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The Wives of the Muhammad the Apostle of God

The first wife of Muhammad was Khadija. They were married in Makkah and they spent a quarter of a century of love and happiness together – until her death. While Khadija was alive, Muhammad did not marry any other woman.

After the death of Khadija, Muhammad married many other women but no one among them could ever take the same place in his heart that she had. When she died, the bliss for him, of married life, also departed with her. To the end of his life, he reminisced about her, and remembered her with love, affection and gratitude.

The first woman Muhammad married after the death of Khadija, was Sawdah bint Zama'a, a widow whose husband had died in Abyssinia.

The third wife of the Apostle was Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr. She is said to have been married in Makkah but she went to the house of her husband in Medina.

The Apostle often tried to win the loyalty of a clan or tribe by marrying one of its women. His marriage with Umm Habiba the daughter of Abu Sufyan, and Safiya the daughter of Akhtab, were such marriages.

One of the wives of the Apostle was Hafsa the daughter of Umar bin al-Khattab. Her husband was killed in the battle of Badr, and her father was anxious to find a new husband for her. He offered her in marriage to his bosom friends, first to Uthman b. Affan, and then to Abu Bakr. But both of them regretted their inability to marry her.

Umar was mortified at the rejection of his daughter even by his own friends, and he complained to the Apostle about it. The latter, to salve Umar's injured feelings, said that since no one else wanted his daughter, he would take her into his own harem.

With the exception of Khadija, all other wives of the Apostle remained childless. The governor of Egypt had sent to him a Coptic slave-girl called Maria. She entered his harem, and bore him a son whom he called Ibrahim.

The birth of a son invested Maria with extraordinary importance, to the great chagrin and heart-burning of her co-wives. The Apostle lavished immense love upon the little boy, and spent long hours with him, carrying him in his arms. But unfortunately, the boy didn't live long, and died in the year of his birth.

D. S. Margoliouth

His (Mohammed's) last years were brightened for a time by the birth of a son to his Coptic concubine (sic) Mary whom he acknowledged as his own, and whom he called after the mythical (sic) founder of his religion, Ibrahim.

This concubine (sic) having been the object of extreme envy of his many childless wives, the auspicious event occasioned them the most painful heartburning; which indeed was speedily allayed by the death of the child (who lived only eleven months). (*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

By giving birth to a child, the status of Maria was raised in the Prophet's esteem; he now looked upon her as a free wife, indeed, as one enjoying a most favored position.

It was natural that this change would incite no little jealousy among his other wives who were barren. It was also natural that the Prophet's esteem and affection for the new born child and his mother increased that jealousy.

Moreover, Muhammad had liberally rewarded Salma, the wife of Abu Rafi, for her role as midwife. He celebrated the birth by giving away a measure of grain to all the destitutes of Madinah. He assigned the newborn to the care of Umm Sayf, a wet nurse, who owned seven goats whose milk she was to put at the disposal of the newborn.

Every day Muhammad visited the house of Maria in order to see his son's bright face and to reassure himself of the infant's continued health and growth. All this incited the strongest jealousy among the barren wives. The question was, how long would these wives be able to bear the constant torture.

One day, with the pride characteristic of new fathers, the Prophet entered Ayesha's chamber with the child in his arms, to show him to her. He pointed out to her his great resemblance to his son. Ayesha looked at the baby and said that she saw no resemblance at all. When the Prophet said how the child was growing, Ayesha responded waspishly that any child given the amount of milk which he was getting would grow just as big and strong as he.

In fact, the birth of Ibrahim brought so much pain to the wives of the Prophet that some of them would go beyond these and similar bitter answers. It reached a point that Revelation itself had to voice a special condemnation. Undoubtedly, the whole affair left its imprint on the life of the Prophet as well as on the history of Islam. (*The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935*)

On one occasion, Hafsa is reported to have “surprised” her husband with Maria, and she disclosed this “secret” to Ayesha. The other wives of Muhammad heard the story from Ayesha. There was much gossip and loose talk about this incident. Eventually, Al-Qur’an al-Majid had to intervene with a reprimand to the two ladies in the following verse:

If ye two turn in repentance to Him (to God), your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if ye back up each other against Him, truly God is his protector, and Gabriel, and (every) righteous one among those who believe, – and furthermore, the Angels – will back him up. (Chapter 66; verse 4)

Translator's Note

“The Prophet's household was not like other households. The Consorts of Purity were expected to hold a higher standard in behavior and reticence than ordinary women, as they had higher work to perform. But they were human beings after all, and were subject to the weaknesses of their sex, and they sometimes failed.”

“The imprudence of Aisha once caused serious difficulties: the holy Prophet's mind was sore distressed, and he renounced the society of his wives for sometime. Umar's daughter, Hafsa, was also sometimes apt to presume on her position, and when the two combined in secret counsel, and discussed matters and disclosed secrets to each other, they caused much sorrow to the holy Prophet.” (A. Yusuf Ali)

Many of the commentators and translators of Qur’an have translated the Arabic word *saghat* which occurs in verse 4 of Chapter 66, quoted above, as “inclined.” Their translation reads as follows:

Your hearts have become inclined.

Inclined to what? “Your hearts have become inclined,” is a meaningless translation in this context. The correct translation of the word *saghat* is “deviated.” M. Abul Ala Maudoodi has given a correct translation of this verse which is as follows:

“If you both (women) repent to God, (it is better for you), for your hearts have swerved from the right path, and if you supported each other against the Prophet, you should know that God is his Protector, and after Him Gabriel and the righteous believers and the angels are his companions and helpers ...” (Tafheem-ul-Qur’an, Volume 6, Lahore, Pakistan, English translation by Muhammad Akbar Muradpuri and Abdul Aziz Kamal, second edition, May 1987).

When Hafsa “surprised” Muhammad in the company of Maria, he is supposed to have promised to her (to Hafsa) that he would not see the latter (Maria) again. This, of course, was disallowed. One wife had no right to restrict the freedom of her husband to see his other wives. Such an attempt on the part of one wife would be contrary not only to the laws of Islam but also to the customs of Arabia, both before and after Islam.

Sir William Muir

As in the case of Zeinab, Mohammed produced a message from Heaven which disallowed his promise of separation from Mary, chided Hafsa and Ayesha for their insubordination, and hinted at the possibility of all his wives being divorced for demeanor so disloyal towards himself.

He then withdrew from their society, and for a whole month lived alone with Mary. Omar and Abu Bakr were greatly mortified at the desertion of their daughters for a menial concubine (sic) and grieved at the scandal of the whole proceeding. (*The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877*)

From the foregoing it can be seen that the domestic life of the Prophet, after the death of Khadija, was not marked by any felicity. Many of his wives were jealous women, and the first “casualty” of their jealousy was the tranquillity of his house.

D. S. Margoliouth

The residence of the wives in the Prophet's harem was short, owing to unsuitability of temper; in one or more cases the newcomers were taught by the jealous wives of the Prophet formularies which, uttered by them in ignorance of the meaning, made the Prophet discharge them on the spot. One was discharged for declaring on the death of the infant Ibrahim that had his father been a prophet, he would not have died – a remarkable exercise of the reasoning power. (*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

It was a practice of the Apostle, occasionally, to leave his home at night and to visit the cemetery of Baqee to pray for the dead who were buried there. Just before his last illness, he visited the cemetery once again, perhaps for the last time, and stayed there praying for the dead until past midnight. Some historians say that it was on this occasion that he caught a chill, and it was the beginning of his fatal illness. Ayesha is said to have followed him on one of these visits.

D. S. Margoliouth

At dead of night, it is said, the Prophet went out to the cemetery called Al-Baki, and asked forgiveness for the dead who were buried there. This indeed he had done before; Ayesha once followed him like a detective when he started out at night, supposing him to be bent on some amour; but his destination she found was the graveyard. (From the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, volume iv, page 221). (*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

The women the Prophet married after the death of Khadija, were very different from her (from Khadija) in character and temperament. Khadija had given consistent and unstilted support to her husband in the promulgation of Islam, and she had sacrificed all her immense wealth for this purpose.

Her sacrifices had reduced her to a state of great privation but she never complained to her husband about the lack of anything. Her marriage was rich in the blessings of the love and friendship of her

husband, and in happiness unlimited.

Muhammad Mustafa himself lived a life of extreme austerity. Even when he was the sovereign of all Arabia, he was still as abstemious as he was in Makkah before his migration to Medina. Ayesha herself says that she had no recollection that her husband ever ate food to his heart's content twice in one day.

When the spoils of war or the state revenues came, the Prophet distributed them among the Muslims. His wives noted that even the poorest women in Medina were thus growing rich but not they. It occurred to them that they ought not to be deprived of the largesse of their husband.

After all, they were not accustomed to living such an austere life as he was. They discussed this matter among themselves, and they all agreed that they too ought to have a share in the good and lawful things – same as the other women of Medina.

The wives of the Prophet, thereupon, presented their demands to him. They were unanimous in demanding a larger stipend from him. Two of them, viz., Ayesha and Hafsa, acted as their “spokeswomen.” While they were pressing their demands upon him, Abu Bakr and Umar came to see him on some private or public business.

The Prophet sat silent, surrounded by his wives. When Abu Bakr and Umar learned what was afoot, they were very angry, and they sharply reproved their daughters for demanding more money from their husband.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Abu Bakr rose to his daughter Aishah and pulled her hair and so did Umar to his daughter, Hafsa. Both Abu Bakr and Umar said to their daughters: “Do you dare ask the Prophet of God what he cannot afford to give?” They answered: “No, by God, we do not ask him any such thing.” (*The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935*)

Eventually the matter was resolved when a new verse was revealed in this regard, and which reads as follows:

O Prophet! Say to thy consorts “If it be that ye desire the life of this world, and its glitter, – then come! I will provide for your sustenance and set you free in a handsome manner. But if ye seek God and His Apostle, and the home of the hereafter, verily God has prepared for the well-doers amongst you a great reward.” (Chapter 33; verses 28 and 29)

Translator's Note

“The position of the wives of the Prophet was not like that of ordinary wives. They had special duties and responsibilities...all the consorts in their high position had to work and assist as mothers of the *ummat*.

Theirs were not idle lives, like those of odalisques, either for their own pleasure or the pleasure of their husband. They are told here that they had no place in the sacred Household (of the Prophet) if they merely wished for ease and worldly glitter. If such were the case, they could be divorced and amply provided for. (A. *Yusuf Ali*).

Al-Qur'an al-Majid offered the wives of the Prophet a choice, viz., either they had to choose God and His Messenger, and live lives of self-denial and sacrifice; or they could choose the luxuries, pleasures and glitter of this world in which case they would have to part company with their husband for ever. The offer was unequivocal, and the wives were free to choose.

Ayesha, Hafsa and seven other ladies reconsidered the matter, and then decided to forego the comforts and pleasures of this world, and to stay in the household of the Prophet as his wives.

When Mohammed Mustafa (may God bless him and his Ahlul Bait) died in 632, he had nine wives in his harem. Ayesha outlived him by half a century, and the wife who outlived all other wives of the Prophet, was Maymuna. She, incidentally, was the last woman he had married.

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