

Exploring Social Etiquette and Norms in Surah Al-Hujurat: An Academic Analysis

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Abstract: *The Holy Quran was sent by Allah the Almighty as a guidance for all mankind. When it was revealed, there was a significant lack of etiquette, good conduct, peaceful coexistence, and social values among people in Arabia and the rest of the world. This period is referred to as the "Age of Ignorance" (Ayyam al-Jahiliyyah). Allah the Almighty, revealed the Holy Quran as a complete code of life for mankind, providing teachings on all aspects of human life. Among these teachings, social etiquettes and norms are prominently featured. Surah al-Hujurat is one of the Surahs, where social etiquettes are most extensively discussed. The social etiquettes mentioned in Surah al-Hujurat are applicable to all aspects of human life, regardless of religion, race, country, nation, or era. This article analyzes these social etiquettes and norms presented in Surah al-Hujurat. The insights presented in this article are derived from authoritative classical Tafsir (exegesis) sources of the Holy Quran, contextualized to address the challenges and needs of the present time. By adhering to the teachings of Surah al-Hujurat, individuals and communities can achieve happiness, prosperity, and peaceful coexistence in both personal and collective spheres of life.*

Keywords: *Surah al-Hujurat, Society, Etiquette, Norms, Tafsir*

Introduction

Humans naturally live in societies, and social interactions are a fundamental part of human behavior. It is crucial to uphold social etiquette and norms to live peacefully in a society. Social etiquette helps to create a balance environment in a pluralistic society. A person who embodies social etiquette and norms naturally becomes polite, humble, tolerant, and peace-loving. On the other hand, the absence of these qualities leads to mutual conflicts, jealousy, enmity, slander, and hostility. When the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) arrived in Madinah, he established a peaceful and ideal society. If the instructions of Surah al-Hujurat are implemented in a society, it will be possible to form an ideal state resemble to the state of Madinah Munawwarah. This article analyzes the social etiquettes and norms mentioned in Surah al-Hujurat.

Literature Review

The instructions of Surah al-Hujurat on maintaining social etiquette and norms are elaborately discussed in commentaries of the Holy Quran such as Tafsir of Ibn Kathir, Tafsir of Fakhruddin Razi, Tafsir of Imam Suyuti, etc. In these books, the

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moral teachings of Surah al-Hujurat, social etiquette, and other topics have been briefly discussed. However, the moral teachings and social etiquette have not been discussed in a systematic or continuous manner.

Other than this there are some articles on this topic in various languages including Arabic, Urdu and English. Mufti Muhammad Waqar wrote an article titled ‘Social principles and etiquette in the light of surah al-Hujurat’ in Urdu. Umar A Hasan wrote ‘Moral Refinement in Surat al-Hujurat’ in English. Shykh Abu Bilal wrote a book on this matter in Arabic. His book’s name is ‘*Tammulat fi Suratil Hujurat*’. Although Social Etiquette and Norms have been discussed in these books and articles, they do not specify which verse is associated with which etiquette and norm. Additionally, there is a lack of continuity and comprehensiveness in the discussions.

In this article, we have systematically analyzed all the Social Etiquette and Norms mentioned in Surah al-Hujurat and have clearly identified which topics are associated with specific verses. This will add a new dimension to the research on Social Etiquette and Norms in Surah Hujurat.

Surah Hujurat: A brief description

Surah al-Hujurat is the 49th chapter of the Holy Quran. It is placed right after Surah al-Fath. This Surah consists of 18 verses and was revealed in Madinah. (Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 7, p. 364)

Surah al-Hujurat was revealed in the 9th year of Hijrah. (Al-Bayanuni, 1997, p. 19) This Surah highlights several important aspects, including showing respect towards the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), instruction to play role in case of dispute between two groups of Muslims, the importance of verifying information before acting upon it, the principles of Muslim brotherhood and the duties to maintain it, as well as the concept of the unity of humanity. (Al-Bayanuni, 1997, pp. 23-24)

Surah al-Hujurat is also known as Suratul Akhlaq (the Chapter of Morals) and Suratul Adab (the Chapter of Etiquettes). The context of its revelation is as follows:

Imam Bukhari mentions that once some people from the tribe of Tamim came to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). During this time, a discussion was taking place regarding who should be appointed as their leader. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) suggested the name of Qa’qa’ Ibn Ma’bad, while Hazrat Umar (RA) proposed the name of Aqra’ ibn Habis. This led to a debate between Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) in the gathering, and their voices eventually grew louder. In response to this, the relevant verses of Surah al-Hujurat were revealed. (Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 7, p. 365)

The subsequent verses were also revealed concerning the people of the Banu Tamim tribe. Some members of this tribe arrived in Madinah during the afternoon when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was resting. The Banu Tamim were Bedouins

and were unfamiliar with social etiquette. Hence, they began calling out to the Prophet from outside his room by his name, leading to the revelation of these verses. (Shafi, 2008, Vol. 8, p. 102)

Social Etiquette and Norms in Surah al-Hujurat

In the 18 verses of Surah al-Hujurat, important social etiquettes and norms have been discussed. In some verses, multiple etiquettes are mentioned. We will analyze these etiquettes sequentially according to the verses.

a. Guiding Muslim's Respectful Conduct Towards the Prophet (PBUH)

At the beginning of Surah al-Hujurat, emphasis is placed on maintaining proper etiquette with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In the first five verses of this Surah, four key directives are given to honor his esteemed status. Firstly, one should not act hastily or precede him in matters. Secondly, One should not raise his voice above the voice of Prophet (PBUH) while speaking with him. Thirdly, conversations with him should be conducted in a gentle and lower tone. Lastly, one should not disturb him during his rest by calling out to him, but instead, patiently should wait for his response. These guidelines are clearly outlined at the start of the Surah. Allah said: 'O ye who believe! Put not yourselves forward Before Allah and His Apostle; But fear Allah : for Allah Is He Who hears And knows all things. Those that lower their voice In the presence of Allah's Apostle, their hearts Has Allah tested for piety : For them is Forgiveness And a great Reward. Those who shout out To thee from without The Inner Apartments— Most of them lack understanding. If only they had patience Until thou couldst Come out to them, It would be best For them : but Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (The Holy Qur'an, 49: 1-5)¹

The teachings from these verses can be applied to various aspects of social life. Particularly, the lessons are relevant when interacting with elders, respected individuals, or those who are knowledgeable, specially those who are religious preceptor. Following the revelation of these verses, the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) became extremely cautious. They began to speak very softly. For instance, Thabit Ibn Qays, who naturally had a loud voice, moderated his tone out of fear after hearing this verse. Ibn Zubair (R.) reported that, Umar (RA) would speak so softly in the presence of the Prophet (PBUH) that sometimes the Prophet had to ask him to repeat himself. (Ibnul Zawji, 1984, Vol.7, p. 545) Abu Bakr (RA) also vowed to speak in a very lower tone in front of the Prophet (PBUH). (Al-Asqalani, 2005, Vol. 10, p.613)

b. Speaking softly in public gatherings

Another implicit lesson derived from these verses is the discouragement of raising one's voice without necessity. Speaking loudly without reason is considered

¹ All the translations of the verses of the Holy Qur'an quoted in this article have been taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, *The Holy Qur'an*.

impolite and disrespectful. Surah Luqman also condemns such behavior, comparing loud and unnecessary speech to the braying of a donkey. Allah Said:

وَاقْصِدْ فِي مُشْيَكْ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتَكْ إِنْ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتِ الْحَمَيرِ۔

‘And be moderate In thy pace, and lower Thy voice; for the harshest Of sounds certainly is the braying of the donkey.’ (The Holy Qur'an, 31: 19)

Due to this, the companions often criticized those who spoke harshly and loudly. Considering the early verses of Surah al-Hujurat, speaking loudly in the Prophet's Mosque is particularly disapproved. Once, Umar (RA) saw two men speaking loudly in the Prophet's Mosque and asked them where they were from? They replied that they were from Ta'if. Umar (RA) said that if they were from Madinah, he would have punished them for raising their voices in the Prophet's Mosque.

c. Respectfully Addressing Without Using Names

One important teaching from these verses is the emphasis on not addressing esteemed individuals by their names directly. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were very cautious in their manner of addressing him. They addressed the Prophet (PBUH) as “Ya Rasulallah” (O Messenger of Allah) instead of “Ya Muhammad” or “Ya Ahmad.” In the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty addresses all other prophets by their names but refers to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as “Ya Ayyuha ar-Rasul” (O Messenger) or “Ya Ayyuha an-Nabi” (O Prophet). Because of this, many scholars have deemed it impermissible to directly call him “Ya Muhammad.” In this context, the following verse from the Quran is also noteworthy:

لَا تَجْنُوْلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَذَّابٌ بَغْضُكُمْ بَغْضًا۔

‘Deem not the summons of the Apostle among yourselves Like the summons of one of you to another.’ (The Holy Qur'an, 24: 63)

This verse shows strict guidelines on how to call the Prophet (PBHU). Said Ibn Jubair said: ‘the meaning of this verse is Do not say Ya Muhammad. Say: Ya Rasulallah and Ya Nabiyyallah. Let my father and mother be sacrificed for you.’ (Ibn Abi Hatim, 1997, P. 2655)

This guideline applies not only to the Prophet (PBUH) but also to elders, scholars, and those in positions of authority or respect within the community. We also do not address an elder, respected, or knowledgeable person by their name directly. Different respectful titles are considered appropriate for relatives as well, such as mother, father, grandfather, uncle, etc. Calling them by their first names is regarded as socially improper behavior. By observing this etiquette, individuals demonstrate humility and honour, promoting a culture of respect and propriety in society.

d. The Harm of Spreading and Believing Rumors

Spreading rumors and acting impulsively based on such rumors are both harmful to society. From Surah al-Hujurat, we learn how to respond when rumors spread within the community. Allah refers to those who spread rumors as “Fasiq” or sinner. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بَيْنَ أَنْ تُصِيبُوهُ أَنْ تُصِيبُوهُ قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِيبُوهُ عَلَى مَا فَعَلْنَا نَادِمِينَ

‘O ye who believe! If a sinner comes To you with any news, Ascertain the truth, lest Ye harm people unwittingly, And afterwards become Full of repentance for What ye have done.’ (The Holy Qur'an, 49: 6)

Spreading rumors is undoubtedly a sinful act because it leads to affliction (Fitnah) and conflict. The Holy Quran describes such Fitnah as worse than killing. The guidance provided in Surah al-Hujurat ensures that society remains safe and peaceful, even in the face of rumors. The verse advises us to verify news through the term “fatabayyanu” before accepting it. This verse teaches us that hastily reacting to news without careful investigation can lead to regret and social disorder. Imam Shafei said, ‘Allah has commanded whoever decrees his command upon one of His servants to verify before He proceeds.’ (Nisapuri, 1990, p. 462)

e. Principles of Conflict Resolution and Coexistence

Ensuring social security is a collective responsibility. Disputes and conflicts among people can arise for various reasons, potentially leading to riots and violence. Surah al-Hujurat offers an effective principle for preventing such conflicts. When two groups within society engage in disputes or conflicts, it is the duty of the neutral parties to intervene and mediate to resolve the conflict. However, if one party is willing to reconcile while the other persists in conflict, the community must take action against the uncooperative party to maintain peace. Allah Says:

وَإِنْ طَائِقَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ افْتَنِلُو فَأَصْلِحُو بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَعْدَ أَخْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأَخْرَى فَقَاتِلُو الَّتِي تَنْعِي حَتَّىٰ تَنْفِي إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ فَاعَلْتُمْ أَخْرَى مِنْهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِحْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُو بَيْنَ أَخْوَيْكُمْ وَأَنْقُوا اللَّهَ لَعْنَكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

‘If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace Between them : but if One of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, Then fight ye (all) against The one that transgresses Until it complies with The command of Allah ; But if it complies, then Make peace between them With justice, and be fair : For Allah loves those Who are fair (and just). The Believers are but a single brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your Two (contending) brothers; And fear Allah, that ye May receive Mercy.’ (The Holy Qur'an, 49: 9-10)

This approach emphasizes that staying silent in the face of conflict is not an option. Instead, effective measures must be taken to mediate and resolve disputes. By actively working towards reconciliation, peace can eventually be restored.

Because ensuring social security is a collective responsibility. In summary, when conflicts arise, it is crucial to actively intervene and mediate to resolve them, thereby ensuring harmony and coexistence within society.

f. Prohibition of Six Socially Unethical Behaviors

Surah al-Hujurat highlights and prohibits six socially unethical behaviors in two of its verses. These behaviors are identified as major contributors to the disruption of social peace, order, and cohesion. Eliminating these behaviors from society can significantly reduce crime rates, interpersonal conflicts, and social discord. These behaviors include mocking others, reproaching individuals by highlighting their faults, calling each other by offensive nick names, harboring negative assumptions about others, engaging in spying to uncover others' faults, and backbiting. Allah says: 'O ye who believe! Let not some men Among you laugh at others : It may be that The (latter) are better Than the (former) : Nor let some women Laugh at others : It may be that The (latter) are better Than the (former) : Nor defame nor be Sarcastic to each other, Nor call each other By (offensive) nicknames : Ill-seeming is a name Connoting wickedness, (To be used of one) After he has believed : And those who Do not desist are (Indeed) doing wrong. O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (As possible): for suspicion In some cases is a sin : And spy not on each other, Nor speak ill of each other Behind their backs. Would any Of you like to eat The flesh of his dead Brother? Nay, ye would Abhor it, But fear Allah : For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.' (The Holy Qur'an, 49: 11-12)

Among these sins speaking ill of others behind their back (Ghibah) is the worst. Ibn Abbad (Ra) said, 'Same as consuming dead body, it is forbidden for a believer to speak ill behind someone's back.' (Ibn Yasin, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 373)

The Prophet (PBUH) once addressed his companions regarding Ghibah: 'Do you know what Ghibah is?' Then he explained, 'If what you say about him is true, then you have engaged in Ghibah. But if it is not true, then you have slandered him. (Tibrizi, 2001, Vol. 9, p. 64)

Backbiting is a serious sin in Islam and should be avoided to maintain purity in speech and relationships.

g. Creating Global Brotherhood by Eradicating Social Inequality

Social inequality is a common problem in all countries, often rooted in economic disparities. In regions where racism exists, people may face discrimination based on their skin color, language, or tribal affiliation. Islam advocates for a society free from such discrimination. One verse from Surah al-Hujurat is particularly relevant in this context:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْفَاقُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ حَبِيرٌ

‘O mankind! We created You from a single (pair) Of a male and a female, And made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise Each other). Verily The most honoured of you In the sight of Allah Is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge And is well acquainted With all things. (The Holy Qur’ān, 49: 13)

This verse emphasizes that neither skin color, wealth, nor tribal affiliation is a measure of superiority. Instead, piety and consciousness of Allah (Taqwa) are the true measures of a person’s worth. Alusi said, ‘In the sight of Allah, the most Righteous man is the most honoured man in this world and the world hereafter.’ (Alusi, 1988, Vol. 26, p. 163)

A person who fears Allah is naturally inclined to be virtuous. Therefore, a virtuous individual should be socially respected, while a dishonest person should be socially disregarded. This approach can significantly contribute to transforming the moral character of society. By valuing piety and righteousness over superficial attributes, we can foster a more equitable and just community.

Socially Recommended and Prohibited Actions in Light of Surah Al-Hujurat

Socially Recommended Actions

No.	Action	Verse no.
1.	Being humble	1
2.	practicing piety	1,10,12
3.	Speaking softly	2
4.	Exercising patience	5
5.	Verifying information	6
6.	To Love Iman	7
7.	Mediating between conflicting parties	9, 10
8.	Making every effort to bring about peace	9
9.	Administering justice and ensuring fairness	9
10.	Maintaining a sense of brotherhood	10
11.	Doing repentance	11
12.	Hating disbelief, defiance and disobedience	7
13.	striving with properties and lives in the cause of Allah	15

Socially Prohibited Actions Actions

No.	Action	Verse no.
1.	Not raising one’s voice	2, 3
2.	Not calling out loudly	4

3.	Not paying attention to rumors	6
4.	Do not act without knowledge	9
5.	Not mocking anyone	11
6.	Not blaming anyone,	11
7.	Not calling anyone by derogatory names	11
8.	Not speaking ill of anyone behind their back	12
9.	Not harboring negative assumptions about others	12
10.	Not ngaging in spying to uncover others' faults	12
11.	Do not be racist	13

Findings

This article elaborately discusses social etiquette and norms of this Surah. This Surah has 18 verses. We have explored 13 recommended actions and 11 prohibited actions from these verses and identified the verses containing instructions for these actions. The teachings of Surah al-Hujurat should be widely promoted in society. It should be included in the curriculum of schools, colleges, and Universities. Public awareness should be raised on this topic so that people can follow the recommended actions and avoid the prohibited behaviors.

Conclusion

Maintaining etiquette is one of the signs of a civilized person. The way a person interacts with others reveals how polite and educated he is. When Surah al-Hujurat was revealed, there was little regard for social etiquette, norms and decorum. Oppression, conflicts, looting, fighting, and disputes were common phenomena. When the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established the Islamic state in Madinah, Allah revealed Surah al-Hujurat. This Surah had a profound impact on the companions of the Prophet (PBUH). As a result, crime rates and the tendency to commit crimes in Madinah dropped to nearly zero. In today's world, unrest, conflict, oppression, and looting have been increased. If we, regardless of religion or race, can internalize the teachings of Surah al-Hujurat, peace can be established everywhere.

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