
Breaking Stereotypical Barriers: The Exemplary Lives of Seven Women in Islam

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Abstract

Women played a crucial role in the history of Islam. Islam recognizes woman as equal partner of man. The contributions of women in Islam can not be unseen. Islam came forward by ensuring the rights of women, when they were not even allowed to be born. This research was done on seven woman who are remarkable in the history of Islam. All these women broke stereotypes that society had designed for them. These women were not the women of modern era but from early age of Islam. There were woman who donated all the wealth for the cause of Islam, stood against tyrant rulers, spoke for truth, participated actively in wars, secured highest ranks in Islam. The seven prominent women are Khadeejah bint Khuwayild, Fathima bint Muhammad, Maryam bint Imran, Asiya bint Muzahim, Lady Hajar, Zainab bint Ali and Ayisha bint Abu Bakr. All these women are notable for their exemplary actions and services.

Keywords: wives of Prophet, stereotype resistance, steadfastness, piety,

Introduction:

Khadeejah bint Khuwayild

Khadeejah was the first wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She was born in to aristocratic clan of the Quraysh. She was the one who broke the stereotypes of woman before decades that still exists. She was a wealthy business woman at that time and she belonged to a noble family. She was a woman who is demonstrating economic and intellectual power in a patriarchal society. She was married twice before the Prophet (PBUH) to two Arab noblemen. They were Abu Hala (or Hind ibn Zar'ah) and later to Ateeq ibn 'Aa'ith. Both husbands passed away. She had two sons in her first marriage and one daughter in her second. She was proposed by many prominent men. But she rejected everything, because she had no intention to get married again. She employed many people for her business.

Muhammad was one among them to manage a trade caravan to Syria. She accepted him as employee but had to test his honesty. She gave him a caravan and sent her servant

Maysara with him. She asked to report to her news related to Muhammad's (PBUH)skills and honesty. Maysara informed Khadijah that Muhammad (PBUH) was successful in making profit in an honest manner. He sold all his merchandise before he even arrived in Al Sham. He returned with profit and proved more skillful than anyone. She was also informed some unusual events took place during the journey. His incomparable kindness, honesty, and cheerfulness made her fell in love with him deeply. She sent a trusted friend, Nafisa, to propose marriage to Muhammad on her behalf as she was impressed by acts of Muhammad for his honesty, fairness, and remarkable success.

She chose her partner according to her wish. She looked for character than wealth. She was 40 years old when she got married to 25 year old Muhammad (PBUH). The marriage was monogamous. She was a loyal wife and supported Prophet during his thick and thin. Muhammad's prophethood began during this marriage. He went to Mount Hira for meditation and he received first revelation from angel Jibril. This was on top of a hill. Kadheejah gave all support by supplying food and water in her mid fifties. Prophet was terrified by the experience in Hira cave. He was anxious because of the responsibility that Allah was going to place on him. It is Kadheejah, who comforted and reassured him. He collapsed in the hands of Kadheejah by worrying who is going to believe him. She was the first person to believe in him. It is remarkable that the first believer of islam is a woman. She gave spiritual, emotional and financial support when others rejected him. She donated all her fortune for islam. when he received the first of God's revelations, she encouraged him and supported him during the most difficult days of his life. People boycotted him, kadheejah was always with him instead of poverty and starvation.

Health of Khadeejah became worse because of suffering during their ban. The tenth year of hijra, hence known as year of grief in the history of islam because both Khadeejah and Abu Thalib(paternal uncle) passed away. Prophet was so heartbroken in the death of Khadeejah. He cherished her memory throughout his life. Khadheeja was the dearest among all his wives. Many hadith were reported about Khadheeja. Ali ibn Abi Thalib reported that Allah's Messenger said that The best of the world's women is Mary (at her lifetime), and the best of the world's women is Khadija (at her lifetime)(Şahih al-Bukhari, 1997, Hadith 3820). She is one among world's five best women(Sahih al-Bukhari,1997, 63.40;3815). Aishah, one of his wife expressed her jealous over Khadheeja for possessing the heart of Muhammad (PBUH). Prophet answered that the love for Khadheeja was nurtured in his heart by Allah. She was offered a special place in heaven by Allah.(Sahih al-Bukhari,1997,62.156; Sahih Muslim, 2007, 44.5877) . Once Muhammad (PBUH) was in the house of Aaishah, Haallah(sister of Khadijah) came to visit him. When he heared her voice, which resembles that of Khadheeja, he overwhelmed with emotion. He admired all her relative and friends even after her death. He always remembered the generosity and love of Khadheeja, so whenever he slaughtered an animal, he would send a portion of the meat to her friends. .

The Holy Prophet used to praise Hazrat Khadijah often and her virtues and the sacrifices for Islam. Out of control Aaishah once asked him that Why he is talking so much of the old lady after Allah gave him better, younger and more attractive wives. The Holy Prophet became emotional by this question and he said, "Oh, No, Aaishah! You have no idea how good Khadijah was to me. She believed in the truthfulness of my claim when others rejected me. She became my best companion and helper when others took me. Moreover God has blessed me with children from her." (Sahih Muslim, 2007, Hadith 2435). Hazrat Abu Hurairah said that the angel Jibreel once came to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and told him that Hazrat Khadijah was bringing some food for him. Jibreel asked the Prophet (PBUH) to give her greetings of peace from Allah and also from himself, and to tell her the good news that she would have a house in paradise made of shining pearls, where there would be no noise or trouble. (Sahih Muslim, 2007, Hadith 2432)

Fathima bint Muhammad

The best women of the world are four: "Maryam (Mary), Asiya (wife of Pharaoh), Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, and Fatimah bint Muhammad." (Musnad Ahmad, 1999, Hadith 2663) . Fathima is the another one among world's five best women mentioned by Prophet Muhammad(PBUH). She was born in Mecca as the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Kadheera. She was married to Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin of Prophet Muhammad. Fatimah is termed as the mother of Imams and is admired by both Sunni and Shia Muslims. She was a lady of modesty, humility, spirituality, and generosity. She is a symbol of resistance. She was considered as human hourie. It is believed that she was conceived after the journey to Paradise(Day of Meraj), Prophet consumed fresh dates and apples of Paradise. Allah transformed this food into water in the loins of the Prophet. So Fathima is from heaven. Fathima known in different names Siddiqah (the honest), Al-Mubarakah (the blessed one), At-Tahirah (virtuous), Az-Zakiyah (the chaste), Ar-Radhiyatul Mardhiah (she who is gratified and who shall be satisfied), Al-Muhaddathah (person, other than a prophet, that the angels speak to), and Az-Zahra (the splendid).

Prophet often described her as joy of his heart and piece of his heart. He further declared, "Whoever harms her has harmed me, and whoever angers her has made me angry; whoever makes her glad has made me glad, and whoever saddens her has made me sad." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 1997, Hadith 3714)

She resembled Prophet in his physical and spiritual aspects and she is the mother of the Ahlul Bayt (Family of the Prophet). She is considered as leader of women in paradise. Narrated by Aishah :The Prophet(PBUH) said to Fātimah:"Are you not pleased that you will be the leader of the women of Paradise, or the leader of the believing women?"(Sahīh Muslim,2007, ḥadīth 2449). Many people including Abu Bakr and Umar asked to marry Fathima, but Prophet rejected them all. He was waiting for Allah's command. Ali ibn Abi Thalib, who longed her hand in marriage. But he was worried of his financial condition, he had nothing, even a house. Then Jibreel(angel) came by the order of Allah to marry Fathima

to Ali ibn Abi Talib. Prophet asked Fathima's consent. Fathima did not ask about Ali's occupation, manners or age because she knew all about his character, talent and his service to islam. He is asked to sell his shield to give mahr(a payment to the bride which she will keep).

Their marriage caused people to show their hidden resentment and envy. Many fabricated stories told against Imam Ali to disturb their life instead of many warning to those who would oppress his family, will subjected to Allah's anger. Zayd ibn Arqam narrated that Prophet (PBUH) have said that "O people, I am a human being. I am about to receive a messenger (the angel of death) from my Lord and I, in response to Allah's call, (would bid good-bye to you), but I am leaving among you two weighty things: the one being the Book of Allah in which there is right guidance and light, so hold fast to the Book of Allah and adhere to it". He directed his followers to hold the Book of Allah and then said: "The second are the members of my household I remind you (of your duties) to the members of my family." (Sahih Muslim,2007, Hadith 2408.)

Even Though she is loved and respected by Prophet Muhammad(PBUH), she suffered lot after his death. She was deeply inflicted by the death of Muhammad(PBUH). Fatima revealed the extent of her sadness and inability to bear life without her father. She is called Al- Muhaddathah because Angel Jibreel often visited her to console her after the death of Prophet (PBUH). Angel Jibreel is the angel for delivering divine revelation to prophets. No other person than a Prophet can see him, but Fathima , Hagar(Mother of Ismail), Mariyam(mother of Isa) had seen and talked with him. After the demise of Prophet (PBUH), She strongly believed that her Husband Ali would be the first caliph of muslim community as Prophet declared his importance in Ghadeer Khum. He declared that whomever he is leader, Ali is his leader. (Jami at-Tirmidhi,1997, Hadith 3713)

Narrated Hubshi bin Junadah:that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "Ali is from me and I am from 'Ali. And none should represent me except myself or 'Ali."(Jami at-Tirmidhi, 1997, Hadith 3719)

It is said that Abu Bakar took that position with the support of some people while Ali was performing final rites of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She strongly believed that caliphate cannot be assigned to anyone by mankind, rather it is divine. She stood against political injustice and suppression with her strong faith and commitment to Allah. She challenged authority of Abu Bakar by not accepting his caliphate. Abu Bakar rejected her inheritance that Prophet had given her. She delivered a speech in Prophet's Mosque in Madeena, which known as Sermon of Fadak. It was a protest against power and authority and claimed her inheritance and authority of Ali. It is also said that Umar ibn Khattab came to her house and threatened her and family. Fathima and Ali were not ready to accept the authority of Abu Bakar and Umar set fire on their door. During the event, fathima wounded badly and it resulted in miscarriage and eventually her death. Sunni school of Islam rejects

this narration. She was not pleased with authority at the time of her death. She asked Ali to bury her at night, because she did not want any of person who harmed her to attend her funeral prayer. She also wished to keep location of her grave secret.

The events related with Fathima is often considered as controversial in Islam, because it lead to split in Islam as Sunni and Shia. Both sect have different narration about her death and funeral. Sunni believes that she died of grief because of death of her beloved father Muhammad (PBUH), and she buried at night because she wanted to preserve her dignity and honor. She died after six month of Prophet's death. It was a early death and her life was a series of trials. According to Shia belief she was 18 year old and according to Sunni, she was 27 at the time of her death.

Maryam bint Imran

Maryam is the one and only lady mentioned by name in holy Qur'an. Qur'an refers her seventy times and there is Surah(chapter) on her name(Surah Maryam). She is one among the greatest Woman in Islam. She received a massage from Allah through Angel Jibreel that she is carrying a chosen child. She was not married and virgin. In Qur'an, Jibreel says "O Mary, Allah has chosen thee and purified thee and chosen thee above the women of all people"(Qur'an 3.42). She was chosen for the task because of her devotion and piety. Angel says: "O Maryam (Mary)! Verily, Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him, whose name will be Al-Masih 'Isā (Jesus), son of Maryam, held in honor in this world and in the Hereafter, and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah"(Qur'an 3:45). She was confused by this revelation, then the massage came: "I am only a messenger of your Lord, to give you [Mary] the gift of a pure son.' She said: 'How can I have a son while no man has touched me, and I have not been unchaste?' He said: 'Thus Allah creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is.'(Qur'an 19.19–21).

She left her home in order to give birth to Isa. Few months later, she began to feel labor pain. She saw a palm tree and took rest under the tree. The day was hot, the pain was immense and there was nobody to help her. In the moment of despair, she wished that she had never been born. Then a voice came to direct her to drink the water from the stream beside her and shake the tree to eat dates. The voice reassured her and promised her to keep silence. She gave birth to Isa from there and returned to her home. People began to question her for ruining and dishonoring her parents by giving birth to a fatherless child. She pointed to Isa without answering any. Then the baby in the cradle began to speak : "Indeed, I am a servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined me to pray and give zakah as long as I live. And He has made me dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me arrogant or miserable. And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive."(Qur'an 19:30–33). Maryam(as) can be considered to a status of Prophet as she was mentioned directly in Qur'an and Angel Jibreel spoke with her many times. She also got

direction from Allah himself. She was placed in honorable position for her strength amidst of trials and sufferings.

Asiya Bint Muzahim

She was the wife of Pharaoh. She was mentioned in Qur'an for her steadfastness and piety. She is one of the four greatest women of all time in Islam. She was married to a tyrant ruler, who claimed to be god and made his people worship him. Prophet Musa was born in the time when Pharaoh ordered to kill all male child to protect his life, power and fame. Asiya gave refuge to Musa brought up him like her own son. She insisted Pharaoh to adopt the infant Musa. The wife of Pharaoh said: "(Here is) joy of the eye, for me and for thee: slay him not. It may be that he will be use to us, or we may adopt him as a son." And they perceived not (what they were doing)! (Qur'an 28:9). Asia accepted islam eventually, but mistreated by her husband. Even Though Asiya saw a faithful woman die from her husband's torture, she openly showed her belief before Pharaoh. She was the Queen, she could have chose the materialist world. But she chose to hold her faith strongly. She refused to reject the God of Musa, as she was ordered to do so. She was tortured to death for her steadfastness. She rejected her husband and all the worldly thing that he could offer. She took her freedom to choose, she was not ready to allow others to decide her life. "And Allah sets forth an example for the believers: the wife of Pharaoh, who prayed, "My Lord! Build me a house in Paradise near You, deliver me from Pharaoh and his 'evil' doing, and save me from the wrongdoing people." ([Quran 66:11](#))

Zainab bint Ali

Zainab is the eldest daughter of Fathima and Ali. She is known for her activism after Karbala, martyrdom of her brother Hussain ibn Ali. She is considered as symbol of resistance, strength and sacrifice. She inherited her father's skill in oratory, knowledge and bravery. Karbala is the most tragic event took place in the history of islam. It was the battle between Imam Hussian ibn Ali with the army of Yazid ibn Muawiya. Hussain, his family and followers were brutally martyred as they refused to pledge allegiance to unfair rule of Yazid. Zainab took care of children and women in the camp. The access to water was cut off for three days, she consoled children with the words of assurance when they asked for water. She also assisted and assured her brother on the face of battle. She helped Hussain to mount on his horse, as all other male companions were martyred before him. She witnessed martyrdom of her beloved brother. The army of Yazid mutilated and humiliated the sacred body of Imam Hussain. She witnessed all those in front of her eyes. They set fire on tents, but she dealt the situation without panic and saved many children. They were taken as prisoners but he confronted the enemies and she addressed the people with calmness and courage. She started the revolution with her words. She revealed what she witnessed in Karbala. She exposed the cruelty and falsehood of Yazid. The truth of Karbala was revealed and spread through uh Lady Zainab, the bravest in the history of Islam.

Lady Hagar

Hagar is the wife of Prophet Ibrahim. Since his first wife Sarah could not bear a child, she asked Prophet Ibrahim to marry Hagar and she gave birth to Ismail. This is the

lineage of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Even Though Allah tested these couples in various occasions, they stood strong in their faith and hope in Allah. After the birth of Ismail, Ibrahim is commanded to abandon them in a dessert. He took his wife and infant to the barren land, present day Makkah and left them. Hagar asked repeatedly why he is leaving them in a dessert until he say it is order of Allah. Hearing this, the lady soon became faithful, because she knew that Allah will not abandon them even if there is no one to help.

Narrated Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him): "Ibrāhīm (Abraham) brought Hājar (Hagar) and her son Ismā'īl (Ishmael), while she was suckling him, to a place near the Ka'bah under a tree on the spot of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. In those days, there was nobody in Makkah, nor was there any water. He made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward. Ismā'īl's mother followed him saying, 'O Ibrāhīm! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to enjoy)?' She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, 'Has Allah ordered you to do so?' He said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Then He will not neglect us.' and returned while Ibrāhīm proceeded onwards. Having reached the Thaniyya where they could not see him, he faced the Ka'bah, and raising both hands, invoked Allah with the following prayer: 'O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Your Sacred House; in order, O our Lord, that they may offer prayers perfectly. So fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and (O Allah) provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.' (Qur'an 14:37)" (Al Bukhari, 1997, Hadith 3364)

The baby Ismail began to cry over thirst and Hagar went search for water. But she could not find a drop of water to quench the thirst of her baby. She began to run between Safa an Marwa (a pair of mountain) seven times in search of water. She waited to the answer from her Lord. Angel Jibreel appeared in front of her and informed the happy news that Allah answered their call. The water burst forth under the hells of Ismail, the barren land. It began to flow without limit until she worried it might not stop. She said Zam Zam, which means stop. Later the water known as Zamzam, still quenching the thirst of millions of believers who come to perform Umrah and Hajj. Hagar is the symbol of Motherhood and Sacrifice in Islam. She is one of the women speak with Angel Jibreel. Now a days, Millions of muslims run between Safa and Marwa during Hajj and Umrah, this can be taken as tribute to her sacrifice and trust in Allah. No man can perform Hajj and Umrah, without Sahy (walking/running seven times between Safa and Marwa). She was honored by Allah by making her footsteps inevitable part of Hajj and Umrah. Every king has to imitate the action of a lady to perform Hajj.

Ayisha bint Abu Bakar

Ayisha, Wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) known for her intelligence and vast knowledge. The basics of islam are Qur'an and Hadiths (saying and Sunnah of Prophet). She

transmitted two thousand Hadiths. She played significant role in preserving Hadiths. She was married to Muhammad (PBUH) at young age. She was only unmarried, all other Prophet's wives were divorced or widows when he married them. She actively involved in teaching Qur'an and Hadiths in muslim community. She can be considered as important female scholar in early Islamic era. She was not a stereotypical woman within four walls. She was the leader and led army. Her home in Madeena became hub for scholars and many people went to learn Hadiths there.

Women in Islam is often misinterpreted throughout history. But there are lot of women who went beyond stereotypes that socially assigned for them. Islam is not a misogynistic religion, rather it ensures the rights of women in all spheres of life. This study was done on some great Muslim women in the early age of Islam. They secured highest place through their piety, protest against evil. The greatest example for this is Sahy between Safa and Marwa. Everyone has supposed to walk between them to complete obligatory annual pilgrimage (Hajj) by following footsteps of a woman . This is the noble place Allah has placed woman in Islam. When it comes to Lady Fathima and Zainab, they are the symbol of resistance and they stood against the authority while all others kept the silence. They could not be muted by worldly offers. While Lady Maryam kept her silence and showed her obedience to Allah. She tolerated everything bravely. Asiya tortured to death for her steadfastness whereas Lady Ayisha is the base of Islamic teaching. Hadith collection could not be possible without her. Kadheeja, the beloved wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) became the first believer of islam and remembered for her valuable services in Islam.

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