

Right of honour and repute in islam

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ABSTRACT

The subject of Human Rights in general has been a topic of wide ranging discussions and debate on different forums of the world. Throughout the course of history Human Rights always attained an utmost importance in the minds of sages and philosophers. It warmly received universal acclamation by all segments of societies and people of all creeds particularly in the contemporary world as a dominant human rights ideology.

Human dignity and honour are considered as among the most important human rights in Islam. Islam treats them as sacred and inviolable. The sanctity, honour and dignity of a person is not only recognized in Islam, rather both the individual and state are held under obligation to protect the repute and dignity of a person.

The current article is an endeavour to refresh and enhance the knowledge of the readers on human rights in the perspective of Law and Shariah and thus develops a fresh outlook concerning concepts of the man's honour and repute.

Key words: Honour, Islam, Human, Rights, Dignity.

Human dignity and honour are among the central themes in Islamic teachings. Islam has given a unique position to man by affirming his special status among the creatures and choosing him as Vicegerent of Allah on earth. The Quran while highlighting the issue speaks as:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوُجُوهِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا.

“And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Taiyibt (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference”.¹

Again in Surah ‘Suad’ the Quran states as:

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

“So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration”.²

Right to honour and human dignity in Islam are declared as sacred and inviolable.

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The sanctity of a Muslim includes the sanctity of his life, his honour, and his property. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) while speaking on the issue states as:

إن دماءكم ، وأموالكم ، وأعراضكم عليكم حرام كحرمة يومكم هذا .
 “Your lives, your property, and your honour are as sacred as this day”.³

Islam deems all human beings to be worthy of respect.

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ
 ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا

“Truly, We did offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. But man bore it”.⁴

The Quran declares that human beings are made in the best of moulds:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاَنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ .
 “O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses; and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety”.⁵

The protection of honour and human dignity is the primary obligation of an Islamic state. Islam forbids attacking each other's honour in any way.⁶

Islam instructs the believers and those who are in authority, to take care for the sick and disabled, to provide shelter and food to the needy and poor and to save the life and repute of a person maintaining and upholding human dignity.

The Quran speaks on the issue as follows:

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَٰلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ
 جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

“We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind”.⁷

In the true spirit of Islamic law it is an obligation of a Muslim towards another Muslim not only to defend his person and property but also to defend him from disgrace and insult if he is being insulted in his presence and he has the ability to stop the doer.

If a person does not help a Muslim where he is being disgraced and his honour is at stake God will not help such a person where he is most in need of His Help and implores Him for it. It is not fitting for an eminently truthful person to be a reveller.

A hadith of the Messenger (SAW) persuades the believers to help and assist his other Muslim brothers by saying as:

“Whoever is present while a Muslim is humiliated before him, and is able to assist him [and yet does not], Allah will humiliate him before [all of] creation”.⁸

In another tradition the Messenger (SAW) states as:

“Whoever protects a believer from a hypocrite Allah will send to him an angel who will protect him from the fire of Hell on the day of resurrection.”⁹

Again in another Hadith the Messenger (SAW) speaks as:

“O assembly of those who believed with their tongues, but into whose hearts faith has not yet reached! Do not backbite the Muslims, nor seek out their secrets! For, whoever seeks out the faults of his brother, Allah will seek out his secrets. And, whoever has his secrets sought out by Allah, Allah will disgrace him, even (if he hides) in the depth of his house”.¹⁰

In Islam it is an obligation of a believer not to use his tongue injuring another Muslim. He is allowed to speak only to benefit his Muslim brother otherwise he should remain silent. Some of the traditions in this regard are worth mentioning.

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should say [something] good, or he should keep silent”.¹¹

“Whoever guarantees for me what is between his two jaws and what is between his two legs, I guarantee Heaven for him”.¹²

“Indeed, your blood, property and honour are sacred to [one another], like the sanctity of this day of yours in this city of yours”.¹³

“O assembly of those who have believed with their tongues, but into whose hearts faith has not yet reached! Do not backbite the Muslims, nor seek out their secrets! For, whoever seeks out the faults of his brother, Allah will seek out his secrets. And, whoever has his secrets sought out by Allah, Allah will disgrace him, even [if he hides] in the depths of his house”.¹⁴

The importance of the right of honour may only be judged by one of the Ahadith of the Messenger of Allah(SAW) narrated by Abdullah ibn- Amr- ibn al-`As(RA), saying that :

“I saw the Messenger of Allah (saw) performing *tawaaf* around the Holy Ka' ba saying to it that”.

“How pure and good you are! How pure and good your fragrance is! How great and exalted you are! And how great and exalted your sanctity is! But by Him in Whose hand is Muhammad's soul, the sanctity of a believer's blood and property in the sight of Allah is greater than your sanctity!”¹⁵

Similar remarks have also been passed by Abdullah bin Umar, while looking at the Kabah. He said that:

“How great and sacred you are! But the sanctity of the believer is greater than yours”.

In Islam, it is the obligation of the state that “it should make efficient arrangements for the protection of the honour and repute of the people, which extends to their honour, repute and privacy of homes”. In this regard “Islam declares any interference or encroachment on the privacy of his life, as illegal and sinful”.¹⁶

Islam not only makes it obligatory for the state to protect the honour of the citizens but also gives them right of private defence to protect their honour.

The Holy Quran honouring the sanctity of privacy in homes states as:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتَسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَا أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا حَتَّى يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ قِيلَ لَكُمْ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا هُوَ أَزْكى لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ.

“Oh you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and greeted those in them; that is better for you, in order that you may remember. And if you find no one therein, still, enter not until permission has been given. And if you are asked to go back, go back, for it is pure for you. And Allah is All-Knower of what you do”¹⁷.

The Messenger (SAW) has gone to the extent of instructing his followers that a man should not enter even his own house suddenly or surreptitiously. He should somehow or other inform or indicate to the dwellers of the house that he is entering the house, so that he may not see his mother, sister or daughter in a condition in which they would not like to be seen, nor would he himself like to see them in that condition. Once a Companion of the Messenger (SAW) asked Allah's Messenger:

“Whether he should ask permission to go into his mother’s house?” the Messenger replied: that ‘he should’. The man said that: ‘he lived with her in that house’, but Allah’s Messenger replied: ‘Ask her permission’.¹⁸

The Messenger (SAW) also said:

الاستئذان ثلاث ، فإن أذن لك ، وإلا فارجع.

“Take permission three times and if it is not granted, then you should go back”.¹⁹

Peeping into the houses of other’s people has also been strictly prohibited, so much so that there is the saying of the Messenger that if a man finds another person secretly peeping into his house, and he blinds his eye or eyes as a punishment then he cannot be called to question nor will he be liable to prosecution.²⁰

In another Hadith, the Messenger (SAW) prohibited people from reading letters of the others and warned that even if a man casts sidelong glances in order to see a letter of another person; his conduct becomes reprehensible.²¹

Since the honour of a human being has been held to be sacred and sacrosanct by Islam, making false allegations and accusations which bring unjustly dishonour and insult to others have been held as major sins and big crimes.²²

Islam stresses, in general, the security of honour and repute of every individual, but special emphasis has been laid where security of women’s honour is concerned, and Allah has seriously admonished those violating it. The Quran condemning and declaring it a big crime states as:

وَالَّذِينَ يَزْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ .

“And those who accuse chaste women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them (with) eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony”.²³

To emphasize the sanctity of repute and honour of a person, the Messenger (SAW) on many occasions of the Farewell Hajj, not only prohibited Muslims taking the life and property of other Muslims, but also from any encroachment on their honour, respect and chastity.

He commanded in this regard as:

المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده

“A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe”.²⁴

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) on many other occasions has forbidden people from insulting others and bringing them to disgrace. The following Ahadith of the Messenger (SAW) indicate how much sanctity is given by Islam to the honour and repute of a Muslim.

من ستر مؤمنا في الدنيا على خزيه ستره الله يوم القيامة.

“Anyone who saves his brother to be insulted, Allah will save him from insult on the Day of Judgment”.²⁵

Ibn Umar reported that the Messenger (SAW) of Allah said:

من ستر على مؤمن في الدنيا ستره الله يوم القيامة.

“Who so conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his sins on Resurrection Day”.²⁶

من كانت له مظلمة لأخيه من عرضه أو شيء ، فليتحلله منه اليوم ، قبل أن لا يكون دينار ولا درهم ، إن كان له عمل صالح أخذ منه بقدر مظلمته ، وإن لم تكن له حسنات أخذ من سيئات صاحبه فحمل عليه.

“Whoever has insulted another person or disgraced him or has wronged him in any other way should have it forgiven today (in this life), before the Day when there will neither be money nor other goods of this world, save his own good deeds which will be taken away from him and given to those wronged by him in this world according to the measure of his crimes. And if all his good deeds fail to compensate for his wrongs, the evil deeds of the wronged victims will be cast upon him”.²⁷

The worst oppression in the eyes of Islam is unjustified attack on some body's honour. Whoever beats a Muslim will have to face Divine wrath.

Umar, while giving a send-off to his executive officials, used to give them the following instructions:

“I am not sending you out as tyrants and oppressors, but as leaders and guides. Take heed! Do not disgrace and debase Muslims by beating them”.²⁸

During the Caliphate of Umar Ibn Khattab (RA), once Umar bin Saad, Governor of Homs, thought that he had no equal in piety among the ordinary people and other officers of the realm. He spoke thus to a dhimmi (non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic state):

“May Allah bring you to disgrace”. After uttering these words he felt so ashamed and remorseful that he straight away went to Caliph Umar (RA) and resigned, saying:

“It was because of this high office that these Words could come on my lips.”²⁹

Jabala Chassāni was a famous chief of Syria, holding a royal rank. He converted to Islam. Once, while performing tawaf of the Kaaba the hem of his mantle fell under the feet of someone. He slapped him on the face and, as the victim retaliated, Jabala became indignant and went to Hazrat Umar (RA). Upon hearing his complaint Hazrat Umar (RA) said:

“You received punishment for what you did”. He was amazed at the reply and said: “I belong to such a high family, if anyone acts rudely against us he is punished with death”. On hearing this Umar (RA) said:

“That was so during the period of jahillya (ignorance) but now Islam has equalized all ranks”.³⁰

The above examples from the history of Righteous Caliphs (RA) clearly show to what extent the honour of citizens was preserved and protected in the Islamic state. The honour of ordinary people was equal to those who were born in high ranking families.

Islam recognizes the right of human beings to be protected from defamation, sarcasm, offensive nicknames and backbiting. The laws protecting the repute and honour of human beings in this regard have been beautifully illustrated in the following ayat of the Quran.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُوا قَوْمًا مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تُنَابِزُوا بِأَلْقَابٍ وَلَا تَلْبِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابِزُوا بِأَلْقَابٍ .

“O you who believe! Let not a group scoffs at another group; it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames”.³¹

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ .

“O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins; and spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful”.³²

The five evil traits mentioned in the ayah quoted above i.e. Sukhriyya (laughing or scoffing at others), lamz (blaming or finding the faults of others), tanābuz bi'l-Alqāb (contemptuous nicknames), Tajassus (suspicion) and Ghibah (backbiting)

lead to the disintegration and moral collapse of society. Let us look at them in some detail and see how they pave the way to moral corruption in the life of the individuals and a society.

The term Sukhriyya used in the ayah covers a wide range of meaning and takes different forms in different situations. Basically it means “to laugh at others, to scoff, to ridicule or make fun”. Ridiculing others may be for a number of reasons and therefore, may take different forms. “Copying someone’s voice, laughing at his words, face or dress, and making gestures so as to attract attention to other’s weaknesses are all included in Sukhriyya”. “This is regarded as character assassination in Islam, and is abhorred in the same way as physical attack and persecution”.³³

The Messenger (SAW) forbade people to call their slaves or servants by offensive names:

لا يقل أحدكم : أطمع ربك وضئ ربك ، اسق ربك ، وليقل : سيدي مولاي ، ولا يقل أحدكم : عبيدي أمتي ، وليقل : فتاي وفتاتي وغلامي (صحيح البخاري - كتاب العتق باب كراهية التناول على الرقيق - حديث : 2434)

“None of you should say to his slave, *my slave* (abdi) or to his female slave *my slave-woman* (Oman); for you are all Allah’s slaves and all your women are Allah’s slave-women. One should say instead *my servant* and *my girl*, or *my young man* or *my young woman*. And a slave (or servant) should not say *my lord* (rabbi) but *my chief* (sayyidi)”.³⁴

The second of these prohibitions is against lamz. Lamz also has a wide range of meanings which means “to blame, censure, slander, criticize, find fault”, etc. ‘Whether the criticism is done explicitly or implicitly by certain postures of the body, or by word of mouth, it is all included in lamz’. These things also disrupt the good relationships of human beings which Islam wants to promote, and they create discontent and sedition in society. These habits tear men from one another and hinder the progress of piety and moral virtues in society.³⁵

The Quranic approach to lamz is very significant because it addresses Muslims, saying:

“Do not slander yourselves instead of saying do not slander each other”.

This expression is the same when Allah refers to murder and says *do not kill yourselves*, ‘the underlying wisdom being that he who slanders others is in fact revealing his own wicked nature, and by slandering his brother he is also inviting him to do the same thing to him’.³⁶

The Messenger (SAW) stressed that one should guard his tongue from uttering slanderous and abusive words. He said that:

لعن المسلم فسوق وقتاله كفر.

“Reviling a Muslim is disobeying Allah, and fighting with him is infidelity to Allah”.³⁷

The third evil mentioned in the Quran is Tanabuz bi'l-alqab (contemptuous nicknames). The term Tanabuz bi'l-alqab means ‘to call others by contemptuous names, or to give nicknames which may have some ingredients of sukhriyya and lamz’. ‘To remember someone for his weakness in behaviour and to talk about someone’s deformities in physical structure tantamount to Tanabuz bi'l-alqab’. Like mockery and slander, mentioning someone by an offensive name also result in ill-feeling, enmity and disorder. Therefore, ‘Islam wants its followers to avoid all such things which may drive a wedge into society and impair the relationship based on equality and brotherhood’.³⁸

The fourth evil, harmful to the dignity and honour of a person is suspicion. The word used in the Qur’an for it is ‘tajassus’ which again has different shades of meaning and covers a wide range of activities. ‘Spying, trying to find fault with others, whether out of bad motives or curiosity, bugging, reading someone’s letters, ‘peeping at someone else’s house, listening secretly to another’s conversation, investigating someone’s financial, private and family affairs, etc. all constitute tajassus and are forbidden’. They all lead to friction, ill-feeling, corruption and the dismemberment of society.³⁹

Islam aims at establishing its society on cleanliness of conscience and mutual trust, not on doubts, suspicions, accusations and mistrust. Keeping in view the evil consequences of such activities the Messenger (SAW) of Allah has forbidden to seek out the faults of others;

من ستر عورة أخيه المسلم ، ستر الله عورته يوم القيامة ، ومن كشف عورة أخيه المسلم ، كشف الله عورته ، حتى يفضحه بها في بيته .

“He who seeks out the fault of his Muslim brother will have his fault sought out by Allah, and he whose faults are sought out by Allah will be exposed by Him even though he is in the privacy of his house”.⁴⁰

In another tradition of the Messenger (SAW), concealing the secrets of others is highly condemned, and the act has been compared in merit to bringing to the surface a girl buried alive.

من رأى عورة فسترها ، كان كمن أحيا موعودة .

“Who came to know the secret of a person and conceals it is like who gives life to a buried girl”.⁴¹

In Islam the basic assumption concerning people is that they are innocent. A mere suspicion should not be allowed to result in the accusation of an innocent person. Regarding this, the Messenger (SAW) said:

إياكم و الظن ، فإن الظن أكذب الحديث.

“Avoid suspicion, for airing suspicion is the most lying form of speech”⁴²

According to Islam it is not permissible for a government to injure the integrity of private houses by searching them on the grounds that it is necessary to know the secrets of the dangerous persons. Though, to all intents and purposes, the basis of this policy is the fear and suspicion with which modern governments look at their citizens. This is exactly what Islam has called as the root cause of mischief in politics.

The injunction of the Messenger (SAW) on the point states as:

إن الأمير إذا ابتغى الريبة في الناس أفسدهم.

“When the ruler begins to search for the causes of dissatisfaction amongst his people, he spoils them”.⁴³

The second part of the same hadith reported by Hazrat Muawiyah (RA) that he himself heard the Messenger (SAW) saying:

إنك إن اتبعت عورات الناس أفسدتهم أو كدت أن تفسدهم .

“If you try to find out the secrets of the people, then you will definitely spoil them or at least you will bring them to the verge of ruin”.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most instructive incident is one relating to the Caliph Umar (RA), which shows how strongly Islam safeguards the human right to privacy. It is related that “one night ‘Umar (RA) was touring the city of Madina, to find out the conditions of the Muslims. Suddenly, he came across a house from where he heard a man singing inside his house. He suspecting some mischief started peering into the house where he saw a woman and some wine along with the man. On being reminded of the fact that he was violating their right of privacy, he gave up his idea of punishing the man and let the man free after taking oath from him that he would live a pious life in future”.⁴⁵

The aforementioned instances make it abundantly clear that: “under Islamic law neither bugging devices can be fixed in private houses to tape conversations taking place behind the closed doors, nor can letters be censored in transit as is done in modern civilized states”.⁴⁶

The fifth evil prohibited in the cited above Ayat, which violates the human right to dignity and honour is *ghibah*, commonly known as backbiting.

The act of backbiting in the Ayah has been compared to eating the flesh of one’s dead brother, which is not only abominable but even unthinkable. The idea underlying this simile is that by backbiting, a brother consumes the honour of another brother who is not present on the occasion to protest or defend him.

The definition of ghibah which the Messenger (SAW) gave is very instructive and thought-provoking. It is related that a Companion asked him to explain the nature and scope of ghibah. He replied:

ذكرك أخاك بما يكره " قيل أفرأيت إن كان في أخي ما أقول ؟ قال : " إن كان فيه ما تقول ، فقد اغتبتك ، وإن لم يكن فيه فقد بهته .

“Saying something about your brother that would be disliked by him: The Companion exclaimed, even though it be true. The Messenger (SAW) retorted, “If you say something wrong, this is accusation and blasphemy”⁴⁷

The Messenger (SAW) of Allah on a number of occasions has reminded his companions (RA) about the serious consequences of this bad habit and instructed them to avoid it.

Aisha (RA) narrated that she said to the Messenger (SAW):

حسبك من صفة كذا وكذا ، غَيْرُ مُسْتَدَدٍ تعني قصيرة ، فقال : لقد قلت كلمة لو مزجت بماء البحر لمزجته.

“Do you see that Safiyyah (RA) (another wife of the Messenger (SAW)) is such and such- meaning that she is short”. The Messenger (SAW) replied: “You have spoken such a word that if it were mixed in the (water of the ocean) it would have darkened it”⁴⁸

In Islam ghibah is regarded more obnoxious and severe than adultery as in case of ghibah one violates both the rights of Allah (Huquq Allah) and the rights of men (Huquq Ibad) ; where on the other hand in case of adultery only the right of Allah is being violated by the concerned individuals. Allah may overlook the violation of His rights, but “the man who has been subjected to backbiting is not in a position to forgive, primarily because he is not aware when and how a brother of his has outraged him. It is not only the one who backbites who is guilty, but equally all those who relish such conversation. This is why it is suggested that if in a meeting or an assembly someone is backbiting, the listeners should protest and, if necessary, leave the place”⁴⁹.

In the following traditions of the Messenger (SAW) the above mentioned idea has been expressed as:

إياكم والغيبة فإنها شرّ من الزنا.

"Beware of backbiting, for backbiting is more obnoxious than adultery”⁵⁰
 “Whoever has wronged his brother, in the way of property or honour, let him go to him and repair it, before it is taken [from him on a day] when he has no dirhams or dinars, such that if he has any good deeds, some of the good deeds will be taken and given to [the wronged one], otherwise

[if he has no good deeds], some of the other's evil deeds will be taken and cast upon him".⁵¹

The expiation with regard to one who has been back-bitted is that forgiveness be asked for him.⁵²

"Beware of backbiting, for backbiting is more serious than adultery. A man may commit adultery, and drink [wine], and then repent, and Allah will forgive him. But, the backbiter will not be forgiven by Allah until his [back-bitted] companion forgives him".⁵³

"Insulting a Muslim is impiety, and killing him is [a form of] unbelief".⁵⁴

In one of the traditions ghibah is regarded as worse than interest. It is narrated by Saeed bin Zaid that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said:

من أربى الربا الإستطالة في عرض المسلم بغير الحق .
 "To injure the repute of a person is akin to Riba".⁵⁵

The horrifying nature of backbiting can also be gleaned from an incident wherein the Messenger (SAW) admonished his two companions (RA) who were perhaps unwittingly guilty of this crime. The story goes that once the Messenger (SAW) was traveling with some of his companions (RA) when he heard two people passing offensive remarks about Maiz bin Malik Al-Aslami, who had been stoned to death for committing adultery. The Messenger (SAW) kept quiet until he came across a dead donkey lying by the side of the road. He asked the caravan to stop and asked those two persons to dismount and eat the dead animal. They were taken aback by the Messenger's (SAW) words and murmured:

"How can we eat carrion?" The Messenger (SAW) said rather angrily:

"Whatever you have been eating from the honour of your dead brother was even filthier than what I am asking you to do".⁵⁶

The way the Messenger (SAW) reacted to the whole incident and the method he adopted in this particular case provides much food for thought and reflection.

In Shariah the massiveness of the evil of Ghibah can be understood by it that not only doing Ghibah is sinful but listening to it is also treated as a sin. One who listens to it is considered as a partner to one who does it.

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا.
 "And, when they hear vain talk, they turn away from it".⁵⁷

In Surah, al-Mu'minun the Quran speaks as:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

“Successful are those who shun vain talk”.⁵⁸

Islam not only prohibits the backbiting of Muslims, but also of non-Muslims, children and dead person. Backbiting can be done by both words and by gestures.

Another bad habit, which usually accompanies backbiting and is strictly prohibited by Islam, is gossiping. “This means passing on to others what you hear from someone in such a manner that will cause dissension among people, sour their relationships, or increase already existing bitterness between them”.⁵⁹

The Quran while condemning this bad habit of the people speaks as:

وَلَا تُطِيعُ كُلَّ خَلَافٍ مَّهِينٍ. هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءً بِنِيمٍ

And obey not everyone who swears much, and is considered worthless, A slanderer, going about with calumnies⁶⁰.

The Messenger (SAW) on the issue states as:

“The one who spreads gossip which he has overheard will not enter the Garden”.⁶¹

In another tradition it is stated as:

“The most evil among Allah’s slaves are those who go about spreading gossip dividing those who love each other and desiring to defame those who are innocent”.⁶²

Islam condemns this habit of the people who as soon as they hear something bad they spread it without any hesitation and the proper inquiry about its truthfulness. The basic purpose behind the spreading of such like news is just “for the sake of currying favour or merely out of love of causing trouble and dissension”.⁶³

Dr. Yousaf Al-Qaradawi, while highlighting the traits of a gossip and such like people mentions the following verse of a poet saying as:

“If they hear a good word they hide it, and if a bad word they shout it, And if nothing is heard they make up a lie”.⁶⁴

IMPLICATIONS

Honour and Human dignity are among the central themes of Islamic way of life. They are declared as sacred and inviolable rights of man. The purpose of Islam is to establish a society on mutual trust and clearness of conscience, devoid of doubts, suspicions, accusations and mistrust.

In Islam man has a unique position among the other creatures. He has been dignified by his Creator. The sanctity of a Muslim includes the sanctity of his life, his honour, and his property.

The uniqueness of the right to honour and repute in Islam lies in the fact that both the individuals and state are under obligation to respect and honour the sanctity of human life and not to harm or injure his body or repute.

In Islam not only the individuals are bound to avoid injuring others, without just cause and reason but they are also under a duty to assist and save his brother from insult, while he is being humiliated before him, provided he has the capacity to do so and to conceal the faults of his Muslim brother.

The protection of honour and human dignity is the primary obligation of an Islamic state. It is bound to make efficient arrangements for the protection of the sanctity of human body, repute and privacy of homes.

For the sanctity of a person, attacking each other's honour in any way, entering even into someone's own house suddenly or surreptitiously, without indication and permission, peeping into the houses of other people, finding faults of others, defamation, giving offensive nicknames, backbiting, gossiping, suspecting the people merely on the basis of suspicion, spying and search of the people's fault by the governments and intelligence agencies are strictly prohibited in Islam.

Islam not only makes it obligatory for the state to protect the honour of the citizens but also gives the people a right of private defence to protect their honour.

Along with thesecurity of honour and repute of every individual in general, Islam gives a special emphasis on the women's honour seriously admonishes those who violate it.

The right to honour and repute in Islam is so all-pervasive that it stands far superior to the Western law of defamation. The interesting fact about the Western law of defamation is that the person who files suit for defamation has first to prove that he is a man of honour and public esteem. In addition, he also has to produce witnesses to testify in court that the defamatory accusations have damaged his reputation in their eyes. Whereas, in Islamic law, if it is proved that someone has attacked the honour of another person, then, irrespective of whether the victim is able to prove himself a respectable and honourable person, and the words used for it have actually disgraced the victim and harmed his reputation in the eyes of the public or not, the culprit will be punished.

“Contrary to the Western Law of Defamation, in Islam the mere proof of the fact that the accused said things which according to common sense

could have damaged the reputation and honour of the plaintiff, is enough for the accused to be declared guilty of defamation. As in Islam every member of the society is honourable, no matter what his position, rank and financial status is".⁶⁵

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