

## A Critical Analysis of Bent-Rib Metaphor *Ḥadīth*: Embracing Women's Uniqueness and Empowerment

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### Abstract

The Bent-Rib Metaphor *ḥadīth* has long been a subject of interpretation and debate. This critical analysis explores the multifaceted dimensions of this *ḥadīth*, shedding light on its linguistic nuances and the broader implications for women's uniqueness and empowerment within the framework of Islam. The *ḥadīth*, which likens women to a bent rib, is often cited to justify traditional gender roles and hierarchies within Muslim societies. However, this study delves into the historical context, and original Arabic text, dissecting the intricacies of the metaphor and its intended message. It highlights the importance of contextual analysis in interpreting religious texts, challenging the simplistic readings that have often perpetuated patriarchal interpretations. Furthermore, this analysis emphasizes the need to recognize and celebrate the uniqueness of women within Islamic teachings. It argues that the Bent-Rib Metaphor *ḥadīth* can be interpreted as a symbol of diversity, complexity, and complementarity between genders, rather than justifying women's subordination. By promoting a more nuanced understanding of the *ḥadīth*, this study advocates for a broader role for women in religious, social, economic, and political spheres. The empowerment of women in Islamic societies is a central theme of this analysis, emphasizing that embracing the diversity and potential of women can lead to a more equitable and just society by Islamic principles. In conclusion, this critical examination of the Bent-Rib Metaphor *ḥadīth* offers a fresh perspective on women's roles and rights within Islam and serves as a foundation for fostering a more inclusive interpretation of Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Hadith, Bent-Rib Metaphor, Women's Empowerment, Gender Justice.

### Introduction

Islam is indeed known for its profound inclusivity and unwavering emphasis on justice. Throughout its history, Islam has repeatedly demonstrated a commitment to uplifting the position of women and championing gender justice. Central to this discourse is that Islam raises the status of women debunking any distinctions between men and women based on their gender. Islam does not only weigh the significance of men and women in equal measure but also assigns unique and crucial roles to both.

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مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا  
كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ<sup>1</sup>

Who so does that which is right, and believes, whether male or female, him or her will  
We quicken to happy life.

At the heart of this discussion lies a verse from the Quran, highlighting the creation of woman from Adam and the notion of the "Bent-Rib" metaphor *ḥadīth*. Allah said in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا<sup>2</sup>

O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate,  
and out of the two spread many men and women.

These aspects have often been a subject of contention, misunderstanding, and misuse within the Muslim community. While some have chosen to disregard the *ḥadīth*, others have misappropriated its meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Bent-Rib *ḥadīth* rejectors, for instance, claim that Bent-rib *ḥadīth* creates symbolic associations between women and some unfavourable construct i.e., bent, or crooked ribs. To them, the Bent-Rib *ḥadīth* is among the most important *ḥadīth* which plays a pivotal role in demeaning and degrading women.<sup>4</sup> They bluntly confess to being conscientious faith-based objectors to this genre of *ḥadīth* because based on their theoretical paradigm it is fundamentally inconsistent with their understanding of Allah and the Islamic message.<sup>5</sup> They strongly believe the Bent-Ribs *ḥadīth* laid the foundation for legal determinations affirming the position of patriarchy and the exclusion of women from public life. They assert that they have enough circumstantial evidence to indicate a strong bias in the early social dynamics of Islam that shaped the *ḥadīth* one way or another.

It is, therefore, this study aims to delve deep into these aspects, discerning the true perspective, and extracting insights that can inspire and empower women as the unique creations of Allah, equipped to play a vital role in building a civilized and enlightened society. The Bent-Rib *ḥadīth* metaphor will be scrutinized in depth, shedding light on its true meaning and intent. By doing so, the researchers aim to provide a comprehensive and accurate understanding of this *ḥadīth*, enabling women to embrace their uniqueness and the empowerment granted to them by the Almighty Allah the Lord of the whole universe.

## Bent-Rib *Ḥadīth* and Its Evaluation

The topic of Bent-Rib *ḥadīth* has garnered significant attention from the *muḥaddithūn* (scholars of *ḥadīth*). This interest is primarily due to the presence of numerous *ḥadīth* in the primary nine canonical *ḥadīth* collections. These *ḥadīth* suggest that women were created from a rib. Notably, this specific *ḥadīth* is compiled by al-Bukhari,

<sup>1</sup> Sūrah Al-Naḥl, 16: 97.

<sup>2</sup> Sūrah Al-Nisā', 4: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Abou El Fadl, Khaled, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 224-225.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 226.

Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ahmad Bin Hanbal, and al-Dārimi. These collections were the result of the combined efforts of three companions (*shawāhid*), namely Abū Hurayrah, Abū Dhar, and Samūrah R.A.

Although the core content of the *ḥadīth* remains similar, there is a distinction in the wording, specifically the use of "من ضلع" (*min ḍila'in*) and "كالضلع" (*ka al-ḍila'i*), which leads to differing interpretations of the *ḥadīth*. Al-Bukharī quotes that Abū Hurayrah R.A reported Allah's Messenger ﷺ ordered:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: (استوصوا بالنساء خيراً، فإن المرأة خلقت من ضلع، وإن أعوج ما في الضلع أعلاه، فإن ذهبت تقيمه كسرته، وإن تركته، لم يزل أعوج، فاستوصوا بالنساء)<sup>6</sup>

“Take good care of women, for they have been created from a bent rib, and the most curved part of a rib is its upper end. If you insist on straightening it, you will break it; if you leave it, it will remain bent. So take good care of women”

Similarly, *Muslim* quotes a narration from Abū Hurayrah R.A, he reported Allah's Messenger ﷺ ordered:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: (مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَإِذَا شَهِدَ أَمْرًا فَلْيَتَكَلَّمْ بِخَيْرٍ أَوْ لَيْسَ كُنْتُ وَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضِّلْعِ أَعْلَاهُ إِنْ ذَهَبْتَ تُقِيمُهُ كَسَرْتَهُ وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزَلْ أَعْوَجَ اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا)<sup>7</sup>

“He who believes in Allah and the Last Day, when witnessing a matter, should say a good thing or remain silent. Take good care of women, because the woman was created from a rib, and the most curved part of a rib is its upper part; if you insist on straightening it you break it, and if you leave it, it will remain bent, so take good care of women.”

In another narration also in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Abū Hurayrah reported that the Prophet ﷺ said:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: أن رسول الله ﷺ قال: (إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ لَنْ تَسْتَقِيمَ لَكَ عَلَى طَرِيقَةٍ فَإِنْ اسْتَمْتَعْتَ بِهَا اسْتَمْتَعْتَ بِهَا وَبِهَا عَوْجٌ وَإِنْ ذَهَبْتَ تُقِيمُهَا كَسَرْتَهَا وَكَسَرُهَا طَلَاقُهَا)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb, Bāb Khuliqa Ādam wa Ṣolawāt Allāh ‘alayh wa Zurriyyatahu, vol. 11, no. 3084, 112. Kitāb, Bāb Al-Wiṣāh bi al-Nisā’, vol. 16, no. 4787, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Riḍā’, Bāb al-Waṣiyyah bi al-Nisā’, vol. 7, no. 2670, 400.

<sup>8</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Riḍā’, Bāb al-Waṣiyyah bi al-Nisā’ vol. 7, no. 2670, 400.

“The woman was created from a rib. She will not be straight according to your way. If you want to enjoy her, you will have to enjoy her with her twist. And if you try to straighten her, You will break her: and breaking her is divorcing her”

Muslim and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal in their books narrated that Samurah R.A also reported Allah’s Messenger ﷺ ordered:

سَمُرَةٌ يَخْطُبُ عَلَى مَنَبْرِ الْبَصْرَةِ وَهُوَ يَقُولُ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَقُولُ: (إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ وَإِنَّكَ إِنْ تَرَدَّدْتَ إِقَامَةَ الضِّلْعِ تَكْسِرُهَا فَذَايَهَا تَعِشُ بِهَا)<sup>9</sup>

“The woman was created from a rib. If you try to straighten the rib, you will break it. So be kind to her, you would then live in joy with her”

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ: أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَ: (إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ، فَإِنْ تُقِمَّهَا، كَسَرَهَا، فَذَايَهَا، فَإِنَّ فِيهَا أَوْدًا وَبُلْعَةً)

In another narration in Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī, Abū Hurayrah R.A reported that Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ (إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ كَالضِّلْعِ إِنْ ذَهَبْتَ تُقِيمُهَا كَسَرَهَا وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهَا اسْتَمْتَعْتَ بِهَا عَلَى عَوَجٍ) . قَالَ وَفِي الْبَابِ عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ وَسَمُرَةَ وَعَائِشَةَ . قَالَ أَبُو عِيسَى حَدِيثُ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ غَرِيبٌ مِنْ هَذَا الْوَجْهِ<sup>10</sup> .

"Indeed the woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her you will break her, and if you leave her, what you enjoy from her will be with the crookedness."

<sup>9</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Ridā’, Bāb al-Waṣiyyah bi al-Nisā’, vol. 7, no. 2670, 400. Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Ḥadīth Samurah Bin Jundab, vol. 41, no. 19235, 65. Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 251. Al-Shaybānā, Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal Abū ‘Abdillāh, *al-Musnad*, (Cairo: Muassasah Qurṭubah, n.d.), 752. Aḥmad and al-Bazzār narrated with two chains and all of the *rijāl* in one of the chains are *Ṣaḥīḥ*. As we observed, the earlier versions of bent ribs *aḥādīth* are agreed upon (*muttafaq ‘alayh*). In a nutshell, all of them are deemed authentic by al-Haythamī and al-Albānī, except that one of the chains consists of a *majhūl* (unknown) narrator, which is narrated by Aḥmad and al-Bazzār. But undoubtedly another chain is authentic as they quote from two chains.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad Bin Isā, Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhī, Kitāb at-Ṭalāq wa al-Li’an ‘an Rasūlullāh ﷺ, Bāb Mā Ja’a fī mudārati al-Nisā’, vol. 2, Book 8, No. 1188.

Al-Dārimi also narrated in His *Sunan* that Abū Hurayrah RA said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (إِنَّمَا الْمَرْأَةُ كَالضِّلَعِ: إِنْ تُقِمَّهَا،  
تَكَسَّرَها، وَإِنْ تَسْتَمْتَعِ بِهَا، تَسْتَمْتَعِ وَفِيهَا عِوَجٌ)<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her you will break her, and if you leave her, what you enjoy from her will be with the crookedness

Another narration from *al-Dārimi* narrated from Abū Dzar RA said:

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ: أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَ: "إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلَعٍ، فَإِنْ تُقِمَّهَا،  
كَسَرَتْهَا، فَدَارِهَا، فَإِنَّ فِيهَا أَوْدًا وَبُلْغَةً"

Abu Dzar RA reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Woman was created from a rib, and if you try to straighten it, you will break it, so enjoy her with her crookedness. In her crookedness, there is goodness and charm."

In a nutshell, all the above-mentioned *aḥādīth* are sound and authentic; the earlier versions of Bent-Ribs *ḥadīth* are *muttafaq ‘alayh* (agreed upon) and the other *aḥādīth* are transmitted by authentic and reliable chains.<sup>12</sup>

## Scholars' Opinions on Bent Rib Ḥadīth

Every authentic statement of the Prophet ﷺ must be taken within its context. The context of these *aḥādīth* is crystal clear. The Prophet's ﷺ statement is neither intended to degrade women, nor to show the superiority of men over women, nor to say that women were created crooked while men's creation was straight and perfect.

It is worth noting that the *ḥadīth* has been interpreted in various ways by Islamic scholars throughout history. Some have emphasized the subordination aspect, while others have focused on the idea of complementarity. The diversity of interpretations allows for a more inclusive and dynamic reading of the *ḥadīth*. Among others, the scholars have held varying interpretations regarding the meaning of:

<sup>11</sup> ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Taimiyy al-Dārimi, *Sunān al-Dārimi*, Kitāb an-Nikāḥ, Book 11, no. 2154.

<sup>12</sup> The text of the Qur'an will not be protected if its understanding which is contained in the sunnah is not protected. Therefore, the protection of the Qur'an indicates the protection of the Sunnah and the Dīn as a whole. Therefore, belief in the authentic Sunnah is obligatory upon all Muslims. Ibn Taimiyyah stated: "The Sunnah that is a must to be followed for which one is praised due to following it and blamed for going against it is the Sunnah of the Messenger ﷺ in matters of belief, worship and the rest of the affairs of the religion and what is known only by knowledge of the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet ﷺ that is confirmed on his authority". See: Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad bin ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Ḥarānī Abū al-‘Abbās, *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, edited by Anwār al-Bāz ‘Āmir al-Ḥazār, (n.p.: Dār al-Wafā, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2005), vol. 3, 387.

"خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلَعٍ" أَوْ "كَالضِّلَعِ"

whether it signifies creation from Adam's rib or implies something curved, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that without a doubt, a woman was created from a rib that upholds *Ḥaqīqah* (real), not *Majāz* (metaphor). It is reported that Adam slept, and a rib was extracted from his left side, from which *Ḥawwāʾ*, (Eve) was fashioned. Upon awakening, he discovered her beside him, and he did not reject her but instead felt a profound connection because she was a part of him. Consequently, the left rib count was reduced by one compared to the right.<sup>13</sup>

He adds that it could also carry a metaphorical meaning, which is that she was created from something solid and crooked. If you want to straighten her, you break her. If you enjoy her as she is, you enjoy something crooked in a way that can be suitable for it. Crookedness may be suitable for a certain aspect, and the meaning is in its crookedness.<sup>14</sup>

Ibn Ḥajar explains that the phrase 'created from a rib' is commonly understood to mean that *Ḥawwāʾ* was formed from Adam's left rib. Some interpretations even specify that it was his left short rib, removed before Adam entered Paradise and replaced with flesh. The term 'created' implies that she was brought into existence like a palm tree sprouting from its core. The significance of this explanation is that women's origin is associated with a crooked rib, indicating that their inherent nature is not to be denied or altered, as the rib itself cannot be straightened.<sup>15</sup>

The opinions of Ibn Al-ʿArabī and Ibn Ḥajar that *Ḥawwāʾ* emerged from the rib of Adam a.s is best explained that only Allah knows how this happened, any detailed explanation is found in *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt* narrations. The Qurʾan, in various verses, affirms the creation of *Ḥawwāʾ* from the same soul as Adam a.s without specifying the exact method. Among these verses are:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate.<sup>16</sup>

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا

He it is who created you from one soul and made from it its mate, that he might find comfort in her.<sup>17</sup>

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا

<sup>13</sup> Abu Bakr Bin al-ʿArabi al-Malikī, *Ārīḍat Al-Aḥwadhi bi Syarḥi Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Tirmīdhī*, (n.p: n.p, n.d), vol. 5,162.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Ḥajar Al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad Bin ʿAlī, *Ḥadyu al-Sāri Muqaddimah Faṭḥ al-Bāri*, (Damascus: Dār al-Kamāl al-Muttahidah, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Sūrah al-Nisāʾ, 4:1.

<sup>17</sup> Sūrah al-Aʿrāf, 7:189.

He created you from one soul, then made from it its mate.<sup>18</sup>

The consensus among most *mufasssirūn* (scholars of *tafsīr*) and *muḥaddithūn* (scholars of *ḥadīth*) is that 'created you from one soul' refers to Adam a.s. *وَاحِدَةٍ* 'made from it its mate'<sup>19</sup> refers to his wife, *Ḥawwā'*, Eve.

Al-Qāḍī 'Iyad conveys the message that one should show women kindness, as the *ḥadīth* states, "A woman was created from a crooked rib." It emphasizes the importance of treating women with gentleness and being patient with any conduct or variation in their behaviour, just as the Prophet ﷺ advised: "If you attempt to straighten her out too forcefully, you may harm her, but if you allow her to remain as she is, her unique characteristics will persist."<sup>20</sup>

In *Al-Ifsāḥ 'an Ma'ānī al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, Ibn Hubayrah<sup>21</sup> states that when the Prophet ﷺ said: "The crookedness in the rib is the upper part," he meant, "as I understand it, that any curvature or irregularity that may be observed in a woman's physical form is inherent in her natural creation. This curvature represents the highest point on her body in terms of elevation. So, the curvature or crookedness in her rib is the most elevated part, and this crookedness is characteristic of her physical form".

Ibn Al-Anbarī explains that the phrase "*خلقت من ضلع لن تستقيم لك*" can be understood as: "She will not maintain a pleasing posture." This statement is elaborated upon as if someone were inquiring about the implications of her creation from that material. He clarified by saying that she will not stay upright in a way that pleases you, meaning that if you find enjoyment in her, it is in her existing form, which may have imperfections. If you attempt to correct those imperfections, you risk damaging her because it goes against her natural state". This crookedness is highly appropriate for her nature, as she is the home for her husband and the nurturer of her children.<sup>22</sup>

Bearing all the above in mind, it is imperative to approach the Prophet ﷺ's statement about women being created from a crooked rib with a nuanced understanding that considers its historical context and the diversity of interpretations offered by Islamic scholars over the centuries. This *ḥadīth* should not be misconstrued to degrade or assert superiority over women; instead, it highlights the importance of treating women with kindness and patience, acknowledging their unique qualities and characteristics. The crookedness and inherent nature of women are not shortcomings but qualities that make them ideal caretakers and companions. By embracing these variations, we can foster a more inclusive and harmonious understanding of the *ḥadīth* and, ultimately, enhance the respect and appreciation for women in the context of Islamic teachings.

## Women's Uniqueness and Empowerment

<sup>18</sup> Sūrah al-Zumār, 39:6.

<sup>19</sup> Sūrah al-Nisā', 4:1.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Qāḍī 'Iyādh, Iyādh Bin Mūsā. *Ikmāl al-Mu'allim bi Fawā'id Muslim*, (Egypt: Dār al-Wafā', 1998), vol.4, 680.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Hubayrah, *Al-Ifsāḥ 'an Ma'ānī al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, edited by: Fuad 'Abd Al-Mun'im Ahmad, (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Waṭan, n.d) vol.7, 160.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Ṣadīqī, Muḥammad Bin 'Alān, *Dalīl Al-Fāliḥīn li Ṭuruq Riyāḍ al-Ṣaliḥīn*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabī,n.d), vol.3, 97.

Bent rib *ḥadīth* does not affirm the patriarchal position in society like the false claim of *ḥadīth* rejectors. Rather, it is meant to stress a very important point which is: that even though men and women are equal partners, there are some basic differences between them because of their different roles and characteristics. Saying that a woman is created from a crooked rib is to explain that she has all the characteristics that she requires to perform her function perfectly with love and mercy, for instance, to look after her children and family. Thus, if one tries to change a woman's characteristics to be like men then she would not be able to perform her function on earth which is mercy, loving and caring for her loved ones.<sup>23</sup> This formula is also applied to men, as they also have their specific character and roles. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ<sup>24</sup>

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).

By acknowledging women's nature that Allah the Most Merciful endowed them with, that is great mercy, love, and affection to be good nurturers and caregivers of their children and family, and not trying to change their amazing feminine nature and character, this is what makes life peaceful and pleasant. The Prophet ﷺ advises men to respect these differences and treat women with extra kindness.<sup>25</sup> He ﷺ reminds men to treat their wives the way they are, and not try to 'straighten' or change their nature as she would surely be broken. The more you force her, the more she will reject her till the relationship between both of you is broken.<sup>26</sup>

Logically, this rule of communication and good treatment of people applies to all, because a normal person could never accept ruthless and bad treatment from others. We reap what we sow, and as we know a peaceful life can never be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding and tolerance. Muslim women should be grateful to accept the Prophet's ﷺ authentic statements which specifically warn husbands to treat them with extra kindness and care. Likewise, Allah SWT also reminds the husbands, He says in the Glorious Qur'ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا النِّسَاءَ كَرِهًا وَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ لِتَذْهَبُوا بِبَعْضِ مَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيَّنَةٍ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا﴾

27

<sup>23</sup> See: Al-Mubārak Fūrī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥman Bin Abd al-Raḥīm, *Tuhfah al-Aḥwazī Sharḥ Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, edited by Rā'id Bin Abī 'Ulfah, (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 3, 275.

<sup>24</sup> Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49: 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 10, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Munāwī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf. *Fayḍ al-Qadīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*, (n.p: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), vol. 1, 643

<sup>27</sup> Sūrah al-Nisā', 4: 19.



O ye who believes! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them, except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye dislike them, it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good.

Therefore, a man i.e. a husband, is responsible to give due care to his wife and treat her compassionately. In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet ﷺ clearly mentions:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: (خَيْرُكُمْ خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِهِ وَأَنَا خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِي)<sup>28</sup>

Narrated by ‘Āishah RA from the Messenger ﷺ “The best of you is the one who is most loving to his wife.”

Islam guides men to be kind to women even in the event of divorce; they must deal with them with benevolence and great kindness. Allah says in the Qur’ān:

﴿الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٍ بِإِحْسَانٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا بِمَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾<sup>29</sup>

A divorce is only permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold Together on equitable terms or separate with kindness. It is not lawful for you, (Men), to take back any of your gifts (from your wives), except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah. If ye (judges) do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah, there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom. These are the limits ordained by Allah. So do not transgress them if any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such persons wrong (Themselves as well as others).

The Bent-Ribs *ḥadīth*, in its various narrations, conveys the idea that women were created from a bent rib of Adam, and it has been the subject of various interpretations over the years. While the false doctrine has been used to argue for the subordination of women, the researchers emphasise that the nuanced interpretation promotes diversity, complexity, and complementarity between genders and advocates for a broader role for women in religious, social, and political spheres. Rather than taking the metaphor literally, it can be understood as a symbolic representation of the inherent differences between men and women. Just as a bent rib is distinct from a

<sup>28</sup> Al-Tirmidhī, *al- Jāmi‘*, Kitāb al-Manāqib ‘an Rasūl Allah ﷺ, Bāb Faḍl Azwāj al-Nabī ﷺ, no. 3830., vol. 12, 399; Ibn Mājah, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Nikāḥ, Bāb Ḥusn Mu‘āsharah, no. 1967, vol. 6, 119. Al-Albānī says this *ḥadīth* is *ṣaḥīḥ*.

<sup>29</sup> Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2: 229.

straight rib, men and women have their unique qualities, strengths, and weaknesses, which complement each other. This diversity can be seen as a source of strength and richness within society.

## Human Skeleton and Ribs Metaphor

If the metaphor that was used by the Prophet ﷺ, is to be contemplated, remarkably, it is rationally, empirically, and logically acceptable. Ribs are curved on both sides of our bodies to create a cage to protect the heart, the major arteries, and veins as well as the lungs which are all essential for life's continuity. Thus, the curved nature of the rib is one of the signs of Allah's perfection in the creation of human beings and if they were straight, it would not give the maximum security for the heart and lungs as the cage shape does. The following diagram explains the position and great functions of ribs:

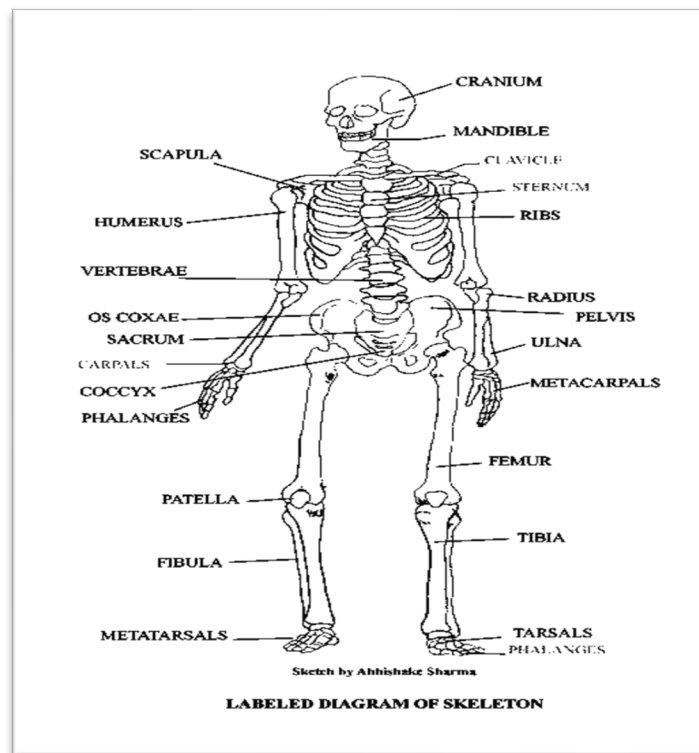


Figure 1: Labeled diagram of the human skeleton to show the position and great function of the ribs.

The bones shown in the chest and hip region in the above labelled human skeleton diagram are the ribs, vertebrae, pelvis, OS coxae, sacrum, and coccyx. The total number of ribs is twelve pairs, as shown in the diagram. The last pair of ribs, which are at the bottom of the rib cage, are called floating ribs, as they are not attached to the sternum. The ribs are arranged in a cage-like structure which protects vital organs like the heart and lungs. In the back, the bones that protect the spinal column are called vertebrae. They help to protect the spinal cord in the body.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Keith L. Moore and Robert F. Dalley, *Clinically Oriented Anatomy*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 2005), 62–64.

The Scientific facts prove that the crookedness of the ribs in the human body is very important to protect the vital organs of man. However, it should be noted here that this is not an attempt to justify or express the wisdom of the Sunnah with the help of science because science is not absolute but the Wisdom of Allah and the Prophet's ﷺ Sunnah are absolute; it is rather to understand the nature of ribs and their functions in the light of scientific fact. The ribs and the whole human body are indeed the perfect creation of the Most Perfect and Powerful Creator. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ﴾<sup>31</sup>

We have indeed created man in the best of moulds

Hence, there should not be any hurt feelings or emotional sensitivity upon accepting such *ḥadīth* because the metaphor does not mean to degrade the feminine nature but to show that women represent the protection of man, as the rib is the protector of the heart. Yet, for such protection to take place then man must protect the woman in the first place. This is because if any harm reaches the 'rib' then the 'heart' is left unprotected. This fact prompts the Prophet ﷺ to remind men to treat women accordingly and accept women the way they are. Women can never be as men wish in some respects. It may be equal to say that from a woman's viewpoint, there is a 'bend' in men's nature too, which means that his actions will never completely coincide with hers.

It is worth noting that Allah explicitly mentions in the Qur'ān:

﴿زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَاَبِ . قُلْ أُوْنَبِّئُكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ لِّلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ﴾<sup>32</sup>

Men are designed to love the things they covet Women and sons; Heaped-up hordes of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to). Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy); and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants.

If one examines this *āyah* with the *anti-hadīth*'s 'magnifying glasses', then perhaps one might argue that this *āyah* is seemingly 'demeaning' and 'degrading' man. But no one among them challenges or reinterprets such *āyah* in the name of justice and equality. This opens to question. If they are the activists for Women's equality, and justice for LGBTQ,<sup>33</sup> perhaps to be fair with all genders they must consider another important gender issue; men's rights or justice for men to contest the matriarchy interpretation of Islamic texts (?)

<sup>31</sup> Sūrah al-Tīn, 95: 4.

<sup>32</sup> Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3: 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. See: Kaleem, Jaweed, "Progressive Launch Gay-Friendly, Women-Led Mosques in Attempt to Reform American Islam", *Faith Shift*, 29 March, 2012, < [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/29/progressive-muslims-launch-gay-friendly-women-led-mosques\\_n\\_1368460.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/29/progressive-muslims-launch-gay-friendly-women-led-mosques_n_1368460.html) > (accessed 24 May, 2023).

## Conclusion

Islam preserves numerous teachings that emphasise the dignity, rights, and roles of women. These include the rights to education, work, property, and participation in public life. The Bent-Rib Metaphor, when interpreted in a positive light, can be seen as consistent with these teachings, encouraging a more inclusive and active role for women in various spheres. Understanding the historical context of the Hadith is important. In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, women in pre-Islamic Arabia often faced extreme oppression and were treated as property. Islam, in many ways, improved the status of women and recognised their rights. The metaphor has been used to illustrate the differences between the genders while emphasising the need for mutual respect and cooperation.

The metaphor can be seen as highlighting the idea of complementarity, where men and women are not in competition but rather complement each other. This can be interpreted as a call for cooperation, mutual support, and the idea that both genders contribute to the functioning and balance of society. This interpretation does not necessitate the subordination of women but encourages collaboration.

In conclusion, the Bent-Rib Metaphor *ḥadīth* can indeed be interpreted as a symbol of diversity, complexity, and complementarity between genders, rather than justifying women's subordination. By understanding the metaphor in this light, it becomes a source of encouragement for a broader and more equitable role for women in religious, social, economic, and political spheres within an Islamic context. This interpretation aligns with the broader principles of justice, equality, and respect for human dignity that are at the core of Islam. It is a call to reflect upon and celebrate the true essence of women's status in Islam, appreciating their distinctive qualities and contributions as an integral part of the divine plan for a harmonious and prosperous society.

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ  
نَقِيرًا<sup>34</sup>

Whoever does good and believes -whether he is male or female - shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be wronged in the slightest.

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<sup>34</sup> Sūrah Al-Nisā', 4:124.

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