**The myth of human rights**

On **Aug 11, 2022** [Zara Maqbool](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/zara-maqbool/)

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We live in an interdependent relational world whereby the virtue of the relationship we are in, we are expected to fulfil certain rights of that relationship that are primarily rooted in values such as respect, trust, physical love, caregiving, loyalty, and so on.  
What are some of these rights? Parents expect obedience from children. A wife expects love and respect from her spouse. Friends expect to be supported and the list goes on.  
And when these expectations are not met that we believe is our ‘right’ we get hurt and heartbroken and find our world crumbling.  
Do we not have rights towards other fellow beings? Of course, we do.  
We fulfil or aspire to fulfil them to feel safe and secure and I believe that contributes to some semblance of safety and normalcy in a world that is chaotic and continues to be because of external adversities, be it covid, climate change, the Ukraine war and so on.  
I strongly believe that the need to connect to others surpasses other needs and human connections and relationships facilitate a supportive system that contributes to our well-being.  
The issue is that our conditioned life teaches us again and again that to do justice to our relationships, we have to fulfil the explicit and implicit expectations, that we are obliged to meet all the requirements and we have no choice but to say yes to everything that’s required of us and failing to fulfil even one ‘right’ is an unimaginable catastrophe.  
There are pre-set decisions about what each relationship demands and so are knee-jerk expectations that if we don’t meet those demands we are falling short and are unkind uncaring people who don’t know how to do justice to our relationships.  
There lacks a sense of freedom to be how we want to be in these relationships because of ‘rights’ hanging like a sword on our heads.  
A female friend expressed to me the trauma of her husband not wanting to be sexually intimate with her and for twenty years she has felt wronged and cannot fathom why he would say no to her especially since she is a physically attractive woman.  
I was discussing this with another friend and he said something very significant that made me think of what rights towards others mean. He said that the husband is simply not into his wife and is not sexually attracted to him and he has a right to say no.  
We have come up with a book of rights that are universally accepted and need to be honoured but there should be exceptions to the rule.  
We unfortunately stay stuck in unhappy relationships too for the same reason because that’s us fulfilling the rights and demands of that relationship.  
Every relationship should have space to say no. The rights toward others need to be exercised within each unique relationship and situation.  
Nowhere am I endorsing not taking care of the needs and wants of different relationships but these rights should also not be expected to be fulfilled by a single stroke of the brush.  
An adult daughter might not feel the same love for her mother who physically abused her or was unavailable for her when she was younger. A husband might not be attracted to his wife even if she is attractive. We can be unavailable for many relationships.  
Perhaps we need to make allowances for the exercising of these rights in the context of the people involved.  
We need to judge less by simplifying complex relationships and viewing them from a single universal lens which is of course specific to cultural nuances. We should have a choice to say no without feeling guilty in our relationships.  
Let individuals define their own set of rights based on their relational stories.