

An Analysis of the Concept of Obedience to the Husband based on the Poem *Khadamuddin* by Hajah Aisyah Sulaiman from Riau

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i7/26007> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i7/26007

Published Date: 16 July 2025

Abstract

Marriage is one of the obligations prescribed by Islamic law for every Muslim, aimed at preserving the human lineage on this earth. Beyond that, marriage encompasses many other profound wisdoms, such as fostering love and affection between individuals, serving as a platform for husbands and wives to fulfill their responsibilities toward their children, and providing a lawful mean to satisfy emotional and physical needs. Every married couple aspires to build a harmonious household filled with love (*mawaddah*), tranquility (*sakinah*), and divine mercy (*rahmah*). One of the keys to a happy marriage is a wife's obedience to her husband's instructions. However, the concept of a wife's obedience is often misinterpreted, leading to dysfunction within the family. This issue has received serious attention from classical Islamic scholars, who elaborated on it in their writings. An example of such work is *Syair Khadamuddin*, a poem written in 1927 by a female author named Raja Aisyah binti Raja Sulaiman from Riau. Therefore, this article will analyze the concept of a wife's obedience to her husband as discussed in this poem. The article employs a document analysis method to collect data. The collected data is then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings of this study reveal that classical Malay scholars paid special attention to the true concept of a wife's obedience to her husband. The advice and guidance elaborated in the poem are presented in an engaging poetic form that aligns well with the customs and traditions of Malay society.

Keywords: Obedience, Husband, Syair Khadamuddin, Aisyah Sulaiman Riau

Introduction

The institution of marriage is aligned with the natural disposition of humans, who desire to live as couples and to continue their lineage. In line with the Islamic legislation of marriage, Allah SWT has also outlined several guidelines to ensure happiness in marital life. The responsibilities and rights of husbands and wives are clearly defined in the Quran and Hadith. One of the religious rules to ensure happiness in marital life is the wife's obligation to obey her husband's commands and instructions. This obedience is essentially a sign of appreciation and respect from the wife to her husband as the head of the family, as well as the provider and protector of the wife and children. However, obedience to the husband must never override obedience to Allah. In this regard, there are some members of society who misunderstand this concept, leading wives to obey their husbands blindly even in matters that contradict the commands of Allah SWT. The responsibility of obeying one's husband was also emphasized by the traditional Malay society, as clearly explained in *Syair Khadamuddin* written by Raja Aisyah binti Raja Sulaiman.

Methodology

For data collection, this article employs the document analysis method. Document analysis is a systematic procedure used to evaluate documents, whether in printed or digital form. This method ensures that data is examined and interpreted to extract meaning, develop understanding, and expand empirical knowledge (Orbin & Strauss, 2008). The documents used can take various forms, such as advertisements, attendance records, meeting minutes, working papers, books, brochures, diaries, journals, letters, memos, photographs, videos, and others commonly found in libraries (Bowen, 2009: pp. 27–28). In this study, the analysis focuses specifically on the text of *Syair Khadamuddin* authored by Raja Aisyah binti Raja Sulaiman. The data obtained is then analyzed using the content analysis method.

Background of the Author and the Poem Syair Khadamuddin

Syair Khadamuddin was written by Raja Aisyah binti Raja Sulaiman Ibni Ali Haji, a renowned literary figure and noblewoman from Riau (1808–1870). She was born and raised on Pulau Penyengat, Riau, Indonesia, and passed away in Johor in the 1930s. She was buried at the Royal Mausoleum of Johor, Mahmudiah. Raja Aisyah Sulaiman married her cousin, Raja Khalid Hitam bin Raja Haji Hassan Ibni Raja Ali Haji. Raja Khalid Hitam was a prominent figure within the Malay royal courts of Johor, Terengganu, and Pahang (*Syair Khadamuddin*, xxx). Raja Aisyah was also known as a noblewoman who upheld her dignity, faith, and honor during the oppressive colonial era. In this context, her work stands out as a form of traditional Malay feminism, something rarely seen in classical Malay literature (Ding Choo Ming: 1994).

Syair Khadamuddin, which is the subject of this study, was included in the book *Himpunan Kitab Turath Karya Ulama Perempuan di Alam Melayu*, published by *Khazanah Fathaniyah* in 2019. In this collection, *Syair Khadamuddin* was not transliterated into the Roman alphabet but retained in Jawi script, spanning a total of 152 pages. It begins with the phrase Bismillahirrahmanirrahim and the text is written in poetic form with two columns.

In 1987, Raja Hamzah Yunus produced a transliterated edition of *Syair Khadamuddin*. He emphasized that *Syair Khadamuddin* is not merely an entertaining poem but is also rich with moral education and the struggle of traditional values. However, his analysis was limited to textual aspects only, without expanding the discussion to the socio-historical context or the

implicit gender critique within the work. Meanwhile, a study by Musliha (2019) analyzed the dimensions of Malay female characters through this poem. This study classified the roles of women as maidens, wives, and widows, and highlighted the value of reason and virtue as a distinctive trait of Malay women.

The Obedience of a Wife to Her Husband According to Islam

In the Qur'an, there are several verses indicating that a wife is obligated to obey her husband, as long as the husband's commands do not contradict Islamic law. One of the clearest Qur'anic verses used as evidence is:

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard.

(Surah An-Nisa' 4:34)

Allah SWT has ordained the obligation for a wife to obey her husband in matters that are good and proper. Through this obedience, the path to Paradise is made easier for her. Based on a hadith authenticated by Imam Ibn Hibban, from Abu Hurairah RA, the Prophet SAW said:

"If a woman performs the five daily prayers, fasts during the month of Ramadan, guards her chastity (honor), and obeys her husband, she will enter Paradise through whichever gate she wishes."

[Narrated by Ibn Hibban, Hadith No. 4163, 471/9]

In another hadith narrated by Imam al-Tirmizi, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"If I were to command anyone to prostrate to someone else, I would have commanded a wife to prostrate to her husband."

(Narrated by al-Tirmizi, Hadith No. 1159)

The above hadith is a metaphor from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) illustrating the great obligation of a wife to obey her husband's commands. It emphasizes that if prostrating to other human being was not considered a sin, the Prophet would have certainly commanded wives to prostrate to their husbands.

From the above verses and hadith, it can be understood that obedience to the husband is an obligation for a wife. Scholars from the four major Islamic schools of thought agree that a wife's obedience to her husband is mandatory, provided that his commands do not contradict Islamic principles and do not harm the wife. Therefore, a wife is not required to obey any order from her husband that conflicts with Shariah law. For example, if a husband commands his wife to expose her *aurat* (parts of the body that must be covered) to non-mahram men, such a command is forbidden to obey because it goes against Islamic principles. Likewise, a husband is not obligated to provide financial support (*nafkah*) to his wife if she disobeys him. A husband also has the right to prevent his wife from leaving the house. This means that a wife is obligated to seek her husband's permission before going out, except in emergency situations. An example of a valid emergency that permits a wife to leave the house without her husband's permission is when she needs to care for elderly parents and no other caregiver is available to perform this duty at that time (al-Nawawi: 23–27; al-Shirbini: 208; al-Kasani: 331–335; Ibn Abidin: 596; al-Dasuqi: 491–492; Ibn Qudamah: 30–32; al-Bahuti: 211–213). Contemporary scholars, however, clarify that obedience does not mean a wife is deprived of

having her own opinions or her right to leave the home in pursuit of knowledge, especially knowledge that is personally obligatory (*fardhu 'ain*) (al-Haitami, 8/327).

Analysis of the Concept of Obedience to the Husband in Syair Khadamuddin

Past scholars and former religious figures have emphasized the rulings and laws related to husband and wife. One important aspect of married life is the wife's obedience. In the poem *Syair Khadamuddin* composed by Raja Aisyah, it is clear that she places particular emphasis on the concept of a wife's obedience to her husband.

The *Syair Khadamuddin* narrates the story of a noblewoman who frequently hosted gatherings with other women at her home. These gatherings typically involved feasting and discussions on women's issues. This aspect is vividly illustrated by the author, Raja Aisyah, in her poem.

*Hingga dibuat Siti bangsawan,
Di dalam rumah satu jamuan,
Dihimpunkan di sana segala perempuan,
Tua muda janda perawan*

Thus noble Siti held a feast,
Within her home, a gathering at least.
There she assembled women all around,
Young and old, widows and maidens found.

On page 16, he also describes that the issue discussed by the women attending the gathering was about the wife's obedience to her husband.

*Jawab bini lebai Abdullah,
Kita perempuan serba salah,
Jika bersuami mahu taatlah
menurut segala hukuman Allah*

*Bini Qadhi menjawab segera
di dalam taat ada bicara
mahulah jua dengan berkira
tiadalah kelak mendapat cedera*

Answered the wife of Lebai Abdullah,
As women, we're blamed in every matter.
If married, we must submit and obey,
To all of Allah's laws, come what may.

The Qadhi's wife replied in turn,
In obedience, let wisdom discern.
Let thought and fairness guide the way,
So no harm shall fall someday.

However, what was revealed by Encik Gafur's wife shocked the Qadhi's wife and the other women who present at the gathering:

*Tunduk berkata Bini Encik Gafur,
Tersenyum sambil sirih dikapur,
Saya ini masuk mencampur,
perasaan perempuan menunggu dapur*

*kepandaian yang lain tiada berguna
Walau bagaimanapun bijaksana,
tak tahu memasak berkemas tak kena
Perasaan saya terlalu hina*

*Kerana perempuan apabila kahwin,
taatlah suami tiadalah lain,
menjaga makanan baju dan kain
untuk berjalan untuk bersalin*

*Demikian sudah hamba amalkan
taatkan suami diri diserahkan
mana Sukanya kami turutkan
sama ada ya ataupun bukan*

*Kerana sahaya mengambil petua
Dengan Wak Man Wak Haji Jawa
Perempuan bersuami selamamanya jua
Taatkan perintah ia semua*

*Kerana kita jadi isterinya,
Sifatkan diri seperti hambaNya
Sebarang apa perintah kehendaknya
Jika disalahi dosa jadinya*

Bowed, spoke the wife of Encik Gafur,
Smiling gently, betel lime on her lips,
"I join in here among the women,
Waiting by the kitchen's warming fires.

Other skills hold little worth,
Though wise in thought and mind,
If cooking and tidying are unknown,
My heart feels low and quite confined.

For when a woman weds her spouse,
She must obey her husband's will,
Caring for food, clothes, and cloth,
In daily life and childbirth still.

This is the path I have embraced,
Obedient, my self I yield,
Where he is pleased, I follow close,
Whether yes or no, my fate is sealed.

For I have learned from elders wise,
Wak Man and Wak Haji Jawa,
That a married woman must always be,
Loyal, obedient, and in awe.

Because we are his wives, indeed,
We live as servants to his needs,
Any command he gives to me,
Disobedience brings sinful deeds.”

From what was narrated by Encik Gafur’s wife above, it can be understood that there were some women at that time who obeyed all their husbands’ orders without assessing whether those commands contradicted Islamic teachings or not. They believed that a wife would bear the sin if she disobeyed her husband, even in matters of wrongdoing, to the extent that they likened themselves to servants.

It was even more surprising when Encik Gafur’s wife revealed that there were wives who were willing to pawn their possessions so their husbands could gamble and socialize with other women. This situation is illustrated in the following poem:

*balasan kelak iaitu neraka
takutlah hamba tiada terhingga
jadilah kami taat belaka
baik dan jahat semua kusuka*

*Suamiku itu terlalu nakal
di dalam rumah ia tak kekal
sahaja lu beri sahaja ku bekal
wang dan emas berpuluh bungkal*

*Untuk ia memberi betina
menyukakan hatinya di mana-mana
terkadang dibawanya Jepun dan Cina
balik ke rumah kami di sana*

*hamba sediakan suatu bilik
tempat ia baring bergolek
kuhantarkan makana yang pelik-pelik
serta dibekalkan sekarang balik*

*Terkadang suamiku hendak berjudi
wang tiada dipundi-pundi*

*Kusuruh gadaikan kain randi
Cincin Intan ikatan Hindi (hlm 17)*

*Kerap kawannya datang berhimpun
Mengajak pergi ke rumah Jepun
Tiada wang kuberi kupon
Supaya boleh kehendaknya sempurna*

*Sekali-kali tiada ku kahat
lanya hendak berbuat jahat
Sementara muda badannya sihat
baharulah hatinya luas dan rehat*

*Kerap pulak hamba disuruhnya
Mencari perempuan elok rupanya
Boleh menyuka akan hatinya
Seberapa belanja kuberi dianya (hlmn 18)*

The consequence later is hell's fire,
A boundless fear, my heart's desire.
So we become completely obedient,
Loving all, both good and violent.

My husband is mischievous and wild,
He does not stay at home, this wayward child.
I give him freely, no denial,
Money and gold in generous pile.

To please his heart, he brings women near,
Here and there, his pleasures clear.
Sometimes Japanese, sometimes Chinese,
Back to our home, they come with ease.

I prepare a room for him to lie,
Where he can rest and lounge nearby.
I send strange foods to satisfy,
And supply what he needs, no deny.

Sometimes my husband wants to gamble,
No money left in his pocket to handle.
I'm forced to pawn the finest cloth,
A diamond ring, a treasured oath. (page 17)

Often his friends gather around,
Urging him to the Japanese ground.
No money I give, but coupons instead,
To fulfill his wishes, enough is said.

At times I cannot refuse or say no,
For mischief in him starts to grow.
While his youth and strength remain,
Only then can his restless heart find gain.

Often he orders me to seek,
A woman fair, with charm unique,
One to please his restless heart,
For whom I spend, though torn apart. (page 18)

Apart from the story above, Mr. Gafur's wife also spoke about her obedience when her husband told her to abandon the obligatory of prayers and fasting during Ramadan. Due to a lack of clear understanding about the limits of obedience to a husband, Mr. Gafur's wife followed his instructions even though such actions contradict Islamic law (Shariah) and are forbidden for a wife to obey. This was conveyed by Mr. Gafur's wife in the following verse:

Takut malu ku sentiasa
Dahulu ku tangah sembahyang Isya
suamiku memanggil dengan paksa
hamba batalkan pada itu masa

Tiap-tiap Ramadan ia hukumi,
Tiada diberinya puasa kami
Walau ku puasa setengah yawm,
diajaknya makan roti dan umai (h 19)

Ketika itu berbukalah beta,
Menurut ia empunya kata,
Segala perempuan sekelian rata
Mendengar ini kisah cerita

Ada tertawa ada yang marah
Bini Lebai mukanya merah
katanya tidak semenggah kena diarah
inilah taat tak tentu arah

Bini Encik Gafur berkata tentu
Orang taat semua begitu
Lamun disalahi walaupun Satu
Perempuan taat bukannya itu

Hamba berkhobar terus dan terang
Suami beta nafsunya garang
Tak boleh melihat isteri orang
Gilalah ia bukan sebarang (hlmn 20)

Shame and fear I held so tight,
Once in Isya' prayer one night,
My husband called with voice so stern—
I stopped my prayer, with heart that burned.

Each Ramadan, he made it known:
"No fasting here"—his word was stone.
Though I had fasted half the day,
He'd bring out roti, umai on a tray.

And so I broke my fast in woe,
Obeyed his word—I dared not say no.
To all you women, far and near,
Listen well to what you hear.

Some laughed aloud, some took offense,
The Lebai's wife showed no pretense.
"This kind of order lacks all grace—
Obedience here is out of place!"

But Gafur's wife spoke with pride,
"All loyal wives stand by their guide.
Though he be wrong in just one part,
Disloyalty breaks a faithful heart."

I told the truth, both plain and wide:
My husband's lust he could not hide.
He can't behold another's bride—
Without going mad, with eyes so wild. (Page 20)

What was shared by Mr. Gafur's wife greatly surprised the women who attending the gathering at Siti Sabariah's home. Among those who responded with advice and criticism was the Mufti's wife. Her admonition is expressed in the following verse:

Karena kami ta'at menurut
Kehendak betul kehendak herot
Isteri Mufti marah terkerut
Katanya itu ta'at yang karut

Dan itulah salah bida'ah
Tiada sekali memberi manfaat
Laki-laki yang jahat melanggar syariah
Adakah patut engkau nan ta'ah

Dan lagi terlalu salah
Melebihkan suami dari pada Allah
Sejahat-jahat kerja engkau itulah

Akan sekarang segera kebetulan

Guru mengajar dengan sebenarnya
Engkau tak paham akan kehendaknya
Serta tiada mahu bertanya
Jadilah terkena selama-lamanya

Berpatutan benar dengan lakimu
Tiada mempunyai akal dan ilmu
Lebih jahat daripada dirimu
Karena membiar akan bodohmu (hlmn 20)

Because we obey without doubt,
Whether the will is right or turned about,
The Mufti's wife frowned in dismay,
Saying, "That obedience leads astray."

This is a wrongful, harmful innovation,
Bringing no good or salvation.
A wicked man who breaks the law—
Should you obey him? Never, no!

And even more, it's truly wrong,
To raise your husband above God strong.
The worst of deeds is what you do,
Soon justice will come to you.

The teacher teaches truthfully,
Yet you fail to grasp his plea.
Refusing questions, you choose to stray,
And thus the loss will always stay.

Fitting well with your own ways,
Lacking reason, lost in haze.
Worse than you is none to see,
For letting ignorance rule your mind. (Page 20)

From the verses of the poem above, the concept of a wife's obedience to her husband clearly does not align with what has been outlined by Shariah law. There are wives who obey their husbands in matters that contradict Shariah law. For example, obeying a husband's command to abandon obligatory of prayers and fasting, or allowing the husband to commit sinful acts. This is actually very much against the laws prescribed in Islam. The jurists from the four schools of thought (*madhhabs*) have unanimously agreed that a wife is obligated to obey her husband as long as the commands do not conflict with Islamic principles and do not harm the wife. Therefore, it is forbidden for a wife to obey her husband's orders that are not in accordance with Shariah law (al-Nawawi: 23-27, al-Shirbini: 208, al-Kasani: 331-335; Ibn Abidin: 596; al-Dasuqi: 491-492; Ibn Qudamah: 30-32; Al-Bahuti: 211-213).

Conclusion

Allah Ta'ala has commanded wives to obey their husbands. However, it is forbidden for a wife to obey a husband's command that clearly violates Allah's law. This is because obedience to the husband cannot override obedience to Allah SWT. The poem written by Raja Aisyah binti Raja Sulaiman explains that there are wives who do not understand the true concept of obedience to their husbands, causing them to blindly follow their husbands' orders even when they clearly contradict Shariah law. This misunderstanding was addressed by the women attending a gathering at the home of a woman named Siti Sabariah. From the content of Syair Khadamuddin, it can be concluded that society in the 1960s placed great importance on knowledge about marital happiness. One way to convey knowledge about family life was through writing in various forms, including syair—a type of poetry that carries advice and guidance.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the financial and technical support for this Industry Grant by Dar al-Qari Resources under the grant (UniSZA/2023/PPL/DAQR(089)).

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