

## Reconstructing Society in the Light of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt: Protecting Society from Malicious Tongue

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### Abstract

*Muslims are faced with many issues, including the malicious use of the tongue, that challenge their social cohesion. Considering the gravity of this matter, this work explores the path towards social reform by infusing the values of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt into society leveraging the mechanisms of social reconstruction philosophy. In particular, it analyses verses 11 and 12 of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt which primarily discuss tongue-related social ills such as backbiting, ridiculing, and name-calling; they also illustrate a process of self-development that can facilitate mutual respect and brotherhood thereby minimizing the likeliness of internal conflicts of the Muslims. This work utilizes a qualitative study, which demonstrates that Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt is instrumental in protecting society from the ills of the tongue.*

### Keywords

social ills, social reconstruction, Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, malicious tongue, backbite, ridicule.

### Introduction

The Muslim world is facing various problems that destroy social bonds and unity at all levels.<sup>1</sup> The malicious use of the tongue is among the

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<sup>1</sup> B. Nasiri and M. Haji Esmaeily, “Convergent Approaches in the View of the Holy Quran with Emphasis on the Interpretive Opinions of the Commentators About Verse 9 of Surah Al-Hujurat,” *Quran and Hadith Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 287–306, <https://doi.org/10.30497/quran.2020.14442.2822>; Muhammad Ahsan, “Contemporary

major causes of those problems.<sup>2</sup> By extension, harmful text messages, emails, multimedia, and social media posts are also included. It is of great concern as it destroys interpersonal relationships, which can lead to large-scale conflicts. Consequently, this work sheds light on that very aspect to usher in a meaningful and long-lasting social reform. It examines *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* and how to infuse its values into society via the mechanisms of social reconstruction philosophy. To that end, this work explores verses 11 and 12 of *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* and offers a detailed discussion of the verses including a brief exegesis. These verses primarily identify tongue-related social ills such as backbiting, ridiculing, and spreading rumours and illustrate the process of self-development towards social transformation. When the ideas of these verses about character development are implemented by education and culturing, the long-desired social reform will be ensured.

### Methodology

This work adopts the qualitative approach. As a result, its findings are generally interpretive, which are based upon the examination of the writings, experiences, and reflections on relevant subject matter. Since this study investigates the issues of the Muslim world to pave the way for the reconstruction of Muslim societies, it is essentially a study of human experience. In other words, it is a study of perceptions surrounding events and circumstances and therefore, the qualitative study is appropriate and justified.

In general, this work examines the contents of the body of materials regarding social conditions around the world, specifically the Muslim world in relation to complications caused by malicious tongue. Additionally, it explores Qur'ānic exegesis and relevant texts specific to *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* from both classical and modern sources to lay the foundation for a social reform that can lead to mutual respect and brotherhood thereby minimizing the likeliness of internal conflicts.

As this is a qualitative study, it depends solely on observation and subjective experience. It does not involve quantitative information. Additionally, the qualitative study solely depends on the content analysis of various subject matters without the involvement of any

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Global Ummatic Challenges and Future Vision: Human (Under-) Development and Clash of Civilisation,” *Journal of Political Studies* 1, no. 2 (2010): 1-18.

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Akhiruddin Ibrahim et al., “The Importance of Restraining Our Tongue according to the Quran: An Implementation among the Students,” *IJASOS- International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences* 3, no. 7 (2017): 167-75, <https://doi.org/10.18769/ijasos.309672>; “The Evils of the Tongue” (2005), <https://islamhouse.com/en/books/1239/>.

interviews or first-hand information. Another limitation of this study is that it focused on Muslim-majority countries and their social issues. Consequently, it excluded issues pertaining to Muslim minorities, such as in the West. Furthermore, it is impossible to go into the fine details of Muslim societies across the world as they are of different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. Therefore, this work is forced to generalize social issues irrespective of the background of individual Muslim countries. Social issues are addressed in general as no single formula can address every background. Rather, the solution needs to be contextualized when discussed or applied within certain social settings of a country or a culture.

### Literature Review

Social reconstruction is founded upon pragmatism, a philosophy derived from subjective human experiences in which truth is relative and changing. Social reconstruction philosophy promotes reform towards a just and better society through transformative education.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, social reconstruction found its roots among progressive educators with pragmatic and social ideas such as John Dewey. Later, it was further developed by others including George Counts. After some ups and downs, finally, in 1950, Theodore Brameld, laid the foundations of social reconstructionism.<sup>4</sup> Social reconstructionists viewed the state of society as troubling because it failed to reconstruct itself to adapt to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. They proposed a critical study of the past and to use enquiry, questioning, and experimentation to address the current challenges towards a new social order. They believed that the educators in the school system could be a vehicle towards a new social order by developing innovative curricula, policies, and practices.<sup>5</sup> They are in the best position to take on such a noble, delicate, and complex task of social reform within the school system by educating future leaders. They claim that the present educational process is heavily influenced by the needs of the economy; it is too narrow and stagnant and does not offer the vital imagination and creativity to meet the current challenges. Teachers need to focus on critical issues and instead of just giving answers, they should raise more questions thereby stimulating students' thinking

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<sup>3</sup> G. L. Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> McNeil J. McNeil, *Curriculum: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*.

process and engaging them to have an active say in education. Unless overhauled, it will repeat the past and preserve the existing order of the broken society rather than being a means of its transformation. To make this overhauling effective, such a learning process needs to be more action-oriented, more meaningful, and centred around the social life of the students. It should also critically look into real-world problems such as oppression, violence, inequality, and hunger as such issues often raise controversy. Moreover, there should be a focus on enquiry, analysis, discourse, and perspectives.<sup>6</sup> While this philosophy manifests noble ideas, it is essentially secular and therefore, may not be fully compatible for implementation in Muslim societies.

Some works linked social reconstruction to Muslim society. It is seen as one of the two distinct directions of modernist Islamic thought among contemporary Muslim thinkers in the Maghrib.<sup>7</sup> They attempted to locate modern Western intellectual legacy and practices such as democracy, freedom of thought, and individual liberties within Islam. Their goal was to reimagine the Islamic legacy. In this process, their Western intellectual thoughts became more direct and they somewhat embraced the secular political system. Similarly, some envisioned reconstruction within the context of gender equality; they suggest reconstructing traditional interpretations of the Qur'ān and *sunnah* to make space for women's leadership in Islam for current times. Additionally, they recommend that "any forms of interpretation of the sources of Islamic teachings that are contrary to the principles of justice and ignores the spirit of Islamic teachings that uphold the equality between men and women need to be reconstructed."<sup>8</sup> While the authors consider Islam a part of this reconstruction process, it is not an Islamic social reconstruction at its core because the entire process is not guided by the traditional understanding of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *sunnah*. However, other works address social issues strictly based on the Qur'ān and *sunnah*, specifically based on Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. Javid presents the guidelines of ethics and morality that are found in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt.<sup>9</sup> Others presented the best ways of establishing interpersonal

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<sup>6</sup> "Social Reconstructionism" (2015), <https://graduatefoundationsmoduleela.wordpress.com/social-reconstructionism/>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Amine Tais, "Revivalism and Reconstructionism in Islamic Reform: Intellectual Trends in Modernist Maghribi Thought," *Journal of Religion and Society* 21 (2019): 1-20.

<sup>8</sup> Tedi Supriyadi, J. Julia, and Endis Firdaus, "The Problems of Gender Equality: A Reconstruction of Islamic Doctrine," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, no. 2 (2019): 106.

<sup>9</sup> Sabiq Javid, "Importance of Social Ethics: A Special Reference in the Light of Surah Hujurat," *International Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 3, no. 4 (2019).

relationships based on Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt.<sup>10</sup> Waqar and Haq offer an overview of the sūrah and claim that it offers the fundamental guidelines for a peaceful and fulfilling social life.<sup>11</sup> While these works are thought-provoking and inspiring in their discussion of one or more social issues, they are very limited in scope as they do not address the big picture of social reconstruction with the corresponding implementation process. This work intends to fill that void and design a roadmap of social reconstruction in the light of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. Specifically, it is a multi-pronged undertaking of character development at the different sectors of society that can safeguard the society from malicious tongue, thereby minimizing chaos, building trust, and fostering peace and stability.

### Malicious Tongue in Society

In today's world, the unregulated malicious tongue unleashes countless evils such as backbiting, slandering, false accusation, false witness, lying, scandal, etc. The following discussions illustrate those issues.

#### Gossip

One of the major issues with the tongue is gossip. Wilson and others<sup>12</sup> and Foster<sup>13</sup> define it as a conversation involving salacious information about a person who is absent; it is condemned in almost all cultures as it is generally perceived as disgraceful and dishonest behaviour. This discussion excludes harmless chatting even though it may fall in the category of vain talk and inefficient use of time. Pascua states that even in the fifteenth century, gossip was considered to be a social evil with dangerous consequences and was looked upon as “an enemy without a face.”<sup>14</sup> According to Dunbar, gossip is a widespread problem in society

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<sup>10</sup> Omar M. Khasawneh and Mohammad A. Al-Jamal, “Dealing with People in Light of the Quranic Chapter of Al-Hujurat (The Chambers): A Social Perspective,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 7, no. 2 (2017): 1-7.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Waqar and Imranul Haq, “Social Principles and Etiquette in the Light of Surah Al-Hujurat,” *International Journal of Advanced Research* 9, no. 5 (2021): 125-35, <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/12814>.

<sup>12</sup> David Sloan Wilson et al., “Gossip and other Aspects of Language as Group-Level Adaptations,” in *The Evolution of Cognition*, ed. C. Heyes and L. Huber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 347-65.

<sup>13</sup> Eric K. Foster, “Research on Gossip: Taxonomy, Methods, and Future Directions,” *Review of General Psychology* 8, no. 2 (2004): 78-99, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.78>.

<sup>14</sup> Esther Pascua, “Invisible Enemies: The Devastating Effect of Gossip in Castile at the End of the Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2019): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2019.1566758>.

to the extent that it accounts for approximately 65% of speaking time.<sup>15</sup> Sami states that these types of actions continue to be compatible with human nature. People love to delve into the shortcomings of others, reveal their secrets, and harm people's honour.<sup>16</sup> Such type of malicious gossip about someone behind their back is called backbiting. Peng and others claim that gossip-like actions cause more activity in the prefrontal cortex of one's brain where important cognitive functions take place such as decision-making and planning; people are typically entertained by hearing negative information about others and at the same time annoyed by hearing negative information about themselves.<sup>17</sup> Such kinds of behaviours exist in society for various reasons, such as conflict, revenge, anger, to make oneself feel superior, etc. Linking conflict to gossip, Helmy, Labib, and AbouKahf "showed two consequences of conflict. First Lionism (Predatory Bullying) including driving wedges between people, Gossip, Backbiting, lying, false testimony, stealing, cursing."<sup>18</sup> These could be a symbol of insecurity of a person or a reflection of a judgemental character; it relates to the mental health of people including emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.<sup>19</sup>

Gossip limits social cooperation by destroying the foundation of the good opinion of others. It belittles the humanistic values of individuals and weakens the bond of society. The evil motives of people capitalize on the weakness of a person and spread it, further strengthening the despised characteristics in a man. Everyone has certain kinds of weaknesses, and the spread of such things brings suspicion and pessimism in society thus annihilating trust and the spirit of cooperation. Popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and X, have become vehicles for the uncontrolled spread of undesirable

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<sup>15</sup> R. I. M. Dunbar, "Gossip in Evolutionary Perspective," *Review of General Psychology* 8, no. 2 (2004): 100–10, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.100>.

<sup>16</sup> Yaqdan Sami Muhammad al-Jubouri, "Backbiting Jurisprudence in the Islamic Law," *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana* 26, no. 2 (2021): 13–26, <http://bdigital2.ula.ve:8080/xmlui/654321/7614>.

<sup>17</sup> Xiaozhe Peng et al., "The Ugly Truth: Negative Gossip about Celebrities and Positive Gossip about Self Entertain People in Different Ways," *Social Neuroscience* 10, no. 3 (2015): 320–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470919.2014.999162>.

<sup>18</sup> Sherine Helmy, Ashraf Labib, and Abdelsalam AbouKahf, "The Impact of Islamic Values on Interpersonal Relationship Conflict Management in Egyptian Business Organizations 'An Applied Study,'" *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* 143 (2014): 1109, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.561>.

<sup>19</sup> Katerina Georganta, Efharis Panagopoulou, and Anthony Montgomery, "Talking behind Their Backs: Negative Gossip and Burnout in Hospitals," *Burnout Research* 1, no. 2 (2014): 76–81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2014.07.003>.

information. There are built-in mechanisms to restrict that; however, once the negative information goes out, it is very difficult to contain the damage. Backbiting may result in observable harm to a person at various levels, such as emotional, physical, financial, marital, etc.<sup>20</sup> It can lead to damaging consequences for a community by diminishing trust and cohesion.<sup>21</sup> Within the context of an institution, gossip can indicate a stressful environment<sup>22</sup> and can lead to eroded morale and decreased productivity.<sup>23</sup> Specifically in a hospital setting, gossip is considered a problem demanding attention.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is clear that gossip, specifically backbiting, can hurt people, families, communities, institutions, etc.

As globalization is on the rise,<sup>25</sup> the world has become a small village; a problem anywhere is a problem everywhere, including in Muslim societies. Currently, the morals of Muslims are slowly dying out due to the influence of internal and external social problems.<sup>26</sup> Regarding Muslims in the Gulf, the *Khaleej Times* reported, “Backbiting is so widespread among people that it has become an issue of people’s meetings and an avenue for expressing their anger, misgivings and jealousy.”<sup>27</sup> In a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia, “television gossip shows, popularly known as infotainment, have become a daily staple for Indonesian viewers for more than a decade. However, due to

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<sup>20</sup> Nancy B. Kurland and Lisa Hope Pelled, “Passing the Word: Toward a Model of Gossip and Power in the Workplace,” *Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 2 (2000): 428–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/259023>.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Paine, “What Is Gossip about? An Alternative Hypothesis,” *Man* 2, no. 2 (1967): 278–85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2799493>; F. T. McAndrew, E. K. Bell, and C. M. Garcia, “Who Do We Tell and Whom Do We Tell on? Gossip as a Strategy for Status Enhancement,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 37, no. 7 (2007): 1562–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2007.00227.x>; Shimul Melwani, “A Little Bird Told Me So: The Emotional, Attributional, Relational and Team-Level Outcomes of Engaging in Gossip” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> R. Davidhizar and S. Dowd, “The Dynamics of Rumours in Clinical Settings,” *Nursing Standard* 11 (1996): 40–43.

<sup>23</sup> Danziger E. Danziger, “Minimize Office Gossip,” *Personnel Journal* 67 (1988): 31–34.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah A. Thomas and Elizabeth J. Rozell, “Gossip and Nurses: Malady or Remedy?” *The Health Care Manager* 26, no. 2 (2007): 111–15, <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.HCM.0000268613.02997.8c>.

<sup>25</sup> W. Hachten and J. Scotton, *The World News Prism: Challenges of Digital Communication* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. Web, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> J. Khalil and M. Kraidy, “The Middle East: Transnational Arab Television,” in *The Media Globe: Trends in International Mass Media*, ed. L. Artz and Y. Kamalipour (n.p.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 79–98.

<sup>27</sup> “Why Islam Prohibits Backbiting and Slandering” (2015), <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/opinion/why-islam-prohibits-backbiting-and-slandering>.

its nature of publicly airing the supposedly dirty laundry of Indonesian celebrities, infotainment has been under attack since its inception. Religious, professional, and social organizations have publicly debated its content.”<sup>28</sup> Muslim societies are suffering many of the consequences of gossip as discussed earlier, including disputes and arguments within households and between neighbours and relatives; it strains relationships and shatters families.<sup>29</sup> It “tears apart the union of Muslims, divides their inclusion, weakens them, makes Muslims within reach of their enemies.”<sup>30</sup>

### ***Ridiculing, Defaming, Name-Calling***

There are some actions, which are more direct and aggressive than harmful gossip (backbiting), such as ridiculing, defaming or calling names. Ridiculing is an act that victimizes, belittles, or humiliates others.<sup>31</sup> It can be laughing at somebody’s appearance or speech, imitating somebody’s weakness, making obscene gestures to someone, calling names, referring to weakness, criticizing, etc. Ridiculing can take a different shape known as defamation; it usually involves derogatory statements or publications regarding others without any justification.<sup>32</sup> It can appear in various other forms, such as cartoons, songs, movies, articles, posts on websites, etc.

In most cases, ridicule targets groups or members of groups, such as ethnic groups, women, etc.<sup>33</sup> It can be a form of entertainment against those who are disliked or not a part of one’s group.<sup>34</sup> Another reason, the most harmful one, people may belittle or defame others is to maintain a

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<sup>28</sup> Hanny Savitri Hartono, “Muslim Mothers and Indonesian Gossip Shows in Everyday Life,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 43, no. 126 (2015): 298, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2014.996995>.

<sup>29</sup> “The Evils of the Tongue” (2005), <https://islamhouse.com/en/books/1239/>.

<sup>30</sup> Alam Khan, “The Concept and Psychological Effects of Sins in Islam,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2015): 186-91.

<sup>31</sup> D. Zillmann, “Disparagement Humor,” in *Handbook of Humor Research*, ed. P. McGhee and J. Goldstein (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), 85-108; Frank W. Wicker, William L. Baron, and Amy C. Willis, “Disparagement Humor: Dispositions and Resolutions,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39, no. 4 (1980): 701-09, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.4.701>.

<sup>32</sup> M. Silberman, “Back to Basics: The Importance of Patient Respect,” *AANA Journal* 83, no. 5 (2015): 312-15.

<sup>33</sup> C. P. Wilson, *Jokes: Form, Content, Use, and Function* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> L. Fave, “Humor Judgments as a Function of Reference Groups and Identification Classes,” in *The Psychology of Humor*, ed. J. Goldstein and P. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 195-210; Wicker, Baron, and Willis, “Disparagement Humor,” 701-09.



positive social identity of oneself or to feel superior to others.<sup>35</sup> Ridicule tends to normalize prejudice and discrimination towards a group.<sup>36</sup> When individuals are exposed to such kinds of stereotyping of certain groups of people, it may sow the seed of stereotypical views within them.<sup>37</sup> Exposure to this kind of demeaning behaviour can increase the expressions of aggression.<sup>38</sup> Defamation can cost the reputation of a person in society, thereby harming emotionally, socially, and economically.<sup>39</sup> These practices desensitize society to improper behaviours.

Unfortunately, these ills have become a very common and integral part of current society. It is evident in television and social media in general, in addition to highly polarized political campaigns, and entertaining comedies. These activities often become hostile and demeaning. When content was analysed for a week in primetime television, 69% of all humorous incidents in prime time were hostile.<sup>40</sup> Such actions may lead to grave consequences, such as the recent mass shooting at Walmart Shopping Center in the USA. In a CNN news article, Elamroussi highlights that very point as the shooter's death note says, "the associates [co-workers] gave me evil twisted grins, mocked me."<sup>41</sup>

These types of social problems are common in Muslim societies even within the religious bodies and clergy class. That students at religious

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<sup>35</sup> H. Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American* 223 (1970): 96–102.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas E. Ford and Mark A. Ferguson, "Social Consequences of Disparagement Humor: A Prejudiced Norm Theory," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 8, no. 1 (2004): 83, doi: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0801\_4.

<sup>37</sup> James M. Olson, Gregory R. Maio, and Karen L. Hobden, "The (Null) Effects of Exposure to Disparagement Humor on Stereotypes and Attitudes," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 12, no. 2 (1999): 195–219, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1999.12.2.195>.

<sup>38</sup> Robert A. Baron, "The Influence of Hostile and Nonhostile Humor upon Physical Aggression," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (1978): 77–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014616727800400116>; K. M. Ryan and J. Kanjorski, "The Enjoyment of Sexist Humor, Rape Attitudes, and Relationship Aggression in College Students," *Sex Roles* 38 (1998): 743–75.

<sup>39</sup> E. Hall-Lipsy and S. Malanga, "Defamation Lawsuits: Academic Sword or Shield?" *EMBO Mol Med* 9, no. 12 (2017): 1623–25.

<sup>40</sup> S. H. Stocking, B. S. Sopolsky, and D. Zillmann, "Sex Discrimination in Prime Time Humor," *Journal of Broadcasting* 21 (1977): 447–57.

<sup>41</sup> Aya Elamroussi, "The Youngest of 6 Victims in a Deadly Mass Shooting at a Virginia Walmart Has Been Identified as Authorities Learn More about Thegunman," November 26, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/26/us/chesapeake-virginia-walmart-shooting-saturday/index.html>.

institutions are also involved in such offensive behaviours<sup>42</sup> further reinforces the idea that the general population do not have much hope in abstaining from such ills if the religious students themselves are failing to abide by virtuous principles. Therefore, such malicious and unregulated activities must be addressed immediately with the needed seriousness.

### **Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt: Pathway to Transformation**

At this juncture, we dive into Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt verses 11 and 12 to understand the root causes of and the solutions to the various social ills such as backbiting, ridiculing, defaming, and name-calling. We offer a detailed discussion of the verses including a brief exegesis. Furthermore, we discuss how to leverage the social reconstruction philosophy, i.e., its mechanism of education and culturing, in implementing the solutions from Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt.

Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt verses 11 and 12 examine the social discords caused by the malicious tongue and present guidelines for developing a virtuous character that can address such social ills. Verse 12 states, “O believers! Avoid many suspicions, [for] indeed, some suspicions are sinful. And do not spy, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of their dead brother? You would despise that! And fear Allah. Surely Allah is [the] Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful.” This verse lays down three prohibitions against the following explicit sins that incite social chaos and mischief: suspicion, spying, and backbiting.

Although these actions are listed separately, they are interrelated since backbiting often starts initially as suspicion. Philips affirms that “gossip can only take root and grow if excessive suspicion is present.”<sup>43</sup> To address the problem of backbiting, the Qur’ān encourages Muslims to start by purifying their thoughts by eliminating suspicions about others.

### **Suspicion**

Suspicion is “a mental state usually short of belief in which one entertains a notion that something is wrong or that a fact exists without

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<sup>42</sup> Ibrahim et al., “Importance of Restraining our Tongue according to the Quran,” 167–75.

<sup>43</sup> Bilal Philips, “Slander Backbiting and Gossip Can only Take Root and Grow if Excessive Suspicion,” April 13, 2017, <https://m.facebook.com/DrBilalPhilips/photos/slander-backbiting-and-gossip-can-only-take-root-and-grow-if-excessive-suspicion/10155178974439089/>.

proof or on slight evidence.”<sup>44</sup> Kopper and others state that suspicion hurts the interest of a person who is not proven to be guilty of any wrongdoing.<sup>45</sup> Van Prooijen, Spadaro, and Wang assert that suspicion “yields a range of negative societal outcomes by impacting people’s interpersonal, within-group, and between-group relationships.”<sup>46</sup> Unwarranted suspicion triggers mistrust. Rigg argues that trust is the cornerstone of a friendly relationship and an absence of that is counterproductive.<sup>47</sup> Suspicions against the government can be the basis of conspiracy theories.<sup>48</sup>

The Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) said, “Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the worst of false tales.”<sup>49</sup> Sa’di states that unsubstantiated suspicion or ill thoughts against a believer can be a sin as it tends to continue until it results in inappropriate actions.<sup>50</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī state that thinking ill of a Muslim is a sin unless the person manifests evil outwardly and as such, Muslims should strive to maintain a positive outlook towards fellow Muslims.<sup>51</sup>

Mawdūdī details several types of suspicions and explains which of them are justified. The first kind of suspicion is to think well about a fellow Muslim; this is morally approved and encouraged. The second kind of suspicion is what law enforcement and the legal system deal with daily; they have to make decisions based on the most probable scenario of evidence without absolute certainty. Such decisions speak to the

<sup>44</sup> Merriam-Webster, s.v. “suspicion,” accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suspicion>.

<sup>45</sup> Ákos Kopper et al., “Creating Suspicion and Vigilance: Using Enemy Images for Hindering Mobilization,” *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 3, no. 3 (2017): 108–25, <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v3i3.366>.

<sup>46</sup> Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Giuliana Spadaro, and Haiyan Wang, “Suspicion of Institutions: How Distrust and Conspiracy Theories Deteriorate Social Relationships,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 43 (2022): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.013>.

<sup>47</sup> C. Rigg, “Mistrust, Secrecy and Suspicion, Action Learning,” *Research and Practice* 12, no. 3 (2015): 259–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2015.1094627>.

<sup>48</sup> M. Butter and P. Knight, *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020); J. Prooijen and M. Vugt, “Conspiracy Theories: Evolved Functions and Psychological Mechanisms,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 6 (2018): 770–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618774270>.

<sup>49</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb mā yunhā ‘an al-taḥāsud wa ’l-tadābur, Book 78, No. 94, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6064>.

<sup>50</sup> Abdur Rahman Sa’di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (Riyad: International Islamic Publishing House, 2018), 9:258.

<sup>51</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, trans. Feras Hamza, ed. Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2007), 606, [https://www.altafsir.com/Books/Al\\_Jalalain\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.altafsir.com/Books/Al_Jalalain_Eng.pdf).

probabilistic nature of certain events when the evidence is unclear or implicit and thus is justified due to the lack of alternative methods of legal resolution. The third kind that is allowed is when there exists a definitive and outward indication of evil within a person. Although it is true that Muslims should have positive attitudes towards other Muslims, it should not be taken to the extreme of naivety. The fourth kind of suspicion, which is unlawful, is when there is an equal possibility of interpreting someone's actions as good or evil, but a person opts to view it as evil. For instance, if a Muslim is taking someone else's shoe from a mosque, people should not immediately think that the person is stealing the shoe, rather they should assume that he instead misidentified his shoe.<sup>52</sup>

Qutb says Allah raised a barrier against suspicion to cleanse the feelings of the Muslims, promote purity of conscience, and protect it from evil thoughts. While evil thoughts, which cannot be controlled in and of themselves are not blameworthy, their persistence may ultimately lead to actual sin. When the mind is free from doubt and evil thoughts, it facilitates a social environment that is pleasant and free of worry and apprehension. In a broader sense, it ultimately protects people's dignity and rights by shutting the door of prosecution based on suspicion and outright false accusations. Consequently, people remain innocent, free, and dignified until they are proven guilty as per clear evidence.<sup>53</sup>

To improve social conditions towards a virtuous environment, people need to gain the needed motivation and energy to overcome their weaknesses. Such an environment can be realized only if people consciously and sincerely recognize their problems. Furthermore, when they realize that they are victims of their own actions, they will likewise recognize that only they can fix them. People need to acknowledge that everyone is subject to weaknesses and that they should rather concern themselves with rectifying them instead of engaging in suspicion about others. Upon identifying the root causes of the weaknesses, people must be eager to make the proper behavioural changes. One cause of suspicion is when two persons are speaking in a foreign language in front of a third; another similar cause is to engage in private conversations in the presence of others. When a person is excluded from a conversation either deliberately or due to language barriers, it is difficult to not

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<sup>52</sup> Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān: English Version of Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, trans. and ed. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2006), <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>.

<sup>53</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an (Fi Zilal al-Qur'an)*, trans. M. Salahi and A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2015), 16:93.

assume that the other two parties have less than noble intentions. Accordingly, the Prophet Muḥammad said, “If you are three, two should not converse secretly to the exclusion of your companion for that hurts his feelings.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, people are to speak in a common language that the rest of the present individuals understand and not converse in private lest it fuels the fire of suspicion.

In addition to rectifying behavioural issues, restoring the heart is also crucial because it is the place where suspicion is born. These social ills are a reflection of a sick heart which essentially destroys a person and cascades to society as a whole. Consequently, the importance of a pure heart is highlighted in the Qur’ān and *sunnah*. Allah says, “Indeed he is successful who purifies it [the soul]. And indeed, he fails who corrupts it.”<sup>55</sup> He also states, “Who purifies himself [his soul] will succeed.”<sup>56</sup> The Prophet said, “In the body, there is a piece of flesh, and the whole body is sound if it is sound, but the whole body is corrupt if it is corrupt. It is the heart.”<sup>57</sup> Keeping the heart under check requires constant and vigilant monitoring; one method to do so is to constantly remember death as the Prophet said, “Frequently remember the destroyer of pleasures (i.e., death).”<sup>58</sup> Upon exhorting all possible efforts of reform, a Muslim should never forget to supplicate to the Lord of the worlds for guidance and firmness, as the Prophet’s Companion Anas b. Mālīk said, “The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, most frequently said, ‘O Allah, O Overturmer of hearts, make my heart firm upon Your path.’”<sup>59</sup>

### *Spying*

Suspicion, regardless of the intention, often leads to spying which is to secretly “watch on a person or thing to obtain information.”<sup>60</sup> Spying includes invading people’s personal space without their knowledge such as watching people, reading private letters, listening to private

<sup>54</sup> Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-salām, Bāb taḥrīm munājāt al-ithnayn dūn al-thālith bi ghayr riḍāhuh, Book 39, No. 51, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2184b>.

<sup>55</sup> Qur’ān 91:9–10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 87:14.

<sup>57</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb faḍl man istabra’a dīnah, Book 2, No. 45, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:52>.

<sup>58</sup> Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Mājāh, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-zuhd, Bāb dhikr al-mawt wa ’l-iti’dād lah, Book 37, No. 159, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4258>.

<sup>59</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Kitāb al-du’ā’, Bāb Da’awāt al-Nabī ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa sallam, Book 31, No. 80, <https://sunnah.com/adab:683>.

<sup>60</sup> Merriam-Webster, s.v. “spy,” accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spy>.

conversations, peeping into people's houses, etc. Spying not only uncovers damaging information about others (such as a person being an alcoholic) but also may reveal unpleasant information to the one engaging in spying; for instance, the one who is spying can find out that someone hates or speaks ill of him. Most importantly though, the spying individual harms himself the most by incurring sin and violating the privacy of the one he spies against. Abū Dardā' narrated from Mu'āwiyah that he heard the Prophet say, "If you search for the faults of the people, you will corrupt them, or will nearly corrupt them."<sup>61</sup> Spying in the context of a family will upend the family bonds, strain relationships, and impact the mental health of the children. No matter the justification, spying essentially results in a net loss to all parties involved (both the victim and aggressor).

In this modern age, privacy is nothing but a relic of the past. In June 2013, US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden revealed the alarming extent of mass spying. In agreement, Big Brother Watch states that "in our mass surveillance society, anyone and everyone is under suspicion and observation, whether justified or not."<sup>62</sup> Brissenden reported that alleged spying operations in Pacific Island countries by Australia and New Zealand have political ramifications against strategic alliances and cooperative pacts between allies who were thought to be on the same side.<sup>63</sup>

Allah commands Muslims not to spy on each other in verse 12 of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. Ibn Kathīr says that generally "*tajassus*" (spying) is prohibited due to its negative connotation, unlike the word "*tahassus*" which may mean mere enquiry as utilized in Sūrat Yūsuf: "O my sons! Go you and inquire (*tahassasu*) about Yousuf and his brother, and never give up hope of Allah's mercy."<sup>64</sup> Sa'di says it means not to find or search for the faults of other Muslims; it is to leave the other Muslims alone in their private affairs.<sup>65</sup> Abū Hurayrah narrated that Allah's Messenger

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<sup>61</sup> Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb fī 'l-nahy 'an al-tajassus, Book 43, No. 116, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4888>.

<sup>62</sup> Big Brother Watch, "The State of Surveillance in 2018, UK: Big Brother Watch" (2018), 59, <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-State-of-Surveillance-in-2018.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> B. Brissenden, "Australia Spied on Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono," Leaked Edward Snowden Documents Reveal (2013), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-18/australia-spied-on-indonesian-president,-leaked-documents-reveal/5098860>.

<sup>64</sup> Abū l-Fidā' Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, trans. Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 2003), 9:201.

<sup>65</sup> Sa'di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, 9:258.

said, “Do not look for the others’ faults and do not spy, and do not be jealous of one another, and do not desert [cut your relation with] one another, and do not hate one another; and O Allah’s worshipers! Be brothers [as Allah has ordered you!].”<sup>66</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī say it is forbidden to pursue the imperfections of Muslims even if they are true. The idea is not to dig out the weaknesses of others but rather to hide and protect them from exposure; however, if something is apparent then it is a whole different scenario.<sup>67</sup>

Qutb says that Allah has established a guardrail in the society so no person could be spied upon unjustly. Islam has protected the people of the society from sinking into vile pursuit. This also applies at the level of government such that every person in society has the right to certain privacy and dignity regardless of his situation.<sup>68</sup> Mawdūdī concurs that the government is not required to spy on people to find their secret sins to punish them. It is because secret sins cannot be eradicated by spying and punishing people rather it requires internal reform through education, proper upbringing, and nurturing.<sup>69</sup> Islam has closed all possible doors of unjustified suspicion, thereby guaranteeing a respectful relationship between the government and society which fosters further harmony. However, there are cases when digging into people’s personal lives becomes a necessity for the greater good of society, such as, when someone is accused of an evil that may negatively affect others who intend to engage with a person (such as a person who fails to pay his debts and others wish to loan or enter into a business venture with such an individual).

People should be constantly reminded that such evil traits and acts contribute to not only one’s moral decay but to society’s as well. The Prophet considered spies lacking in true faith and also warned that Allah would expose their shortcomings: “O people, who have professed belief verbally, but faith has not yet entered your hearts: Do not pry into the affairs of the Muslims, for he who will pry into the affairs of the Muslims, Allah will pry into his affairs, and he whom Allah follows inquisitively, is disgraced by Him in his own house.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, searching for people’s faults may be a greater crime in front of Allah than the fault that people

<sup>66</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb mā yunhā ‘an al-taḥāsud wa ’l-tadābur, Book 78, No. 94, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6064>.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 606.

<sup>68</sup> Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 16:94.

<sup>69</sup> Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>.

<sup>70</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb fī ’l-ghībah, Book 43, No. 108, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4880>.

are searching for. Such action brings the displeasure of Allah and can result in a tremendous loss in the hereafter as the Prophet issued a grave warning in the report of Ibn ‘Abbās which states, “If somebody listens to the talk of some people who do not like him (to listen) or they run away from him, then molten lead will be poured into his ears on the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>71</sup> To go even further, Muslims are not only prohibited from spying but are further encouraged to hide the faults of others. The Messenger of Allah said, “Whoever conceals (the fault of) a Muslim in this world, Allah will conceal him (his faults) in this world and the Hereafter. Allah will help a person so long as he is helping his brother.”<sup>72</sup> Such guidelines are far above ordinary or baseline legal rulings; they foster the pinnacle of character development for all members of society. When these teachings are cultured within society through various educational processes, they will guide people’s thoughts and actions.

### **Backbiting**

Spying leads to the uncovering of certain deficiencies of a person which then spirals into the hidden dissemination of such information to others, i.e., backbiting. The technical meaning is to say something about a person in his absence what he disapproves of as it is clear in a *ḥadīth* reported by Abū Hurayrah: “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Do you know what is backbiting?’ They [the Companions] said, ‘Allah and His Messenger know best.’ Thereupon he [the Prophet] said, ‘Backbiting implies your talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like.’”<sup>73</sup> Backbiting includes everything and anything that a person disapproves of, whether related to appearance, family members, social status, religion, etc.<sup>74</sup> Ibn Kathīr points out that speech is considered backbiting even if the information is true<sup>75</sup> as narrated by Abū Hurayrah from Allah’s Messenger: “‘Backbiting implies your talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like.’ It was said to him: ‘What is your opinion about this that if I actually find (that failing) in my brother

<sup>71</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ta‘bīr, Bāb man kadhab fī ḥulumih, Book 91, No. 56, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7042>.

<sup>72</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-dhikr. . . , Bāb faḍl al-ijtimā‘ ‘alā tilāwat al-Qur’ān wa ‘alā ‘l-dhikr, Book 48, No. 48, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2699a>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Kitāb al-birr. . . , Bāb taḥrīm al-ghībah, Book 45, No. 91, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2589>.

<sup>74</sup> Hafiz Muhammad Zubair and Hafiz Hussain Azhar, “Islamic Sharia Teachings and Practices for Preventing Bullying,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 4, no. 1 (2014): 254-65, [https://aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol\\_4\\_No\\_1\\_January\\_2014/25.pdf](https://aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_1_January_2014/25.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 9:202.



which I made a mention of?’ He said: ‘If (that failing) is actually found (in him) what you assert, you in fact backbit him.’”<sup>76</sup> There are many evil motives and catalysts for backbiting such as anger, jealousy, revenge, hiding one’s mistakes by pointing to the mistakes of others, self-righteousness, arrogance, entertainment, etc.

Allah prohibits backbiting in verse 12 of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. Abū Hurayrah reported from the Messenger of Allah the following: “It is enough evil for any man to despise his brother Muslim.”<sup>77</sup> It is important to reflect on the profound and final sermon of the Prophet at his farewell pilgrimage where he compared the sanctity of a Muslim’s honour with that of Mecca among others. It was similar to a last will (*waṣīyyah*) for the Muslims. Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) delivered a sermon on the Day of Nahr, and said, ‘O people! (Tell me) What is the day today?’ The people replied, ‘It is the forbidden (sacred) day.’ He asked again, ‘What town is this?’ They replied, ‘It is the forbidden (sacred) town.’ He asked, ‘Which month is this?’ They replied, ‘It is the forbidden (sacred) month.’ He said, ‘No doubt! Your blood, your properties, and your honour are sacred to one another like the sanctity of this day of yours, in this (sacred) town (Mecca) of yours, in this month of yours.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) repeated his statement again and again.”<sup>78</sup>

Backbiting destroys the spirit of brotherhood and unity, which is the greatest social capital. Allah essentially compares backbiting with cannibalism (i.e., eating the flesh of a dead Muslim) to depict the disgust and seriousness of such a crime.<sup>79</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī say that this verse implies that the way people dislike eating the flesh of their dead brother, they should equally dislike backbiting that brother while he is living.<sup>80</sup> Mawdūdī takes it one step further and argues that backbiting is *ḥarām* (forbidden) primarily on moral grounds as a person is not even hurt by backbiting if he is not aware of it (similar to the dead person whose meat is being eaten). The prohibition of backbiting applies to the dead as well.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-birr wa ’l-ṣilah wa ’l-ādāb, Bāb taḥrīm al-ghībah, Book 45, No. 91, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2589>.

<sup>77</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb fī ’l-ghībah, Book 43, No. 110, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4882>.

<sup>78</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ḥajj, Bāb al-khuṭbah ayyām Minā, Book 25, No. 217, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:1739>.

<sup>79</sup> Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 16:96.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 606.

<sup>81</sup> Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’an*, <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>

Since the honour of a Muslim is sacred, backbiting warrants several punishments as per the Prophet's words: "No person who spreads malicious gossip (or in another report, eavesdropper) will enter Paradise."<sup>82</sup> Spreading malicious gossip entails a person joining a group while they are talking and relaying stories and information with the sole intent to cause discord. On the other hand, the eavesdropper spies on an individual and then relays such collected information. Furthermore, the Prophet said, "When I was taken up to heavens, I passed by people who had nails of copper and were scratching their faces and their breasts. I said: 'Who are these people, Gabriel?' He replied: 'They are those who were engaged in backbiting and who aspersed people's honour.'"<sup>83</sup> Ibn 'Abbās said that the Messenger of Allah passed by two graves and said, "They are being punished, but they are not being punished for anything difficult to avoid. One of them was heedless about preventing urine from getting on his clothes, and the other used to walk about spreading malicious gossip."<sup>84</sup> These warnings should deter people from such reprehensible behaviour once they are made aware with proper training.

It is important to recognize that even if the backbiter is hypothetically flawless, the action of backbiting in itself is a shortcoming. Hence, it is much worse to backbite someone when an individual manifests the same shortcomings. People need to realize that the way they backbite others, others can do the same to them and it becomes an open season of evil for all. Whether a Muslim is flawless or not, upon witnessing someone's weakness he should be thankful to Allah for being free from such a weakness rather than looking down on that person. Additionally, he should pray for that person and advise with wisdom. Allah says about the righteous believers who supplicate to Him, "Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith and put not in our hearts any resentment toward those who have faith. Our Lord, you are kind and merciful."<sup>85</sup> This is a true reflection of communal thinking, brotherhood, and compassion. When Muslims are taught such teachings they will develop noble character with meaningful practice leading to social reform.

Islam places significant emphasis on protecting people's honour and thus instituted numerous measures. The key to safeguarding the honour

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<sup>82</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb bayan ghilaz ṭaḥrīm al-namīmah, Book 1, No. 196, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:105a>.

<sup>83</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb fī 'l-ghībah, Book 43, No. 106, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4878>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṭahārah wa sunanihā, Bāb al-tashdīd fī 'l-bawl, Book 1, No. 81, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:347>.

<sup>85</sup> Qur'ān 59:10.

of a Muslim is to be cautious when using the tongue in general as Allah says, “Successful indeed are the believers . . . those who avoid idle talk.”<sup>86</sup> Out of concern for accountability, people should not indulge in unnecessary matters as Allah states that there is “not a word does (one) utter but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it).”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the Prophet issued a grave warning against a loose tongue when he stated, “The servant speaks words, the consequences of which he does not realize, and for which he is sent down into the depths of the Fire further than the distance between the East and the West.”<sup>88</sup> The Prophet also said, “O Mu’aadh! Is there anything that topples people on their faces - or he said on their noses - into the Hellfire, other than the harvests of their tongues.”<sup>89</sup> Jābir narrated that he heard the Prophet say, “A Muslim is he from whose hand and tongue the Muslims are safe.”<sup>90</sup> Muslims should only speak for constructive purposes due to the Prophet’s statement, “He who believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak a good word or remain silent.”<sup>91</sup>

Despite the guidelines from the Qur’ān and *sunnah*, backbiting does take place. Therefore, the question is: What should one do when he becomes the subject (victim) of backbiting? It is not easy to control one’s temper and anger after being defamed in absentia. Firstly, people should not vent their anger to the public unless that is part of seeking reconciliation or justice. As the Qur’ān says, “Allah does not like that evil should be uttered in public except by him who has been wronged.”<sup>92</sup> Secondly, they should not respond to such evil with another evil, as Allah says, “Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond [to evil] with what is best, then the one you are in a feud with will be like a close friend.”<sup>93</sup> Responding to evil with its like will only fuel a continuous and vicious cycle of attack and counterattack, resulting in chaos. Thirdly, one should go to the person in private, so the issue does not become public and try to reconcile sooner rather than later as the Messenger said, “The deeds

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 23:1-3.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 5:18.

<sup>88</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-zuhd wa ’l-raqā’iq, Bāb al-takallum bi ’l-kalimah yahwī bihā fī ’l-nār, Book 55, No. 64, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2988a>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-fitan, Bāb kaff al-lisān fī ’l-fitnah, Book 36, No. 48, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:3973>.

<sup>90</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb bayan tafāḍl al-Islām, Book 1, No. 69, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:41>.

<sup>91</sup> Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb ikrām al-ḍayf, Book 78, No. 163, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6136>.

<sup>92</sup> Qur’ān 4:148.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 41:34.

are presented on every Thursday and Monday and Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, grants pardon to every person who does not associate anything with Allah except the person in whose (heart) there is rancour against his brother. It would be said: ‘Put both of them off until they are reconciled.’”<sup>94</sup> Fourthly, before seeking reconciliation or clarification, one should take time to subside one’s anger because emotions (such as anger and vengeance) cloud one’s judgement; the process of reconciliation requires composure and wisdom. The Prophet said, “A judge should not decide between the two while he is in anger.”<sup>95</sup> Fifthly, one can always turn to Allah for patience, and forgive the aggressor in secret and supplicate for his guidance as “Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) never took revenge for his own self in any matter presented to him.”<sup>96</sup>

The next question is if one witnesses others backbiting, how should they be addressed? He is to advise them to stop that evil as the Messenger of Allah said, “Whoever protects his brother’s honour, Allah protects his face from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>97</sup> Also, Allah encourages enjoining good and forbidding evil in general: “Let there be a group among you who call [others] to goodness, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil—it is they who will be successful.”<sup>98</sup> Emphasizing the same general idea, the Prophet said, “Whoever amongst you sees an evil, he must change it with his hand; if he is unable to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is unable to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest form of Faith.”<sup>99</sup> Upon exhausting all efforts if the people do not take heed, then a Muslim is to disassociate himself from them in a respectful manner as Allah says, “If they hear gossip, they walk away.”<sup>100</sup> He also states that when the believers “pass by pointless talk, (they) pass by with dignity.”<sup>101</sup>

Thus far, the processes of handling backbiting as a subject of it or a witness to it have been addressed; it is now imperative to discuss the

<sup>94</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-birr wa ’l-ṣilah wa ’l-ādāb, Bāb al-nahy ‘an al-shaḥnā’ wa ’l-tahājir, Book 45, No. 44, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2565c>.

<sup>95</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-aqḍiyah, Bāb al-qāḍī yaqḍī wa huwa al-ghaḍabān, Book 25, No. 19, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:3589>.

<sup>96</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ḥudūd, Bāb kam al-ta’zīr wa ’l-adab, Book 86, No. 75, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6853>.

<sup>97</sup> Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-birr wa ’l-ṣilah, Bāb mā jā’a fī ’l-dhabb ‘an ’irḍ al-muslim, Book 27, No. 37, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1931>.

<sup>98</sup> Qur’ān 3:104.

<sup>99</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb bayan kawn al-nahy ‘an al-munkar min al-īmān, Book 1, No. 84, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:49a>.

<sup>100</sup> Qur’ān 28:55.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:72.

legal consequences of backbiting if the victim chooses not to overlook or forgive the aggressor. If he chooses to seek his rights against the aggressor, he can choose to take the person to court and be dealt with in a discretionary manner as deemed proper by the judge. This is because there is no explicit punishment (*ḥadd*) in the Islamic legal system (*sharī'ah*) for this offence; hence, a Muslim judge can offer a verdict as a discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*) as he sees fit.<sup>102</sup>

As far as the redemption of the offender is concerned, it involves seeking Allah's forgiveness in addition to seeking the forgiveness of the victim. Firstly, repentance to Allah guarantees forgiveness, thereby clears the person of the sin, and allows a clean start towards transformation. The message of hope and salvation is evident in the following verses and narrations: "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."<sup>103</sup> It was narrated from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet said, "If you were to commit sin until your sins reach the heaven, then you were to repent, your repentance would be accepted."<sup>104</sup> When Muslims reflect on this, it gives hope and positivity and can restore the hearts that will bring stability and peace to society. Secondly, regarding seeking forgiveness from the victim, Abū Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allah said, "Whoever has wronged his brother with regard to his honour or anything else, let him seek his forgiveness today before there will be no dinar and no dirham, and if he has any good deeds to his credit they will be taken from him in a manner commensurate with the wrong he did, and if he has no good deeds, then some of his counterpart's bad deeds will be taken and added to his burden."<sup>105</sup> If the victim is unaware of the backbiting, then the offender should not disclose the issue to him to seek forgiveness because it can damage the relationship and may lead to a cycle of counter-backbiting and conflicts, in which case no one benefits from it. In this circumstance, it is sufficient to pray for the

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<sup>102</sup> M. Madkour, "Defining Crime Responsibility according to Islamic Legislation," in *The Effect of Islamic Legislation on Crime Prevention in Saudi Arabia: Proceedings of the Symposium Held in Riyadh, 16-21 Shawwal, 1396 A.H* (Riyadh: Ministry of Interior, 1976), 104.

<sup>103</sup> Qur'ān 39:53.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-zuhd, Bāb dhikr al-tawbah, Book 37, No. 149, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4248>.

<sup>105</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-riqāq, Bāb al-qīṣāṣ yawm al-qiyāmah, Book 81, No. 123, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6534>.

person as well as speak good about him in every place where he was spoken bad about him.<sup>106</sup>

Now, can the victim contribute to the reconciliation process as well? Yes, as mentioned earlier, the victim can be patient with the insult and not bring the issue up at all and can forgive the offender for the pleasure of Allah. Such nobility of the victim can contribute to the healing process and transform the offender and society as a whole. Allah promotes such a character saying, “So (O Mohammad) be patient over what they say. . . .”<sup>107</sup> Also, He states, “Be gracious, enjoin what is right, and turn away from those who act ignorantly.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, He says, “Let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?”<sup>109</sup> Finally, He says, “And those who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.”<sup>110</sup> These passive and noble characteristics have very positive outcomes. The aggressor may realize the dignity of such a person and genuinely understand his own mistakes. It can humble and encourage him to make up for his mistakes, thereby, strengthening the bond of brotherhood. Perhaps by observing the sincerity and regret of the aggressor, the victim also may feel genuine acceptance and love for the aggressor. When both parties come forward, it may establish a bond of brotherhood like never before. It will also become an example for others in this society promoting love, forgiveness, respect, and brotherhood. As an incentive for working towards Islamic social reform, there should be frequent discussions of its processes and how it averts harm and brings a tremendous amount of good in both lives.

There are some exceptions to the general discussion presented above. In some cases, backbiting may be allowed when there is a genuine need for the greater good of society. For instance, the complaint of the oppressed or information in relation to a marriage proposal; the following narrations shed light on those. Once Hind bint ‘Utbah, the wife of Abū Sufyān, came to the Prophet and said, “Abu Sufyan is a miserly person. He does not give adequate maintenance for me and my children, but (I am constrained) to take from his wealth (some part of it) without his knowledge. Is there any sin for me?” Thereupon Allah’s Messenger said, “Take from his property what is customary which may suffice you

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<sup>106</sup> “Backbiting in Islam and Its Expiation” (2002), <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/23328/backbiting-in-islam-and-its-expiation>.

<sup>107</sup> Qur’ān 73:10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:199.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:22.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:134.

and your children.”<sup>111</sup> In another incident, the Prophet himself spoke about the weaknesses of companions when it was justified. The event revolved around two of the companions, Mu‘āwiyah and Abū Jahm, when they sent their marriage proposals to a lady, Fāṭimah bint Qays. She came to the Prophet and asked for his advice. He said, “Muawiyah is a poor man and Abu Jahm beats his wives much.”<sup>112</sup> In this case, as there was the question of the lady’s future and she had consulted the Prophet for his advice, he deemed it necessary to inform her of the weaknesses of the two men. It is also allowed to state facts when required by the legal system or to take a position against a person propagating lies or fabricating Prophetic narrations as it is clear from the sciences of *ḥadīth*.

Thus far, this work highlighted the ills of the tongue that take place in the absence of a person. However, other harms can be inflicted upon a Muslim while in his presence, such as ridiculing, defaming, mockery, and name-calling. These too result in animosity among people and are equally harmful to society. Therefore, Allah says in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt verse 11:

O believers! Do not let some (men) ridicule others, they may be better than them, nor let (some) women ridicule other women, they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the (true) wrongdoers.

This verse addresses typical interpersonal issues, which can significantly affect social health. Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī say that the verse was revealed when a delegation from Banū Tamīm looked down upon poor Muslims.<sup>113</sup> This verse expresses disgust with such an evil action, particularly when it is from a people who profess faith. It also lays down clear prohibitions against ridiculing, defaming, and name-calling.

### ***Ridiculing***

Ridiculing is an act that belittles or humiliates others. The Prophet characterized ridiculing as an evil from the pre-Islamic days of ignorance and as such, is inappropriate for a true believer. This is evident from the famous narration of Abū Dharr who said, “I exchanged words with another man, whose mother was a non-Arab. I insulted his mother, and he mentioned that to the Prophet (ﷺ). He (ﷺ) said to me,

<sup>111</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-aqḍiyah, Bāb qaḍīyyat Hind, Book 30, No. 8, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1714a>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Kitāb al-ṭalāq, Bāb al-muṭallaqah thalāthan lā nafaqah lahā, Book 18, No. 60, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1480p>.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 606.

‘Did you trade insults with so and so?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Did you insult his mother?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘You are a man in whom is ignorance.’”<sup>114</sup> The Prophet also said, “It is sufficient evil for a man to look down on his Muslim brother.”<sup>115</sup> Ibn Kathīr says that Allah forbade Muslims to look down on fellow Muslims as it is unbecoming of believers.<sup>116</sup> In verse 11, Allah also reminds us that the ridiculed person may be better than the person who ridicules. It is also evident in other verses of the Qur’ān: “Do not [falsely] elevate yourselves. He knows best who is [truly] righteous.”<sup>117</sup>

As the believers are founded upon the highest moral ground, it is not befitting for them to be associated with such rude speech which may be observed with some unbelievers. Furthermore, Muslims are not allowed to display such poor manners even against sinners; they are instead encouraged to hate the sin but not the sinner as it is clear in the following event. A man who had consumed alcohol was brought to the Prophet who instructed his companions to physically discipline him. Some of them did so with their sandals, others with their hands, and some with their garments. Then the Prophet said, “Enough!” and instructed them (companions) to reprimand and warn that person of how reprehensible his deed was, and they said, “Do you not feel embarrassed in front of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to have done such a thing?” Then the Prophet let that person go, and when he (who consumed alcohol) turned to leave, the people began to pray against him and revile him, and one of them said, “O Allah, put him to shame, O Allah, curse him.” The Messenger of Allah said, “Do not say such things; rather say: O Allah, forgive him, O Allah, have mercy on him.”<sup>118</sup> As Muslims are prohibited from using offensive language even against a sinner, it is even more concerning against pious or observant Muslims. Islamic brotherhood is the most sacred relationship of faith and this must be respected to keep the social fabric intact. Unfortunately, while many Muslims are hesitant to approach major sins (stealing, killing, etc.), some are not shy to belittle another Muslim because it is not as

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<sup>114</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb mā yunhā min al-sibāb wa ’l-la’n, Book 78, No. 80, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6050>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-zuhd, Bāb al-baghy, Book 37, No. 114, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4213>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 9:200.

<sup>117</sup> Qur’ān 53:32.

<sup>118</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ḥudūd, bāb al-ḥadd fī ’l-khamr, Book 40, No. 128, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4478>.



severe in their eyes.<sup>119</sup> They do not realize that a victim of such abuse may respond in an equal manner; it can result in a vicious cycle of attack and counterattack, increasing the evil in many folds. It can further lead to the degeneration of morals and spiritual values in society. Therefore, all forms of these actions are forbidden in Islam.<sup>120</sup>

The root cause of such offensive behaviour is often a superiority complex which is to elevate oneself over others due to race, gender, social status, ethnic background, arrogance, etc. Allah created people with diverse appearances and conditions. He gives no importance to those aspects; the only thing that matters to Him is the religious conviction of a person which is evident in the Qur'ān, "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allaah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e., he is one of the Muttaqoon (the pious)]. Verily, Allaah is All-Knowing, All-Aware."<sup>121</sup> The *sunnah* underscores that very point as the Messenger of Allah said, "Allah does not look at your appearance or your wealth, but He looks at your hearts and your deeds."<sup>122</sup> Sa'di says that no Muslim should speak or act in a manner that belittles others because it is essentially self-admiration.<sup>123</sup> The Prophet said, "Arrogance means rejecting the truth and looking down on people."<sup>124</sup> It is important to recall that arrogance was the original sin that led Satan astray, as Allah said, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam," and they prostrated themselves, except Satan, he refused to be of those who prostrated themselves. Allah said, "What prevented you (O Iblīs) that you did not prostrate yourself, when I commanded you?" Iblīs said, "I am better than him (Adam), You created me from fire, and him You created from clay."<sup>125</sup> Such behaviour can deprive somebody of Paradise as was narrated by 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd that the Prophet said, "No one who has an atom's weight of arrogance in

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<sup>119</sup> Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>

<sup>120</sup> A. K. M. Bodruzzaman, "The Role of Islamic Laws in Combating Hate Speech," *Journal of Shariah Law Research* 5, no. 1 (2020): 75-94, <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/JSLR/article/view/24153/11649>.

<sup>121</sup> Qur'ān 49:13.

<sup>122</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-birr wa 'l-ṣilah wa 'l-ādāb, Bāb taḥrīm ḡulm al-muslim, Book 45, No. 41, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2564b>.

<sup>123</sup> Sa'di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, 9:256.

<sup>124</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb taḥrīm al-kibr wa bayānih, Book 1, No. 171, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:91a>.

<sup>125</sup> Qur'ān 7:11-12.

his heart will enter Paradise.”<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, arrogance on the part of a created entity is offensive to Allah the Creator and He promises humiliation and punishment for the arrogant as narrated by Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet said, “Allah the Most High says: ‘Pride is my cloak and majesty is my lower garment, and I shall throw him who contends with me regarding one of them into Hell.’”<sup>127</sup> Moreover, it was narrated by ‘Amr b. Shu‘ayb via his father and grandfather that the Prophet said, “The proud will be gathered on the Day of Judgement resembling tiny particles in the image of men. They will be covered with humiliation everywhere, they will be dragged into a prison in Hell called Bulas, submerged in the Fire, drinking the drippings of the people of the Fire, filled with derangement.”<sup>128</sup> In addition to the discussed warnings against arrogance, simple reflections on human life can guide us to humility. The human creation starts with a humble beginning from an insignificant drop of fluid, which is then ended by ageing, sickness, and ultimately, an insignificant death after which the mention of such a person will fade away with time. Not only that, but the aftermath of the decaying corpse and the foul odours associated with such a process only to be further compounded by being consumed by the organisms of the earth in the grave only serve to highlight the insignificance of man, and thus should humble oneself. Frequent discussion, training and reflection on these aspects should temper one’s ego and foster the noble characteristics necessary for social reform.

### *Defaming*

The second prohibition in verse 11 is about defaming others. Sa’di says that this verse literally means “Do not speak ill of yourselves,” implying that criticizing a Muslim is the same as criticizing oneself.<sup>129</sup> It is because, in essence, Muslims collectively are like one body and criticizing one part of the body is the same as criticizing the whole body. Allah’s Messenger said, “You see the believers as regards their being merciful among themselves and showing love among themselves and being kind, resembling one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the

<sup>126</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb taḥrīm al-kibr wa bayānih, Book 1, No. 171, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:91a>.

<sup>127</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-libās, Bāb mā jā’a fī ’l-kibr, Book 34, No. 71, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4090>.

<sup>128</sup> Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Kitāb ṣifat al-qiyāmah wa ’l-raqā’iq wa ’l-war’, Book 37, No. 78, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/37>.

<sup>129</sup> Sa’di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, 9:257.

whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it.”<sup>130</sup> Ibn Kathīr says that Allah condemned the slanderer and backbiter in the Qur’ān: “Woe to every slanderer and backbiter.”<sup>131</sup> It is because slander (*hamz*) and backbiting (*lamz*) are transgressions that take place by spreading harmful information about others. Mawdūdī says that the word “*lamz*” is a comprehensive word that includes deriding, reviling, jeering, finding fault, or even targeting someone for criticism by open or tacit references.<sup>132</sup> Allah prohibited all forms of such behaviour because they ruin mutual relationships and create bad blood in society. A shattered society is weakened, thereby impeding growth, and becoming vulnerable to external harm.

### ***Name-Calling***

The third prohibition in verse 11 is against offensive nicknames. This prohibition is very similar to the previous two prohibitions. Allah equates these actions to rebellion after having faith. Ibn Kathīr says that a Muslim should not address another Muslim by a reprehensible nickname.<sup>133</sup> Sa’di says that no Muslim should call another Muslim by a nickname which he does not approve of, because it will embarrass the person and possibly anger him which tends to spiral into confrontation in people with short tempers and limited patience.<sup>134</sup> Mawdūdī says that offensive nicknames include calling someone a hypocrite, sinner, liar, or any name that implies some sort of defect or blemish in a person or his family.<sup>135</sup> Such reckless actions of the tongue harm an individual and thereby society as a whole. Those who do not repent after such actions are considered *fāsiqs* (rebellious). Therefore, repentance is the first step in rectifying this sin in addition to the other steps discussed earlier. However, it is important to note that, in some cases, an apparently offensive nickname is allowed if it is not intended to offend the person but rather serves as an identifier to which he does not object. For example, one of the greatest companions of the Prophet was known as Abū Hurayrah (possessor of the kitten). The discussions above guide

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<sup>130</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-adab, Bāb raḥmat al-nās wa ’l-bahā’im, Book 78, No. 42, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6011>.

<sup>131</sup> Qur’ān 104:1.

<sup>132</sup> Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 9:199.

<sup>134</sup> Sa’di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, 9:257.

<sup>135</sup> Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, <https://islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=49&verse=11&to=13>.

towards a pure heart, heightened consciousness, and a responsible use of the tongue that facilitates mutual respect and brotherhood thereby minimizing the likeliness of internal conflict of the Muslims.

### **Implementation Steps**

The values and measures found in *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* need to be cultured within the society for a successful and lasting social reform. According to social reconstruction philosophy, education must be the principal means for such an endeavour. To that end, there must be a clear and precise social action plan involving discussions, dialogues, and debates at all levels of society including parents, teachers, community leaders, labour leaders, religious scholars, media, and students. In other words, it will require a simultaneous multi-pronged approach from different sectors of society. Particularly, the parents and the teachers ought to play a positive role in the homes and schools respectively. To play such a role, they need to be aware of the necessity of social reform, actively take part in self-development, and be willing to be role models for those who look up to them. Consequently, there must be relevant training for parents, teachers, and the general public.

Firstly, as members of society, parents as adults need to be trained in Islamic values so that society remains safe from social ills. Such training can be offered through adult learning centres in the community. Furthermore, they need to be trained to prepare the next generation for a lasting social reform. The parents have a greater role in culturing children than the schoolteacher because before attending school children are taught at home. In other words, the parents are the primary and first teachers of children and are expected to take part in the moral learning process of their children at home rather than solely relying on the school. Therefore, they need to be trained to infuse Islamic social values into their children; such training can be offered through various prenatal and postnatal workshops and community learning centres. Moreover, parents are to be involved in the planning process of moral learning programmes in schools.

There must be a fresh look at the educational process involving teachers' training, curriculum design, and instructional methods. When the child is ready to go to school, then the teachers have a role to play not just by educating them but also by being an outstanding role model. If the teachers themselves lack fundamental values, then they cannot motivate students merely by lectures. Therefore, teachers must be provided with on-the-job training in addition to whatever training they receive as ordinary members of society. They also must be trained to develop viable curricula where various Islamic solutions to social ills

(including those of the tongue) are integrated; furthermore, the training should include effective methods of transferring that knowledge to the student so that it results in positive social outcomes. It is important to consult the behavioural sciences to recognize people's value systems so that the path to reconstruction becomes easier. Of course, if anything contradicts the basic values of Islam, one should prefer Islamic values.

Unlike ever before, media has unrestricted access to and tremendous influence over people. Accordingly, it is in a position to support social changes. It can infuse positivity, ethics, morals, and values in people through various programmes. Additionally, it can shun unethical and immoral manners to facilitate positivity in society. To that end, it needs to carefully craft its programmes. This requires training of media figures on the Islamic social framework.

### Conclusion

This work discusses several social ills, such as suspicion, spying, backbiting, and ridiculing, that damage the sacred bonds of the Muslims. Muslims are like the bricks of a wall whose internal bonds keep the wall intact (the wall symbolizes society). If those bonds (interpersonal relationships) are problematic, they represent cracks in that wall which threaten its very existence. To address those issues, this study presents the path to social reform in the light of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt. It offers a roadmap of character development to keep society safe from social ills by encouraging people to respect the trust of Allah and control their minds and tongues. Finally, the actual process of implementation through social reconstruction philosophy is presented.

Islam nurtures a society where each individual demonstrates the highest levels of integrity thus resulting in an exemplary brotherhood as seen between the *muhājirūn* (migrants) and *anṣār* (local helpers) in Medina. To culture such noble characters, Muslims need more than just courses or training in social sciences; they require active and perpetual consciousness of Allah, humility, and longing for the life of the hereafter. When this level of consciousness is developed, it works as a guardrail at the individual level which then transforms the society as a whole.

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