exegetes have only paid attention to the negative aspect of the word, and as such, they have defined it to only mean that on the one hand men can command and prohibit women, and on the other, in the event of errors and mistakes, they are responsible for guiding and disciplining them. Balāghi, Zamakhshari, Rāzi, Ibn Kathir and Ālusi hold this view.

1. ‘Qawm’ Literally meaning tribe, but in this context could also mean society (Tr.)

While other Quranic exegetes have only paid attention to the positive aspect of the word, regarding the management of women by men. They say that management means that men must protect, support, defend and ensure the financial needs of their wives. This meaning can be deduced from the words of Ibn Āshur. There is no doubt that with the passing of time and the presence of exegetes like Ibn Āshur during the period of Modernity, Modernity itself would have played a part in the selection of such an opinion. [This is because he would have come face to face with a variety of new questions and discussions concerning women's rights during that period].

Yet a third group of exegetes have simultaneously paid attention to both the positive and negative meanings of this word. It is this third opinion that seems the most logical and acceptable. Based on this approach, Jaṣṣāṣ has stated that men are responsible for the discipline, planning, protection and support of women; likewise, Baghawi has said that men are responsible for their interests, planning and discipline.

c. Some exegetes have paid attention to *qawwām* being in the form of an intense noun. In this regard, Balāghi has applied the intense form of the word to mean the continuous and constant guardianship that a man has over the affairs related to the family. In contrast, Ālusi opines that this noun form is used to indicate the constant support that women require from men concerning affairs related to the home and family. He believes that the use of this noun form alludes to the quality of management being essentially for men.

By glancing at the opinions of the lexicographers and the Quranic exegetes, it becomes possible to derive the meaning of guardian from the word *Qawwām*. Hence, a guardian is responsible for performing three tasks: 1. Management, 2. Providing material and non-material needs and 3. Protecting the sanctity and honor of the family. So, the applied meanings for the word *qawwām* indicate that this word is used in those instances where the above-mentioned responsibilities have been actualized.

However, one could, before addressing the issue of who from the husband and wife is responsible for the management of the family, enquire as to why the family requires a manager in the first place? What would be the issue if a family did not have a manager or if it was managed by a group of individuals?

This question can be explained in a clear and evidence-based

manner. By using the argument *ex remotione* (*sabr wa taqsim*)¹ argument, the scope of the issue will be determined by way of rational confinement. Thereafter, using negating the differing possible options, a likely option will definitely be established.

The argument can be demonstrated in the following manner: The family system has two states; it either requires a manager to administer it or it does not. The second option is rejected in the view of all rational individuals. Because, as was previously mentioned, even with the proclamation of family management in the Glorious Quran, there still exist many areas for potential conflict between the spouses that may at times push them towards the boundaries of divorce. Therefore, imagine the crisis a family environment could find themselves in with the absence of a head.

By assuming the necessity for the family to have management, then two ways are possible for this to happen: 1. Council management or 2. Solitary management. In this instance, council management will be void of any legitimacy, because the foundations of a council are based on the opinion of the majority. As a result, the forming of a council that consists of less than three people is not possible, i.e., when a disagreement occurs between the members, it is only through the unanimous agreement of two people that a majority is achieved. So, as the core of the family consists of just the husband and wife, a council can't be formed. Subsequently, if a disagreement occurs between them, the opinion that suggests management using a council will not be able to provide any solutions to the conflicts that may arise.

If we were to accept the option of sole management within the family, then this can also happen in two ways, i.e., the responsibility of managing the family is either with the wife or with the husband. In order to come to a conclusive answer as to which individual has this responsibility, appropriate criteria must be established. The verse that is currently under discussion provides two criteria as to why the responsibility for the management of the family is given to the husband. One being the superiority of men over women and the other being that the man has to provide sustenance for the woman. (Makārim Shīrāzi et al., 1377 SH, 3/370)

1. *Ex remotione* (*sabr wa taqsim*) سبر و تقسيم An argument that is used in order to identify the cause of a thing (Tr.)

However, the exegetes differ greatly concerning the meaning of the superiority of men over women. Some believe that it is essential superiority within the areas of rationality and spirituality. Others believe that this superiority is only in the area of domestic intelligence. Another group believe that the reason for this superiority is because women are more emotionally inclined, whereas men are more intellectually inclined. A fourth group believe that this superiority is confined to the greater physical strength that men possess compared to women.

If, for argument's sake, we were to ignore these different opinions, and accept that the minimal criteria for man's superiority over woman was his physiological superiority, we would then establish the logic and rationale for giving the responsibility of family management to the man. In simpler terms, if we were to accept that the superiority of man over woman is because of his intellectual and spiritual superiority (ref: Samarqandi, ND, 1/325-327; Baghawi, 1413 AH, 1/422-423; Shawkāni, ND, 1/460; Rāzi, ND, 10/88) or because his intellectual capacity dominates his emotional capacity (ref: Ṭabāṭabāi, ND, 4/217) then giving the responsibility of managing the affairs of women to men is something prudent, as this would indicate that Allah has placed the management of family within the confines of the intellect and intellectuality.

However, if we were to accept that the superiority of men was purely physical, even then, giving men the responsibility for the management of women would be justified, as, according to the exegetes who propound this opinion, the two criteria that have been mentioned in the verse, i.e., *'because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others'* and *'by virtue of their spending out of their wealth,'* are in fact only one reason. As a result, the verse will mean that because Allah has given men physical superiority, He has therefore also given them the responsibility for the economic management of the family (ref: Āmuli, 1360 SH, 2/397), because the large majority of the stages towards procuring an income is based upon physical capability.

By paying attention to the two issues of physical capability and economic management, an intellectual justification for placing the management of women on the shoulders of men is obtained.

By means of the above explanation, together with the predicted

reason for management within the family environment, the reason for placing the responsibility of family management on the shoulders of men also becomes clear.

2. The Scope of Man's Management of Woman

Another crucial question about the verse under discussion is whether the control of women by men is limited to the family sphere or extends to all aspects of her social life, i.e., is this management confined to the family environment or does it include all of her social affairs? The majority of exegetes have not provided a clear answer to this question, however, from the proofs they have used to establish the essential superiority of men over women, it can be derived that they believe in an inclusive form of management. In contrast, a group of exegetes have paid heed to this question. They believe that the management of men goes beyond the confines of the home and family environment.

Therefore, according to this opinion, the management that is stated in the concerned verse would, in addition to family and home affairs, also include her other social affairs such as leadership, governance, religious authority, judiciary and congregational prayer. This opinion becomes clear when we examine the statements of this group of exegetes.

Ṭabarsi writes, 'Men are the managers of women and have authority over them in the areas of planning, discipline, education and development.' (Ṭabarsi, ND, 3/7)

What is apparent from this statement, which claims that men have authority over women in the areas of planning, discipline, education and development, is that the superiority of men extends beyond the family environment.

Similarly, from the apparent meaning of the statement, 'in politics and planning,' that Shubbar mentions in his exegesis of the Glorious Quran, it can be derived that the scope of men's management over women exceeds the limits of the family.

However, if we were to put aside these two statements because they do not provide a direct answer to the issue, we could not do the same with the opinion of Allamah Ṭabāṭabāī, as he directly and clearly states that the management of men over women goes beyond the limits of the family. (Ṭabāṭabāī, ND, 4/343) His proof for this is based on the rule of 'generalization and specification by

means of the cause’, which claims that the cause of a decree can increase or decrease the scope of that decree. In the verse under discussion, the cause provides greater scope. Hence, Allamah’s opinion is that the explicit meaning of this verse refers solely to the family, but the cause that appears in it also includes the greater societal environment. He opines that in this verse Allah aims to show the superiority of men’s intellectual prowess as compared to women. As a result, this superiority includes all those social affairs that require greater intellectual prowess. Allamah shows this cause when he writes, ‘Those general social affairs that are dependent on the superiority of men...’

Further, Ṭabāṭabāī believes that it can be concluded from this verse that women cannot take up any governmental positions, or be part of the judicial and defense institutions, as these fields require greater intellectual powers.

The author of Tafsir al-Furqān also believes that the management of men over the affairs of women is a general one. He believes that because the words men and women were used in an absolute sense, thus the management responsibility of men over women is also established in an absolute manner. He says that the management of the family environment is the clearest instance and likely foundation of other instances of this management.

Ayatullah Ṣādiqī writes,

“The absolute nature of the statement ‘men are the managers...’ indicates that management is established for all men over all women. The clearest instance and example of this management responsibility can be seen within the family environment. It is through this management that marriage and family are organized and regulated.” (Dar’a, 2003, 7/36)

In order to establish his claim for the broader scope of men’s management, the author of Tafsir al-Furqān presents two proofs.

1. The terms men and women in the verse are absolute and general, i.e., they are inclusive of men and women together with all their aspects and facets. Because of this, the management of men cannot be confined to the family environment.
2. The establishment of men’s management over women within the family environment accomplishes the expansion of their management in all other areas of social life, as the family is the

foundation on which all other social institutions are built.

In contrast to the first group, another group of exegetes believe that the verse confines the management of men over women to the family environment and that this verse cannot be used to generalize and extend the superiority of men over women to all social affairs and institutions.

Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah emphasizes that the authority and management of men over women are limited to the home and family environment. In his opinion, what is meant by ‘men’ in the verse is specifically husbands, and what is meant by ‘women’ is specifically their wives. In this way, the management of men is confined to the family environment. Outside of this environment, they are equal. (Zamakshari, ND, 2/315)

In his claim, Mughniyyah stresses on two points:

1. The management of men over women is confined to the family environment. Consequently, he maintains that what is meant by men in the verse are husbands and accordingly what is meant by women are the wives of these men. He then uses the opinions of jurists to limit the authority of men in the family environment to the affairs of divorce, maintenance and permission for exiting the house. They are, therefore, equal in any affair that is outside of those mentioned.
2. He also maintains that the proclamation of men’s management over women does not have the meaning of absolute authority and superiority, such that the husband within the house is the absolute ‘sovereign’ and his wife is an absolute ‘subject’, having no will or choice, rather, what is meant is a specific authority, confined within the affairs that the jurists have specified.

Another Quranic exegete that has limited the management of men to the family environment is Allamah Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Fadlallah. (Fadlallah, 1419 SH, 7/230) In order to establish the claim that the management of men is confined to the family environment, he says that Allah, in explaining the management of men over women, presents two proofs. The first is that men are essentially superior to women and second, the responsibility for the economic affairs of the family is with the husband. However, these two reasons are in fact two parts of one reason and proof. i.e., it is only when they are combined that the

actual reason is established, it is not that they are two independent reasons. As a result, the management of men cannot go beyond the family environment, because it cannot be claimed that men are also responsible for maintaining the economic affairs of women outside of the home, even if they are essentially superior. In this way, he falls into the category of those exegetes who reject the claim that the management of men over women exceeds the family environment.

In essence, he has made two claims:

1. The two reasons that are mentioned in the verse are in fact premises that, when combined, result in one reason. So, it is as if Allah has given management to men because their superiority over women has allowed them to be given the reins of the economic affairs of the family.
2. The organizing of the economic affairs of women via men does not encompass the affairs which are outside of the family environment.

In our opinion, the first view is acceptable. Because, even though the verse is speaking about the family environment, but, as Allamah Ṭabāṭabāī has said, the reason that has been mentioned in it is general and inclusive. That is, the superiority of men over women, in whatever way it is understood, and their being in charge of the economic affairs of women is not specific to husbands or the family environment.

By analyzing the different opinions of the exegetes, it can be said that those exegetes who view the superiority of men over women as being the result of an affair such as intellect, spirit, spiritual state, intellectual prowess and physicality, cannot limit and confine the management of men to just the family environment. If men possess higher levels of intellect and bodily strength in comparison to women, then it would be impossible for it just to mean within the family.

In addition, the claim of Sayyid Fadhlallah, which is based on the understanding that the organization of a woman's economic affairs outside of the home is not the responsibility of the man, is incomplete from two aspects.

1. The claim that the two reasons mentioned in the verse are in fact only one requires further attention. In the least, it goes against the opinion of the majority of exegetes. Because, as

will be explained later on, the majority of exegetes take the two statements, '*because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others*' and '*by virtue of their spending out of their wealth,*' as two separate proofs - one being endowed, the other economical - that explains the reason for men's management.

2. If we assume that these statements are in fact one proof, then Sayyid's second claim that men have not been given the responsibility for the economic affairs of women outside of the home can also be questioned; as the verse, '*by virtue of their spending out of their wealth,*' is describing an objective reality that was common during that period. This has been claimed by some exegetes, such as Ibn Āshur.

Accordingly, the simple indicative sentence structure has been used to indicate this matter, i.e., throughout history and up until the present day, the economic functions of all societies, such as production and investment, were handled by men. This principle even in the contemporary Western world, who are the biggest advocates for women's rights, holds true; as personal, corporate and government economics are still mostly in the hands of men.

In addition to this reality, it must not be forgotten that while Islam emphasizes the protection of a woman's honor and dignity and affirming her high status, it also specifically stresses three important responsibilities for them that are not coherent with economic and financial responsibilities outside of the home. These responsibilities are caring for her husband, her children and her home, in short housewifery.

3. The Philosophy and Reason behind giving the Management of Women to Men

The majority of exegetes, by referring to the two phrases, '*because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others*' and '*by virtue of their spending out of their wealth,*' concur two reasons why men have been given the responsibility of management: 1. The essential virtue and superiority that Allah has given men. They make mention of superiority in affairs such as the intellect, physical strength, etc. 2. Acquired advantage, i.e., because men are responsible for the income and financial affairs of the family, they have management responsibilities over women.

Balāghi views the management of women by men as being an existential affair and one that follows the order of creation. He

believes that ‘Men have management over women by right and virtue because of the laws set out by creation, the innate disposition and the divine law, not as a compulsory command, but rather the wisdom of creation and its pristine order demands it.’ (Balāghi Najafi, ND, 2/860)

In his opinion, men must be superior to women due to the naturally created order, which is based on wisdom and expediency. It is because of this that men are given the responsibility to manage women.

In Minhaj al-Şādiqīn, Kāshāni maintains that these two causes are endowed and acquired causes: ‘Therefore, the reason for this responsibility is because of these two causes that both are bestowed [upon men] and acquired [by them]. (Kāshāni, 1336 SH, 3/19)

Lāhiji also views these two reasons as being endowed and acquired. However, Gunābādi makes use of the terms essential and accidental to explain these two causes, he writes, ‘*because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others*’ in terms of their body, strength, understanding, good governance and intellect that men have been endowed with. *By virtue of their spending out of their wealth* shows that men have essential superiority and accidental superiority, and because of both of these they have been given superiority and authority.’ (Sultān Ali Shāh and Sultan Muḥammad ibn Haydar, 1407 AH, 2/15)

From his statement, it is clear that what he means by the essential superiority of men over women, is their superiority from both physical and mental aspects. He views bodily strength as representing physical superiority, and good management and intellectual perfection as embodying mental superiority. What Gunābādi means by the accidental superiority of men over women is the financial and economic responsibilities that men have with regard to women.

The author of Tafsir al-Furqān views the superiority of men over women as being ontological and legislative. He writes, ‘This valued superiority encompasses two aspects, ontological and legislative. It requires men to continuously protect a woman’s being, livelihood and honor in all their rights and womanly requirements.’ (Dar‘a, 2003, 7/36)

What is meant by existential superiority in the above statement is the physical and mental superiority of men over women, and

what is meant by legislative superiority is that the economic responsibility of the family falls on the shoulders of the man, which is decreed by the Divine Law and Lawgiver.

Abd al-Husayn Ṭayyib also agrees with the opinion of the majority of exegetes who maintain that the superiority of men over women is from varying aspects, such as intellectual prowess. In order to show the absolute superiority that men have over women, he refers to a famous sermon in Nahj al-Balagha. In this sermon, Imam Ali (as) compares men and women from three aspects, i.e., intellect, share of wealth and belief, and says that women in all three of these aspects are inferior to men. (Ṭayyib, ND, 4/72)

Mashhadi Qummi views the superiority of men over women as being because of their greater intellectual prowess, good management and bodily strength, which is an endowed superiority. (Mashhadi Qummi, 1368 SH, 2/441)

From amongst the Sunni exegetes, Ṭabarī also says that the reason for the superiority of men over women is legislative, He writes in this regard, ‘By that which Allah has given men concerning their wives, such as the giving of their dowries to them, spending for them out of their wealth and providing them with their necessities.’ (Ṭabarī, 1421 AH, 5/82) So, as per the above statement, he believes that the superiority of men over women is because men are responsible for paying the dowry and taking care of her expenses.

Jaṣṣāṣ sees the reason for this superiority as being the essential superiority of men over women and that they are responsible for taking care of the family expenses. (Jaṣṣāṣ, ND, 2/236-237)

In this matter, Bayḍāwī also makes use of the terms bestowed upon [by God] and acquired [by men]. He writes, ‘*Men are the managers of women*, they are managers over them in the same manner as a governor has over his subjects, and the reasons for this are two, endowment and finances.’ (Bayḍāwī, ND, 2/184-187)

Ālusi says in this regard, ‘The verse alludes to the reason why men have a greater portion with regards to inheritance. The secret behind this difference in right has been mentioned earlier. Allah has justified this rule by both bestowment and acquire.’ (Ālusi, ND, 5/23) As can be seen from the above statement, Ālusi also makes use of the terms endowment and acquire.

Critique and Analysis

Analyzing the views of scholars on the philosophy and rationale behind appointing men as overseers of women yields the following insights:

1. The majority of the Quranic exegetes have not explored why guardianship and management are necessary within the family. This suggests that they presuppose the family system requires a manager. Perhaps this assumption stems from the fact that the Qur'an does not explicitly address the need for a family manager.
2. It can be said with relative certainty that the exegetes are unanimous in their agreement as to the reason for this principle. They agree that God arbitrarily or haphazardly has not made them managers of women, rather He made so due to two (or according to some exegetes, one) reasons. This matter shows the wise will of Allah in the administration of the affairs.
3. The majority of exegetes opine that the superiority of men over women is based on the reasons of endowment and attainment, i.e., a portion of this superiority is God-given, which has been referred to as endowed or essential superiority, while another portion of this superiority has to do with attainment and acquired causes reasons. This second portion stems from the responsibility that men have in providing sustenance for women and their families.

Concerning the essential superiority of men over women, the exegetes have differed in their opinions. They have mentioned aspects such as the intellect, spirit, spiritual status, greater physicality and social status. Exploring these opinions will require separate research.

Summary and Conclusion

1. *Qayyumiyyat* means the management and guardianship of the family structure. The need for a manager and head within the family is a necessary and obvious matter.
2. The scope of this management of men over women is not confined to the family environment but also includes all their other social affairs.
3. Two reasons have been given for the management of women by men. One is the endowed superiority that Allah has given to men over women, while the other is the financial obligations that men have in providing women with their sustenance.

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