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Chapter 2: Early Life

Khadija was born in Makka. She was the daughter of Khuwayled bin Asad bin Abdul Uzza bin Qusayy. Qusayy was the common progenitor of her line as well as the line of Muhammad Mustafa of the clan of Bani Hashim, and the future Prophet of Islam (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul Bayt). She thus belonged to a collateral branch of the Bani Hashim. Next to Bani Hashim itself, her family was the noblest and the most honorable in all Arabia. Her family was distinguished not only by its opulence but also by the content of its character.

Khuwayled, the father of Khadija, was, like most other members of the tribe of the Quraysh of Makka, also a merchant. Like most of them, he too had made a fortune in foreign trade. The merchants of Makka put together two caravans every year – one in summer and one in winter. They sent the "summer caravan" to Syria and the "winter caravan" to Yemen.

These caravans carried the produce of the desert, and the goods manufactured in Makka and the surrounding areas, and sold them in the markets of Syria and Yemen. They also sold pedigreed horses in Syria. These horses were valued very highly in Syria and in the neighboring countries. After selling their merchandize and their horses, the traders bought grain, olive oil, fruits, coffee, textiles, luxury goods and other manufactured items for sale in Makka. They thus made profit at both ends of the journey.

(This trade of Makka has been referred to in Quran Majid in Sura Quraysh, the 106th chapter).

Foreign trade was the entire basis of the economic life of Makka. Makka had neither arable lands nor water for irrigation.

The Makkans, therefore, could not grow their own food. To feed themselves, they depended upon their trade with Syria and Yemen. With the profits they made in their trade, they bought grain and other necessities of life.

Each caravan had a leader. This leader had to be a man of some exceptional qualities. Upon his judgment and decisions depended the physical safety and the success of the caravan in its business of

selling and buying. He was responsible for protecting the caravan from the brigands and the predators of the desert. This he did by recruiting warriors from various tribes, and by forming a squad or squads out of them, depending upon the size of the caravan. This squad accompanied the caravan to its destination. All caravans bound for distant destinations travelled under military escort.

The caravan-leader also had to be gifted with a "sixth sense" to guide him in the trackless desert during the day, and he had to have the ability to determine directions at night. He, therefore, had to have the knowledge of the relative position of the stars. He also had to assure beforehand the availability of water during the long journey north to Syria or south to Yemen. He also had to take precautionary measures against such unforeseen hazards as sand-storms and flash floods. He also had to have the ability to administer "first aid" to a traveller if he became sick or was injured. In other words, he had to be a man capable of handling any emergency. The merchants of Makka, therefore, selected a leader for their caravans after thoroughly investigating his antecedents. A screening panel of experienced travellers appraised all candidates for the post.

The panel was not satisfied by anything less than the proven ability of a candidate to "navigate" skillfully in the uncharted "sea" of sand, and his success in bringing the convoys of the "ships of the desert," (= the camels), and their cargoes, home safely. To be acceptable to the panel, a candidate had to show that he had thorough familiarity with the logistics of the caravans; and his "credentials" had to be impeccable.

Khadija's mother had died in or around AD. 575; and Khuwayled, her father, died in or around A.D. 585. Upon his death, his children inherited his fortune, and divided it among themselves. Wealth has its own perils. It can tempt one to live a life of idleness and luxury. Khadija subconsciously understood the ambivalent character of wealth, and made up her mind not to let it make her an idler. She was endowed with such extraordinary intelligence and force of character that she overcame the challenge of prosperity, and decided to build an empire upon her patrimony. She had many siblings but among all of them, she alone had "inherited" their father's ability to become rich. But she demonstrated very soon that even if she had not inherited a fortune from her father, she would have made one for herself.

After the death of Khuwayled, Khadija took charge of the family business, and rapidly expanded it. With the profits she made, she helped the poor, the widows, the orphans, the sick and the disabled. If there were any poor girls, Khadija married them off, and gave them dowry. One of her uncles acted as her adviser in business matters, and other members of the family also assisted her in the management of business if and when she sought their assistance. But she didn't depend upon anyone else to make her decisions. She trusted her own judgment even though she welcomed advice and considered it. The senior members of her family knew that one thing she didn't like was paternalism.

Most of the traders who had cargo to sell in Syria or Yemen, travelled with the caravans to oversight all transactions in person. But there were occasions when a trader was unable to leave Makka. In such an event, he engaged a man to go in his stead, with the caravan. The man chosen for this purpose, had to be one with good reputation for his probity and for his sound business sense. Such a man was called an

agent or a manager.

Khadija herself was a homebody and her brothers and cousins also did not show any interest in travelling with the caravans. She, therefore, recruited an agent whenever a caravan was outfitted to go abroad, and made him responsible for carrying her merchandise to the foreign markets and for selling it in those markets.

By judicious selection of her agents, and by selling and buying at the right time and at the right place, she was able to make fantastic profits, and in due course, became the richest merchant in Makka. Ibn Sa'ad says in his *Tabaqat* that whenever caravans of the Makkan merchants set out on their journey, the cargo of Khadija alone was equal to the cargo of all other merchants of Quraysh put together. She had, it was obvious to everyone, the proverbial "golden touch." If she touched dust, it turned into gold. The citizens of Makka, therefore, bestowed upon her the title of the Princess of the Quraysh. They also called her the Princess of Makka.

Arabia at this time was a pagan society, and the Arabs worshipped a multitude of idols and fetishes who, they believed, had the power to bring good fortune to them. But their idolatry was crude and primitive, and their habits, customs and characteristics were repulsive. Drunkenness was one of their many vices, and they were incorrigible gamblers. They were wallowing in a pit of error and ignorance. Quran Majid has borne testimony to their condition in the following verse:

***"It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom, - although they had been, before, in manifest error."* (Chapter 62; verse 2)**

But the country was not altogether devoid of individuals who found idolatry repugnant. These individuals, who were very few in number, were called "Hanifs," i.e., men and women "who had turned away from idol worship." Makka also had a sprinkling of these "hanifs," and some of them were in the clan of Khadija herself. One of them was her first cousin, Waraqa bin Naufal.

Waraqa was the eldest of all his siblings, and his hair had all turned grey. He castigated the Arabs for worshipping idols and for deviating from the true faith of their forebears – the prophets Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismael. Ibrahim and Ismael had taught the lesson of Tawhid – the doctrine of the Unity of the Creator. But the Arabs had forgotten that lesson, and had become polytheists. Waraqa despised them for their polytheism and their moral turpitude. He himself followed the religion of Prophet Ibrahim, the true and faithful slave of Allah. He never associated any partners) with Allah. He did not drink and he did not gamble. And he was generous to the poor and the needy.

One of the most hideous customs of the Arabs of the times was that they buried their female infants alive. Whenever Waraqa heard that someone intended to bury his daughter alive, he went to see him, dissuaded him from killing his daughter, and if the reason for the contemplated murder was poverty, he ransomed her, and brought her up as his own child. In most cases, the father later regretted his error,

and came to claim his daughter. Waraqa exacted from him a pledge to love his daughter, and to treat her well, and only then let him take her back.

Waraqa lived in the twilight of the pagan world. That world was soon going to be flooded with the Light of Islam – the Religion of Allah, par excellence – the Pristine Faith, first promulgated, many centuries earlier, by Ibrahim (Abraham), the Friend and Messenger of Allah. Allah had already chosen His slave, Muhammad Mustafa ibn Abdullah, of the clan of Bani Hashim, to be His new and His last Messenger to the world. The latter was living in Makka at the same time as Waraqa but had not proclaimed his mission yet.

Waraqa was one of the very few people in Makka who were educated. He is reported to have translated the Bible from Hebrew into Arabic. He had also read other books written by the Jewish and Christian theologians. He was a desperate seeker of truth in the darkness of a world growing darker, and longed to find it before his own death, but did not know how.

Khadija was strongly influenced by the ideas of Waraqa, and she shared his contempt for the idols and the idolaters. She did not associate any partners) with the Creator. Like Waraqa and some other members of the family, she too was a follower of the prophets Ibrahim and Ismael.

Khadija was a Muwahhid (monotheist)!

What Khadija did not know at this time was that within a few years, her destiny was going to be intertwined with the destiny of Muhammad Mustafa, the apostle of Monotheism (Tawhid); and with the destiny of Islam, the creed of Monotheism.

Arabia, before Islam, had no political organization in any form, and had no basic structure of any kind. There were no courts or police or a system of justice. Therefore, there was no apparatus to control crime, or to inhibit criminals. If an Arab committed a crime, he didn't feel any remorse. Instead, he boasted that he was capable of being utterly reckless, brutal and ruthless.

The whole peninsula was a masculine-dominated society. A woman had no status whatsoever. Many Arabs believed that women were bringers of bad luck. In general, they treated women more like chattel than like individuals. A man could marry any number of women he liked. And when he died, his eldest son "inherited" all of them except his own mother. In other words, he married all his step-mothers. Such a thing as a code of ethics simply did not exist to inhibit him in any way. Islam placed this foul practice under proscription.

The pre-Islamic Arabs were semi-savages. An Arab spent his life in lawless warfare. Killing and plundering were his favorite professions. He tortured his prisoners of war to death, and torturing animals was one of his favorite pastimes. He had a perverse sense of honor which led him to kill his own infant daughters. If his wife gave birth to a daughter, he was unable to conceal his anguish and displeasure.

“When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief!

With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on.” (Chapter 16; Verses 58, 59)

In most cases an Arab killed his daughter out of his fear that she would be made a prisoner in the inter-tribal wars, and therefore, a slave of the enemy, and her status as a slave would bring disgrace to his family and tribe. He could also kill her out of his fear of poverty. He believed that his daughter would become an economic liability to him. Islam made the killing of children a capital offence.

“Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.” (Chapter. 17; Verse 31)

There were also those Arabs who did not kill their daughters but they deprived them of all their rights. They figured that since their daughters, when married, would go to other men's homes, they ought not to spend anything on them.

It was such an environment in which Khadija was born, grew up and lived – an "anti-woman" environment.

From her home in Makka, Khadija controlled an ever-growing business which spread into the neighboring countries. What she had succeeded in achieving, would be remarkable in any country, in any age, and for anyone – man or woman. But her achievement becomes doubly remarkable when one takes into account the "anti-woman" orientation of the Arab society. This is proof of her ability to master her destiny by her intelligence, strength of will and force of character. Her compatriots acknowledged her achievements when they called her the princess of the Quraysh and the princess of Makka, as noted before.

But even more remarkably, Khadija also earned a third title. She was called "Tahira" which means "the pure one." Who bestowed the title of Tahira upon her? Incredibly, it was bestowed upon her by the same Arabs who were notorious for their arrogance, conceit, vanity and male chauvinism. But Khadija's conduct was so consistently exemplary that it won recognition even from them, and they called her "the pure one."

It was the first time in the history of Arabia that a woman was called the Princess of Makka and was also called Tahira. The Arabs called Khadija the princess of Makka because of her affluence, and they called her Tahira because of the immaculacy of her reputation. They were also aware that she was a highly cultivated lady. She was thus a personage of distinction even in the times before Islam – the Times of Ignorance.

It was inevitable that Khadija would attract the attention of the Arab nobles and princes. Many among

them sent proposals of marriage to her. But she did not consider any of them. Many of these nobles and princes were persistent in seeking her hand in marriage. Not discouraged by her refusal, they sought out men and women of influence and prestige to intercede for them with her. But she still spurned them all. She perhaps didn't attach much importance to the guardians of the male-dominated and "anti-woman" society.

Khadija's refusal to accept the offers of marriage sent by the high and the mighty of Arabia, gave rise to much speculation as to what kind of man she would like to marry. It was a question that Khadija herself could not answer. But her destiny knew the answer; she would marry a man who was not only the best in all Arabia but was also the very best in all creation. It was her destiny which prompted her to turn down offers of marriage sent by commonplace mortals.

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