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In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

"Whoever works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof, and whoever works a righteous deed whether man or woman and is a believer such will enter Paradise, therein will they have abundance without measure." 40:40

Why Did Imam Husain Take His Family?

One of the questions regarding the story of Karbala is why did Imam Husain take his family to Karbala, knowing he along with his companions would all be martyred; knowing his wife, sister, daughters and other girls and ladies would be taken as captives?

In general, when we go for a trip we usually don`t take our family with us, especially young children and babies, if we are expecting some difficulties.

The question then arises as to why did the Imam take his family with him?

To answer this question, I`m going to demonstrate as long as the time permits, some of the roles ladies played in the story of Karbala.

Karbala A Unique Story

There are some characteristics in the story of Karbala, which has made it quite unique. As a matter of fact, it is such a story that the more we study about it the more we discover its magnificence.

Of the unique characteristics of the story of Karbala is that people from different walks of life had a role and they all played (fulfilled) their roles perfectly.

The battle of Karbala is such a unique battle in which men and women, old and young, black and white, Arab and non-Arab had a role. In the list of the martyrs of Karbala, we see the names of 9 or 10 boys under the age of puberty. It is also interesting to know, that among the martyrs of Karbala the names of

15 non-Arabs are glittering. The role of women also, was not just in delivering the massage of the martyrs. They offered a sacrifice in Karbala whose name is also glittering as an only lady martyred in the path of Allah in Karbala.

The Role of Woman In History

To find the role of women in Karbala, we need to first of all to have a glance at the role of women in history and study the different approaches in that regard.

Do women have any role in history at all or should they have any? How does Islam view the matter? No doubt, women have always had an indirect role in human history; i.e. women were making men and men were making history. In other words, women have always been behind the curtain of the historical events good and/or bad. Women had more roles in making the personality of men than men for women. (this argument is sometimes suggested in the egg and chicken way)

My argument today is not about the indirect role of women and the critics around it. What I`d like to bring to your consideration today, is about the direct role of women, as to whether they have had or could have any direct role in making history?

Three Approaches

1. Male Oriented History: The first answer to the question is negative. They hold that women do not have, cannot have and should not have any direct role in society.

They corrupt the society, otherwise. Their mere duty is to bear children, be a good mother for their children and a loyal wife for her husband inside the house. Issues such as women and education, women and politics, women and social affairs, women and social careers, etc. are meaningless in this approach.

2. Male-Female History (corrupted): Feminism. In late Nineteen and early 20th Century, a new approach began to rise under the name of liberation of women. They held that women must have a direct role in society, as they are part of it.

You cannot segregate them from society and jail them at home. Otherwise, in the long run it ruins their indirect role. In order for a mother to perfectly carry on her motherly duty she must be educated. Human education is the carrier of mothers performing that, which requires education. An uneducated mother fails to raise good children.

Women in the West became educated. Illiteracy among women is nearly eradicated. The number of professional women in different fields is increasing. So far so good. Nevertheless, the West made a big mistake of ignoring a very vital fact in female nature and hence imprisoned women in a different way. Woman in the West came out of her house carrying the culture of nakedness.

Woman by nature enjoys being precious for man. She does not like to sell herself cheap. Men exploited women in a modern way under the mask of educating women.

3. Male-Female History (Islamic): In this approach both men and women have a direct role in society but in their own orbit.

The history of religion as described in the Quran as a male-female history but not the way practiced, nowadays, in the West.

From the Islamic point of view, both man and woman have their own direct role in history. However, their role is not mixed with each other.

The story of Adam and Eve as the first humans is the starting example. Despite the Biblical narration, the Holy Quran is always addressing and blaming both Adam and Eve for what they did.[1]

Despite the wrong teachings of the church, which for centuries introduced woman a devil, and the origin of human sin, Islam opens a new approach to the story.

Sarah, the wife of Ibrahim is praised so much in the Quran that she is addressed directly by the Angels as well as Hajar[2].

In the history of Moses, the role of his mother is also highlighted along Moses:

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ۖ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۖ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

And We revealed to Musa's mothers, saying: Give him suck, then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve; surely We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers. (***28:7***)

This role becomes so vivid and outstanding that Maryam, the mother of Jesus, is introduced in the Quran as the one who directly communicates with the Angels:

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُلْقُونَ أَقْلَامَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

And when the angels said: O Mariam! Surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world. O Mariam! Keep to obedience to your Lord and humble yourself, and bow down with those who bow. This is of the announcements relating to the

unseen which We reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Marium in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another. When the angels said: O Marium, surely Allah gives you good news with a Word from Him (of one) whose name is the ' Messiah, Isa son of Marium, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah). And he shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age, and (he shall be) one of the good ones. (3: 42-46)

It is true that women never carried the mission of Prophet-hood because such a heavy duty does not befit their nature, yet this will never degrade their spiritual position. We do believe that Maryam, although she is not a prophet her status is higher than some prophets. For instance, the non-prophet Maryam enjoys a higher status than Prophet Zakariah.

The Role of Woman in the Islamic History

The Holy Quran demonstrates the highest status for women when it comes to Islamic history. The smallest, yet the most profound Surah in the Quran is revealed in regards to the only remaining daughter of the Prophet. The Holy Quran has granted Lady Fatima a unique title never found anywhere else in the Quran, i.e.: Al-Kauthar meaning 'Abundant Blessing`.

In the world that woman was considered to be devilish and the origin of all human sins to the extent that having a baby girl was a shame, the Holy Quran entitles the only daughter of the last Messenger of God 'The Abundant Blessing`. The first two Muslims are Ali and Khadija, one a male and the other a female. The first martyr in Islam is a female, Somayyah.

Our Imams had so many female students who were participating in their lectures. The difference between them and today`s female students was they did not have to go to school with short skirts! They segregated between the culture of nakedness and education.

The woman of Islam is social, professional as well as chaste and honorable. She never sells her body with the excuse of education, profession and social careers.

Lady Fatima was only 18 years old when she delivered her very impressive lecture after the passing away of her father in Madina Mosque. She had been addressing more than one thousand Muslims, male and female, for an hour yet she never showed herself to any male. You want my knowledge, fair enough, what have you got to do with my body?

Karbala, a Male-Female History

Adopting the same Islamic methodology, Imam Husain`s family accompanied him to Karbala. For, in such a great event of early Islam, like many others, both men and women need to play their role.

If Imam Husain was the Master of the Martyrs of Karbala, Zaynab also was the Master of the Messengers of Karbala.

If Imam Husain and his companions struggled against the tyrannical regime of Yazid with their swords, Zaynab and other ladies fulfilled that struggle with their tongues.

If Imam Husain and his companions revived Islam with their blood, Zaynab and other ladies also carried out that message with their speeches.

In fact, without them accompanying Imam Husain, who would have narrated the true picture of Karbala ?!

Sakina, the Daughter of Imam Husain

As unfortunately, there are so many controversies going around regarding the life of Lady Sakina, I decided to put an end to my speech with a few words about her life.

Her Name

The term Sakina comes from dignity and hence Sakina means a dignified girl. There is a common mistake among Arabic speaking people who pronounce her name 'Sokayna`. As Sokayna is a small form of Sakina I suppose it is more appropriate to pronounce her name Sakina not Sokayna.

Her Age

Historically speaking, in Karbala she had been around 11 years old. According to Tabari, Ibn Khallekan, Ibn Athir and many other historians she died in the year 117 A.H.3 Therefore, she has enjoyed the company of four Imams: Her father Imam Husain, Her brother Imam Sajjad, and Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq (a.s.)

Marital Status

Imam Husain had two daughters, Fatima and Sakina the younger one. When Hassan Mothanna, her cousin asked for the hand of Sakina in marriage, Imam Husain suggests Fatima, the older one, the reason being 'I suggest Fatima who resembles my mother more. She is such a worshipping girl that most of the nights she prays and most of the days she is fasting. And about Sakina, she is engrossed with the Divine beauty of God and hence is not ready to marry anyone at this stage`.

However, she married later, her other cousin Abdullah Akbar, son of Imam Hassan, who was apparently martyred in Karbala.

There is also another unproved narration that she had married with Qasim, brother of Abdullah. I personally cannot agree with this narration. For, firstly it is not quoted in reliable sources, and secondly,

the narrators of Karbala agree that Qasim had not yet reached the age of puberty in Karbala.

Who Died In Damascus?

There is again a common mistake among people that Sakina died in the prison in Damascus. They also mistakenly hold that she was not more than 5 years old. Unfortunately, we cannot present any historical proof for any of these.

The Captives in the Castle Of Yazid

Imam Sajjad describes the scene. “We entered the castle of Yazid whilst we were all wrapped with rope. One end of the rope was around my neck and it had gone all through the little boys and girls and ladies. The other end of the rope wrapped my aunt Zaynab. Children and ladies would be whipped if they were slow in walking. We entered the hall of the castle and ensitted in the corner of the castle.”

Zaynab, daughter of Imam Ali and Fatima Zahra, had her old clothes on and had been seated among her servants and other ladies, just like an ordinary woman. Yet, the glory of her personality was shining from under her old dress and hence, attracted the attention of Yazid.

Yazid arrogantly shouted: ‘Who is that lady surrounded by her servants?!”

Nobody replied. For the second time he repeated his question. Again, there was no reply.

Finally, after the third time, one of her servants replied “She is Zaynab, daughter of Fatima daughter of the Prophet of Islam.”

1. Refer to Holy Qur’an, 2: 35, 7: 19-22.
2. Refer to Holy Qur’an, 11: 69-73.

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