

Marriages of the Holy Prophet

When the Holy Prophet passed away, he left nine wives behind. This has become a main target of the Christian and Jewish writers. They say that plurality of marriage (polygamy) in itself points to avidity and to yielding to lust and desire, and the Prophet was not content with four wives which had been allowed to his Ummah but exceeded even that limit and married nine women.

It is necessary to point out that this is not such a simple matter to be dismissed in a sentence that he was inordinately fond of women, so much so that he married nine wives. The fact is that he had married each one of his wives for some particular reason due to particular circumstances.

His first marriage was with Khadijah. He lived with her alone for twenty-five years. It was the prime time of his youth and constitutes two-thirds of his married life. We have written about her on the preceding pages.

Then he married Sawdah bint Zam'ah whose husband had expired during the second migration to Abyssinia. Sawdah was a believing lady who had migrated on account of her faith. Her father and brother were among the most bitter enemies of Islam. If she were left to return to them, they would have tortured and tormented her, as they were doing with other believing men and women, oppressing and killing them, forcing them to renounce their faith.

At the same time, he married 'Ayishah bint Abu Bakr, who was then a six-year old child. She came to the Prophet's house some time after the migration to Medina.

Then he emigrated to Medina and began spreading the word of Allah. Thereafter, he married eight women, all of them widows or divorcees, all old or middle-aged. This continued for about eight years. It was only then that he was prohibited by the Almighty from marrying any woman besides those whom he had already married. Obviously, these happenings cannot be explained by his love for women because both his early life and the later period contradict such an assumption.

Just look at a man with a passion for women who is infatuated with a carnal desire, enamored by female companionship, with a sensual lust for them. You will find him attracted to their adornment, spending his time in pursuit of beauty, infatuated with coquetry and flirtation and craving for youth, tender age, and fresh complexion.

But these peculiarities are conspicuously absent in the Prophet's life. He married widows after having married a virgin, old-aged ladies after having married young girls. Then he offered his wives a choice to give them a good provision and allow them to depart gracefully, i.e. divorce them if they desired this world and its adornment. Alternatively, they should renounce the world and abstain from adornments and embellishments if they desired Allah and His Prophet and the latter abode. Look at this verse of the Qur'an:

O Prophet! Say to your wives: If you desire this world's life and its ornaturne then come, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a graceful departure. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the latter abode, then surely Allah has prepared for the doers of good from among you a ,mighty reward. (Qur'an, 33:28-29)

Is this the attitude of a man infatuated with lust and desire?! The fact is that we will have to look for reasons other than lust and avidity for his plurality of wives:

- He had married many of them in order to give them protection and safeguard their dignity.
- It was hoped that the Muslims would follow his example and provide protection to aged women, widows and their orphaned children.

Sawdah bint Zam'ah's marriage comes into this category. Zainab bint Khuzaymah's husband, 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh (a cousin of the Prophet), was martyred during the battle of Uhud (as stated above). This was the second time she became a widow. She was one of the most generous ladies even in the era of ignorance, so much so that she was called "Mother of the poor". Now she was facing hard times. The Prophet, by marrying her, preserved her prestige and dignity. She passed away in the life-time of the Prophet. Year of marriage: 3 A.H.

Ummu Salamah, whose actual name was Hind, was married to 'Abdullah Abu Salamah (another cousin of the Prophet who was also his foster brother). Abu Salamah and his wife were among the first to migrate to Abyssinia. She had renounced worldly pleasures and was highly distinguished for her piety and wisdom. When her husband died, she was very advanced in age and had many orphaned children. That is why the Prophet married her. Year of marriage 4 A.H.

Hafsah bint 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was married to him after her husband Khunays ibn Hudhayfah was

martyred during the battle of Badr, leaving her a widow. Year of marriage 4 A.H.

- To set free the slaves: His marriage with Juwayriyyah, i.e. Barrah daughter of al-Harith (chief of Banu al-Mustaliq) was performed in 5 A.H. after the battle of Banu al-Mustaliq. The Muslims had arrested two hundred of their families. Juwayriyyah was a widow, and the Prophet married her after emancipating her. The Muslims said: These are now the relatives of the Messenger of Allah by marriage; they should not be held captive. So they freed all of them. Impressed by this nobility, the whole tribe of Banu al-Mustaliq entered into the fold of Islam. It was a very large tribe, and this generosity of the Muslims as well as the conversion of that tribe had a great impact throughout Arabia.
- To forge friendly relations: Some marriages were entered into in the hope of establishing friendly relationships with some tribes in order to blunt their enmity towards Islam.

Ummu Habibah, i.e. Ramlah daughter of Abu Sufyan, was married to 'Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh and had emigrated with them to Abyssinia in the second migration. While there, 'Ubaydullah was converted to Christianity, but she remained steadfastly on Islam and separated from him. Her father, Abu Sufyan, was in those days raising one army after another in order to annihilate the Muslims. The Prophet married her and afforded protection to her although the hope of any change in Abu Sufyan's attitude did not materialize.

Safiyyah was the daughter of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, (Jewish) chief of Banu an-Nadhir. Her husband was killed in the battle of Khaybar, and her father sided with Banu Qurayzah. She was among the captives of Khaybar. The Prophet chose her for himself and married her after emancipating her in 7 A.H. This marriage protected her from humiliation and established a link with the Jews.

☞ To establish and implement important laws: The case of Zainab bint Jahsh is its only example. She was a cousin of the Prophet (daughter of his paternal aunt, and sister of 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh, the first husband of Zainab bint Khuzaymah). She was a widow. Islam had annulled class differences and declared that a family's tribe, wealth, or social status are not the criteria of distinction. Every Muslim is equal.

While announcing it, the Prophet, in the same sitting, gave his three relative ladies in marriage to persons of "low" birth or status. It was done in order to practically demonstrate the Islamic equality, which up to that moment, was only a theoretical principle. Among them, Zainab bint Jahsh was given in marriage to Zayd ibn Harithah, an Arab slave whom the Prophet had freed and adopted as son. People called him Zayd ibn Muhammad. This marriage soon turned sour. Zainab could not overlook that she was a granddaughter of 'AbdulMuttalib, and that Zayd was an ex-slave. No matter how much the Prophet advised them, she did not change her behavior, so finally Zayd divorced her.

In the midst of the continuing social reforms, the Qur'an had declared that adoption was not recognized in Islam, that the sons should be affiliated to their actual fathers. Allah says:

Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his breast, nor has He made your wives whom you declare (to be your mothers) as your (real) mothers, nor has He made those whom you call (as your sons) your (real) sons. These are (mere) words of your mouths, and Allah speaks the truth and He guides unto the (right) way. Call them after their fathers; this is more just with Allah, but if you know not their fathers, then they are your brethren in faith and your friends. (Qur'an, 33:4-5)

After this admonition, people started calling him "Zayd ibn Harithah". But there was a need to put this new system in effect in such a way as to leave no room for doubt or ambiguity. Allah, therefore, ordered the Prophet to marry Zainab bint Jahsh, the divorcee of Zayd ibn Harithah. The Qur'an explains:

.... But when Zayd had concluded his concern with her (i.e. divorced her) We joined her in wedlock as your wife so that there should be no difficulty for the believers concerning the wives of their adopted sons when they have concluded their concerns with them, and the command of Allah shall be carried out. (Qur'an, 33:37)

In this manner, both marriages of Zainab bint Jahsh served to enforce two very important social ethics. Some non-Muslim writers have claimed that the Prophet had fallen in love with Zainab's beauty and that this was why Zayd divorced her. Such writers are blind to the fact that Zainab at that time was in her fifties.

Why did not Muhamaad fall in love with her when she was still a maiden and he himself was young? Consider this question especially in view of the fact that Zainab was a close relative of the Prophet, and that there was no system of *hijab* at that time, and, in any case, relatives usually know about each other's beauty or ugliness.

One of his wives was Maymunah whose name was Barrah bint al-Harith al-Hilaliyyah. When her second husband died in the 7th year of Hijrah, she came to the Prophet and "gifted" herself to him if he would accept her. She only desired the honor of being called the wife of the Prophet. The Prophet waited for the divine guidance in her regard. Permission was granted to him from his Lord as we read in verse 33:50 of the Holy Qur'an which says:

O Prophet! Certainly we have made lawful unto you ... a believing woman if she gifts herself unto the Prophet; if the Prophet desires to marry her, (it is) especially for thee (O Prophet!) rather than for the rest of the believers. (Qur'an, 33:50)

Thus do we see that each of these marriages had some solid reasons behind it; passion and lust were not among them.

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