

Status and Role of Women around Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

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ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to identify and highlight the role and position of women during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). That the Prophet (SAW) exhibited spiritual, social and intellectual equality by consulting the womenfolk in all important matters of life, and that it was not an aberration but norm to consult, contact and interact with them on the moral basis of them being independent moral being. Also, that the women around Prophet (SAW) played a proactive role in and outside their homes.

1. Introduction

The moment we think of the role of the people around the personality of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the early days of Islam, we predominantly think of Muslim men (male *Ashab*). This mindset, to several, is a reflection of the patriarchal society that the Arabia was at the advent of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Even if when some writers recognize the role of Muslim women around the Prophet they only focus on their role within the four walls of the house. However the recent researches, and when Islam is being revisited through the female mind also, have brought out the fact that Muslim women during and after the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) played key role in the establishment of Islam within and outside their households. The matter of fact is that if there were men Companions, there were also women Companions. If there were 'Men around the Messenger' there are also 'Women around the Messenger'.¹ Each woman played her part in the best possible and in the noblest way in the arena of faith and civilization. These women excellently maintained necessary balance between the two segments of humanity: male and female. They were motivated by the Islamic injunction as expressed in the Qur'an at several places that both men and women will be judged not by their gender but by the merit of their deeds. *"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward"*.² In addition to the substantiation from the Qur'an, the Sunnah also makes it abundantly clear that while men and women are undoubtedly different from biological, psychological and emotional perspectives, the purpose of the creation of both males and females remains the same—to worship Allah (SWT).

2. Prophet's wives (azwaj-i-mutahirat) and their position

When we think of the role of women around the Prophet (SAW), the thought that often comes to mind is of prominent

historical figures such as Sumayah (RA), the first female martyr in the early days of Islam, and Nusaybah (RA), the female Companion who fought valiantly with her family to protect the Prophet (SAW) in a battle, and other few known names. While these women are no doubt role models in their piety, devotion, and commitment to Deen, there are many other admirable women as well who shaped the role of the Muslim women at the time of the Prophet (SAW). But to appropriate and appreciate these roles, we will first look into the Prophet's own household. His wives and daughters provide the best of examples of the female standing and role in the Islamic history. Then the role of other women will be discussed.

The special status of the Prophet's wives is emphasized in the Qur'an. Their distinction and status rested in them being addressed in the Qur'an as the 'Mother of the Believers',³ 'Role models in the society',⁴ 'Divine revelation proclaimed in their homes',⁵ and 'narrators of Hadith'.⁶ Indeed, the first person to believe in Allah as the Lord and in Muhammad (SAW), as the Messenger and Prophet, was his wife Hadrat Khadijah (RA). She was the first person to support the Messenger of Allah. When the Prophet (SAW) received the first five verses of the Qur'an (Surah al-'Alaq) the first person he related it to was a woman-Khadijah (RA).⁷ The Prophet (SAW) while relating the most important episode of his life did not took gender (female here) into consideration. He shared it with a gender that he knew was strong and can understand, appreciate and respond most appropriately. Hadrat Khadijah, on her turn, strengthened him, assured him and consoled him. She received the Prophet and his message with a big heart.⁸ She was the woman who was first to accept Islam. She was respected in her own right, and even by today's standard, would be seen as a woman of strength and independence. She was the woman who became the employer and Prophet the employee. Although older than the Prophet (SAW) at the time of their marriage, and previously twice widowed, she knew what it meant to seek strong characteristics in a spouse—trustworthiness, honesty, honor and integrity. She understood the magnitude of the Message and the Prophet's mission and provided the support, both emotionally and financially, that strengthened the Prophet on his

journey in providing divine guidance and spiritual truth to the world.⁹

Hadrat Khadijah (RA) was not only successful in fulfilling the honorable role of mother and wife in a way that we can all adore today, she also was a successful business-woman, entrepreneur in the modern parlance. Hadrat Khadijah very well knew what marriage meant as a partnership and as a shared responsibility. It is reported that she had two sons from her first marriage, Hind and Hala, and a daughter from her second marriage, Hindah. This noble woman, Khadijah (RA), provided the comfort and support for the Prophet (SAW) in his most difficult times, while also struggling through her own tests such as their two male sons dying in infancy. She raised their surviving daughters to be incredibly strong and well-respected women. The beauty and icon of the paradigm shift in outlook of the female role after the advent of Islam is well appreciated and modeled in the life of the Hadrat Khadijah (RA). The Prophet (SAW) said after her death: "She believed in me when no one else did; she accepted Islam when people rejected me; and she helped and comforted me when there was no one else to lend me a helping hand."¹⁰ They had two sons, Qasim and Abdullah (*nicknamed al-Tāhir and al-Tayyib* respectively) who died young and four daughters—Zaynab, Ruqaiya, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah. Emphasizing the prominence of the Hadrat Khadijah, Hadrat 'A'ishah narrates of Muhammad and Khadijah in *Sahih Bukhari*: "I did not feel jealous of any of the wives of the Prophet as much as I did of Khadijah though I did not see her, but the Prophet used to mention her very often, and whenever he slaughtered a sheep, he would cut its parts and send them to the women friends of Khadijah. When I sometimes said to him, "(You treat Khadijah in such a way) as if there is no woman on Earth except Khadijah," he would say, "Khadijah was such-and-such, and from her I had children."

Three years after the death of Khadijah (RA), the Prophet (SAW) married Sawda (RA), a widow who had endured a great deal for the sake of Allah and was the epitome of selflessness and caring. She ministered to raise the Prophet's daughter, Fatima (RA), who was still young at the time of Khadijah's death. Upon reaching old age, she selflessly gave her allotted personal time with the Prophet (SAW) to 'Aisha (RA) so that she would remain married and in the company of the Prophet, without burdening anyone.¹¹

Hadrat 'Aisha (RA) was one of the Mothers of the Believers (*Ummuhat al-mumineen*) who factored largely in the transmission of Hadith long after the death of the Prophet (SAW). As the daughter of Abu Bakr (RA), she had the same strength and characteristics of leadership as her father. Her role as a wife was more than just a companion, but also of a person of great faith, who received vast Islamic knowledge through the words and actions of the Prophet. The precious knowledge that she transmitted faithfully to the believers became a great source of understanding of the Sunnah. She served the Muslim community for 44 years after the Prophet's death. She is also known for narrating 2210 Hadith, not just on matters related to Muhammad's private life, but also on topics such as inheritance, pilgrimage, eschatology, among other subjects.¹² The Prophet (SAW) had profuse love and respect for her that he

exhibited at times by drinking in the same glass, the left over water and from the same spot.

Following his marriage to 'Aisha (RA), the Prophet married Hadrat Hafsa (RA), the daughter of Hadrat 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA). Similar to her father, Hafsa was of strong opinion and did not hesitate to voice her views. She freely shared her thoughts on different topics with the Prophet (SAW), and he in turn encouraged her to freely engage in open and honest communication. She was among the Companions who memorized the Qur'an and verified the written copies recorded after the death of the Prophet.¹³ In Hadrat 'Uthman's reign, the Qur'an was written from the main copy collected during the era of Abu Bakr Siddiq. The *Ashab* had no hesitation in keeping the last preserved word of God with a woman-Hafsah bint 'Umar.

After his marriage to the daughters of 'Umar and Abu Bakr, the Prophet (SAW) married ZaynabbintKhuzayma (RA), a widow whose husband died during the Battle of Badr. She died shortly after the marriage, but even during that brief time she became known for her generosity and was called, with great regard, the "Mother of the Poor."¹⁴ Next, the Prophet (SAW) married Umm Salma (RA), widowed after the battle of Uhud, known for her wisdom, mercy and faith. The Prophet (SAW) would often seek her advice on matters of importance to the Ummah. Umm Salma proved a great advisor to the Prophet (SAW) when he was apparently at a loss at the conclusion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya with the Makkans. After the conclusion of the treaty, perceived by the Muslims thoroughly humiliating, the Prophet ordered them to shave their heads and put themselves in a state of penitence. None of them responded to his call, which he repeated thrice.

Very distressed, the Prophet (SAW) went back to the tent of his wife, Umm Salma, who had accompanied him. When she asked him the cause of his distress, he told her: "I ordered them three times to shave their heads, no one obeyed." Umm Salma counselled: "Do not worry at all, Apostle of God, you yourself shave your head and carry out the sacrifice." The Prophet stood up, cut the throat of the camel destined for the sacrifice, and shaved his head. His Companions, seeing him do this, spoke to each other, and all shaved their heads and sacrificed their animals.¹⁵ This episode amply demonstrates that the Prophet unhesitatingly sought suggestions from his wives and that their status of wife did not confine any of the wives of the Prophet, instead elevated them and allowed them to flourish in versatile roles.¹⁶

Among the later Mothers of the Believers is ZaynabbintJahsh (RA) who had been divorced from Zayd, the young man who was raised as a child in the household of the Prophet (SAW). We see here again that even as a divorced woman, the marital status of Zaynab (RA) did not define or limit her in anyway.¹⁷ This is a far cry from the stereotypes and societal restrictions that are too often placed by Muslims on divorced women today. This disdain is largely cultural than religious. Following the marriage to Zaynab, the Prophet (SAW) married Juwayriyya (RA), known as a blessing to her people of BanuMustaliq; Umm Habiba (RA) known for her strength of faith and character; Saffiya (RA), known for her kindness and

piousness; Maymuna (RA) "the blessed"; and Mariya (RA) known for her fortitude.

Contrary to what is still evident in Islamic thought and societies today, the compartmentalization of work was less distinct in the Sirah of the Prophet. In fact, many argue that helping your wife with household chores is a neglected Sunnah.¹⁸ 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), was asked, "What did the Prophet (SAW) use to do in his house?" She replied, "He used to keep himself busy serving his family and when it was the time for prayer he would go for it."¹⁹

The word used in the hadith is *Mihnah*, which is translated as 'busy serving' here, also means in the Arabic language 'work', 'job', 'profession', etc. This implies helping your wife in the house is a full time job as well. Whether it's helping wash the dishes, cooking, cleaning, raising the kids, etc., is all part and parcel of being the 'man' of the house. The notion that it is somehow degrading for men to help and work with the wife around the house is foreign to Islam.²⁰ In another report 'Aisha is reported to have said, "He did what one of you would do in his house. He mended sandals and patched garments and sewed."²¹

In yet another report it is said that she said, "He milked his goat."²² Hence, he did not find such things too 'womanish' for him to do. It is no wonder that he said, "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives."²³

On the economic independence of a women or a wife it is reported that Hadrat Zaynab, the wife of Muhammad (SAW), was engaged in the leather-trade and distributed her income as charity.²⁴ Consequently the understanding that the women in Islam had, and should have, independent personalities while also being independent economically.

3. Daughters of Prophet (SAW)

Hadrat Khadijah (RA) gave birth to the Prophet's daughters (Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm-iKulthum and Fatimah) in succession. They were like the roses whose fragrance exuded all over the household of the Prophet (SAW). They were to the Messenger of Allah asource of solace and strength.

Hadrat Zaynab (RA), the Great, was the eldest daughter of the Prophet (SAW). She was married to her cousin 'Abul 'Aas. When the Prophet (SAW) was initiated to Prophethood and commissioned to deliver the divine message she along her mother and sisters embraced Islam. But her husband did not accept this message early, leading her in an awkward position. During migration to Madina, Zaynab (RA) remained in Makkah in her husband's house waiting for Allah's decision concerning her situation. During this period, Zaynab was unhappy and distressed. She would cry and cry, and then resign her fate to Allah hoping that He would one day provide a way out for her.²⁵

Hadrat Ruqayyah (RA), the Lady of two migrations, was born after her sister Zaynab (RA). Ruqayyah along with Umm-iKulthum suffered divorce for the cause of Islam. When the Qurayshi persecution of the Muslims intensified, the Messenger (SAW) permitted his Companions to migrate to Abyssinia. Along men there were women as well who migrated first time to

Abyssinia.²⁶ Hadrat 'Uthman migrated in the company of his grief-stricken wife, Ruqayyah. Though Umm Kulthum did not migrate to Abyssinia but she had suffered what was greater than that migration and exile. She and her fellow Muslims, and the members of BanuHashim clan were confined to the valley of Abu Talib where they suffered hunger and isolation for three years. The oppressive Quraysh had made a pact to isolate the Muslims and members of BanuHashim clan. To sustain this malicious pact, they hanged its copy on the interior wall of the Ka'bah and it remained so until Allah provided the besieged people with relief and a way out. Umm-iKulthum along other women exhibited courage and steadfastness under this persecution. She with her father, faced the hardest conditions in the cause of Islam. A manifestation of these difficult conditions was Khadijah's illness. Umm-iKulthum's role became manifest here, for she took care of her mother with all the experience, love and compassion. In addition to this onerous and time-consuming task, she was also responsible for taking care of her younger sister, Fatimah. Umm-iKulthum spent three years of her youthful life in struggle, patience and perseverance. Therefore, she suitably deserved the title, "The Confined of the Valley".²⁷

Hadrat Fatimah (RA), the youngest daughter of the Prophet SAW, laid down an exceptional example in her marital life, relationship with her neighbors and relatives, and in her role as a mother. This is in addition to the never-ending household chores. At the same time she was keen at doing deeds that could gain her Allah's pleasure and His Messenger (SAW). She was always truthful in her words and emulated the exemplary qualities of her father. By this, she became a righteous model and educator for all generations and for all places. Hadrat 'Aisha (RA) amply describes Fatima's personality. 'Aisha said: "I have never seen anyone who was like the Messenger of Allah in speech and walk than Fatimah." She also said, "I have never seen anyone more virtuous than Fatimah." Whenever Fatimah visited her father, he would hold her hand, sit her beside himself and welcome her in the most beautiful and honorable manner.²⁸

4. Women in the battle field

Among the many services that one can render to Islam, is to battle in the way of Allah (Jihad). Few examples of such zeal, determination and courage can be found in history when the disbelievers attacked the Muslims during the Battle of Uhud, only a few devoted followers were left to fight with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). At this critical stage the women Companion Umm Ammarah (RA) shielded him with her body and warded off the enemy with her sword as well as her bow and arrows. Her acts of bravery in the battle of Uhud were such that they were profoundly praised and appreciated by the Prophet (SAW).²⁹ In the battle of Ahazab, the female companion Safiyyah (RA) displayed excellent military strategy in handling the Jewish attack and slew one of the Jews.³⁰ In the Battle of Hunayn, Umm Sulaim (RA), set out to attack the enemy with her sword. In the Battle of Yarmook, Asma-bint-Abu Bakr (RA), Umm Abban (RA), Umm Hakeem (RA), Khawlah (RA) and the Mother of Believers Juwairiah (RA) displayed extraordinary valour. The mother of the Believers 'Aisha, Umm Sulaim and Umm Salit (RA) were among those who were very proficient at nursing the wounded. The Sahabiyat usually accompanied the Prophet (SAW) on his military expeditions and took part in battles both

on land and at sea. Besides taking an active part in the war, the Sahabiyat performed many supplementary services also, like providing medical aid to the soldiers, nursing the wounded on the battlefield and offering food and water to the wounded and thirsty. Standing side by side with the soldiers they would hand them arrows and comfort them to keep up the morale of the army. They also helped to carry the martyred and the wounded back to Madinah. Umm 'Atiya (RA) says about herself: "I participated in seven battles along with the Prophet(SAW). There I took care of the belongings of the Mujahideen, prepared food for them and attended the sick and the wounded."³¹

Tabarani relates: "When the infidels returned after the battle of Uhud, the women went to help and nurse the companions of the Prophet (SAW), Hadrat Fatima (RA) was one of them. When the Holy Prophet (SAW) was wounded, she filled his wound with the mat-ash." Hadrat Anas(RA) relates that Hadrat'Aisha (RA) and Umm Sulaim (RA) had also served the Mujahideen. He says: "I saw Hadrat Ayesha-bint-Abu Bakr and Umm Sulaim (RA) serving the people. They carried water bags on their back and quenched the thirst of the soldiers. They performed this duty briskly and repeatedly."³²

Hadrat'Umar Farooq (RA) related about an Ansari lady Umm Saleet (RA): "She used to bring bags full of water for us on the day of Uhud." The historian, Ibn Ishaq says: "Many women participated in the battle of Khayber along the Prophet (SAW). The grandmother of Hashraj bint Ziyad and other five women also participated in the battle of Khayber. They related the purpose of their arrival to the Prophet (SAW) in these words: "O Messenger of Allah, we have come to help in the way of Allah. We have medicines for the wounded. We shall provide arrows to the archers and prepare food for the soldiers."³³ Hadrat Rufeeda (RA) had established a camp hospital in a tent near Masjid-e-Nabawi and treated the wounded soldiers. When Hadrat Sa'd-bin-Muaz was wounded in the battle of Khandaq, he was brought to the same hospital so that he may be properly looked after by her.³⁴ Not only women participated in battles directly and indirectly, but also encouraged others to fight in defense of Islam and Muslims. After embracing Islam Urwah bint Abdul Muttalib(RA) the aunt of the Prophet (SAW) helped him and encouraged her son to carry on the mission of Islam. When Abdullah bin Zaid (SAW) was wounded in the battle of Uhud, his mother, Umm Ammara(RA) treated his wounds and instead of asking him to rest, she advised "My son! Rise, take your sword and attack the infidels."³⁵

5. Missionary role of the women

Women during Prophet's time also played role in propagating the message of Islam. Delving on the imperativeness of the Dawah in Islam Jalaluddin 'Umar writes "It is the responsibility of those people who embrace Islam not only to follow the tenets of Islam but also to present the Dawah of Islam before others wisely and with all sincerity. This responsibility lies not only on the shoulders of men, but it equally falls on women also. It was the realisation of this great responsibility which both men and women of the early period and of the period of Companions and of the period of the successors of the Companions felt so much that they gave their time, abilities, energy, wealth and even their lives in the field of Dawah and that is how Islam spread far and wide".³⁶ They

spread the message of the Islam through example and converted many disbelievers to Islam. It was Fatimah-bint-Khattab(RA) who converted her brother 'Umar-bin-Khattab(RA) who was to become one of the bravest and most faithful of the companions of the Prophet(SAW).³⁷ It was Umm Salim (RA) who influenced Abu Talhah(RA), and it was Umm Hakim (RA) who convinced her husband Ikrimah (RA) to accept Islam. Umm Shareek Dosiah (RA) very discreetly worked among the women of the tribe of Quraish to spread Islam.³⁸

Such incidents have also occurred in Islamic history that the husband remained outside the fold of Islam or came under it after a long time while the wife had faith in Islam. Even though the husband would persecute her, she remained firm in faith. Hazrat Abul Aas was the nephew of Hazrat Khadeeja. Hazrat Khadeeja nurtured him as her own child. Before the proclamation of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), he was married to her eldest daughter Hazrat Zainab. Though he was quite famous for his politeness and honesty, he accepted Islam just before the Conquest of Makkah. After the Battle of Badr, Hazrat Zainab migrated from Makkah to Madina. This is how, after he accepted Islam, she stayed with him for 15 years in Makkah. It can be well understood, asserts Jalaluddin Umar, how much Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Hazrat Zainab and Hazrat Khadeeja tried to make him understand in this period of time with what all topics that the reality or the truthfulness of Islam would not have been clarified.³⁹

Similarly, the sister of Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed, Fakhtabinte Waleed, accepted Islam after the Conquest of Makkah and took bayat. But her husband Sufwan bin Umayya went away to Yemen. There he wanted to commit suicide. Fakhta got amnesty for her husband from the Prophet. The Prophet granted him the amnesty hence he returned and accepted Islam one month after Fakhta came to the fold of Islam. Also, Umme Hakeem binte Haris joined the Battle of Uhud on the side of 'mushrekeen' (pagans). After the Conquest of Makkah, she accepted Islam. She went to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and secured amnesty for her husband. Then after taking permission from the Prophet, she went to Taman and searched her husband and brought him with her and presented him before the Prophet. Then he also embraced Islam.⁴⁰

Part of a missionary work is also to preserve the religion in its pristine form and protect it from any alterations, impurities and innovations. This very important work of preserving the purity of Islam was performed by all Sahabiyat. They accomplished it by bringing up their children (the next generation of Muslims) on the true teachings of Islam, and transforming them into very valuable individuals for the community. They truly exhibited the saying that 'the lap of a mother is the cradle of a civilization'.

6. Preservation of Hadith literature

Writes Ignaz Goldziher "though the terminology of the science of traditions refers to the links in the chain of transmitters as *rijal al-hadith*, i.e. 'men of the tradition', we frequently meet in the isnads women as authorities for many *hadiths*."⁴¹ Women have not only been allowed to acquire education in religious and mundane branches of knowledge, but their education and cultural training has been considered as

important as that of men. Women during the Prophet's time used to learn Hadith from Prophet (SAW) on different subjects. This learning later served as a great source of knowledge for Hadith and Fiqh compilation. The personality of Hadrat 'Aisha is outstanding in this regard. Imam Zuhri says: "If the learning of all the people is compiled and the learning of all the holy wives of the Prophet (SAW) is also added to it, the learning of Hadrat 'Aisha would be greater than all this".⁴² Imam Zahbi says: "I am not acquainted with any women who had more knowledge than her in the Ummah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) rather among all women".⁴³ She narrated about 2,210 Hadith of Prophet (SAW). Umme Salma (RA) also narrated many Hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and some Hadith through Hadrat Abu Salma and Hadrat Fatima'. Umme Salma also had an important place in Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence). Imam Zahbi says: "Among the companions who were categorized as Fuqaha (Islamic jurist) Umme Salma is also included among them".⁴⁴ Hadrat Hasfa (RA), the daughter of Hadrat 'Umar (RA) narrated 60 Hadith through the Prophet (SAW) and Umm-e-Habeeba (RA), the daughter of Hadrat Abu Sufyan, narrated 65 Hadith from the Prophet (SAW).⁴⁵ Hadrat Asma (RA), the daughter of Hadrat Abu Bakr, also narrated many Hadith. These hadith narrated by women are not short texts. Rather some are very lengthy. Al-Tabarani compiled *al-Ahadiith al-tiwal* (The long hadiths), which contains several narrated by women. The women not only preserved hadith by memorizing them they also knew writing. The Prophet himself instructed Shifabint Abdullah to teach writing to his wife Hafsa. Similarly 'Aisha and Umm Salma and many other women Companions were well known for writing. Al-Qalqashandi (d 821) has mentioned that a group of women knew the skill of writing, and no one from among the *salaf* objected to that.⁴⁶ Writes Mohammad Akram Nadwi: "the dictionary of muhaddithat that I have compiled has accounts of about 2000 women Companions; the hadiths of 130 are recorded in the Six Books. Some of them have only one or two hadiths some hundreds. Imam al-Bukhari has 31 Companions in his *Sahih*, Muslim 36, Abu Dawud 75, al-Tirmidhi 46, al-Nasa'i 65, and Ibn Majah 60. The number of narrators among the Companions' Successors and others after them upto the second century is about 1200, of whom 130 get a place in the Six Books. The total number of women's hadiths in the Six Books is 2,764 hadiths, of which 2,539 are from Companions".⁴⁷

7. Women as counselors

Women also played important part by being counselors as the Prophet (SAW) used to consult them, along male Companions. The Prophet (SAW) consulted the women like Asma bint-e-Umais (RA) and Shifabint-e-Abdullah (RA). All of us know that during the life of Khadijah she was consulted frequently by her husband in all important matters. And we know the acumen with which Hafsa (RA) counseled the Prophet when an awkward situation had developed after the truce of Hudabiyah.⁴⁸

It is clear from several narrations that on the superiority of the 'Deen' and the success of the Muslims each and every woman used to rejoice and feel happy. Once, when Prophet Muhammad (SAW) returned from the battle, a Black servant came to him and said: I vowed that if you came back safely, I would express my happiness by beating the tambourine and singing before you. The Prophet said: 'If you really vowed then

you fulfil it lest you keep it aside.' She said: 'I had vowed so.' Therefore, the Prophet sat and she expressed her happiness by beating the tambourine and singing.⁴⁹

The Muslim women even instructed the Caliphs of their time. Hazrat Mu'awiyah wrote to Hazrat 'Aisha to give him some instructions. Hazrat 'Aisha wrote the following statement of the Prophet, in which there is guidance for a ruler, and sent it to him: 'Those who seek Allah's pleasure at the cost of the pleasure of fellow beings shall be protected by Allah from their evils and those who seek the pleasure of fellow beings at the cost of Allah's pleasure shall be handed over by Allah to those people'.⁵⁰

8. Women as skillful earners

The women Companions were also skillful in diverse art and craft that they had developed for a healthier life. The well-known art and crafts of today like agriculture, business, trade, writing and editing, and cottage industries like weaving, manufacture and designing of cloths—all these are mentioned in the Musnad (a collection of Hadith) of Imam Ahmad. It is very well known that Hadrat Khadijahat al-Kubra, the first Muslim in the world and one of the four greatest women of the world, was engaged in business. Prior to her marriage with the Prophet, the Prophet himself used to look after the management of her business. And after marriage, she herself managed the business.⁵¹ The wife of Hadrat Abdullah ibn-Mas'ud was engaged in small scale industry. She went to the Prophet (SAW) and stated that: "I am an artisan, I produce things and sell them to earn livelihood for my family. My husband does not earn enough for the maintenance of my family members" the Prophet (SAW) said: "yes, you can do so; God will reward you for that".⁵² There was a women companion by the name of Qeela. She said to the Prophet (SAW) "I am engaged in business and purchase and sell different commodities" Thereafter she requested the Prophet to give her guidance about the business affairs.⁵³ Similarly, Khawlabint-Salba, earned through industrial work and maintained her husband also.⁵⁴

Hadrat Jabir bin Abdullah has related that his aunt was divorced by her husband. Obviously after the divorce she was required to spend at least three months for *iddat* in house. But she was in dire need for money because without that she could not subsist. She had a small field of palm trees. She wanted to go out, cut the trees and sell the wood during the period of *iddat*. One of the Companions of the Prophet forbade her to do that. She went to the Prophet (SAW) and asked him whether she could go out for work. The Prophet replied: "Yes, go out, cut your trees and sell the wood. It is as well possible that out of the sale proceeds you meet your expenses and some money is left out which you can give in charity and earn the reward of the hereafter".⁵⁵ Thus, 'it is established by Traditions that Muslim women were not forbidden to go out of their houses for earning a livelihood whenever it was necessary'.⁵⁶

During the Caliphate of Hadrat 'Umar there was a lady by the name Asma bint-Makhrama. Her son Abdullah bin Abi Rabia, used to send her perfumes from Yemen and she used to do business by selling them.⁵⁷

9. Some more female personalities

The above pages dealt with some prominent females and their role during the period of the Prophet (SAW). Here some more prominent personalities, with their role, are presented: (1) Al-Shifabint 'Abdullah: She was a woman of intelligence and was highly respected for her learning and wisdom. Very few women of her time learnt to read and write. This is not surprising, as the Arabs were mostly unlettered. However, Al-Shifa was skilled in this and she taught others. In fact, the Prophet (SAW) asked her to teach Hafsa bint 'Umar, his wife, how to read and write. She did so. The Prophet (SAW) also asked her to teach Hafsa how to treat a skin illness for she was adept in certain aspects of medical treatment. Needless to say, medicine was still an underdeveloped discipline, and Al-Shifa was skilled in what was known at the time. Al-Shifa used to administer her treatment to patients before Islam. When she adopted Islam, she asked the Prophet if she could continue, and he encouraged her to do so. This shows how the Prophet (SAW) always encouraged skill and learning, and how the new Muslims were always keen to establish if their old ways and practices were consistent with Islam.

Al-Shifa was married to a man from her own clan known as Abu Huthmah ibn Hudhayfah, and she gave him a son called Sulayman who grew up to be very religious and a man of good reputation. Al-Shifa was among the Muslims who immigrated with the Prophet (SAW) to Madinah. The Prophet (SAW) was keen to take care of his women companions, particularly those who immigrated with him to Madinah. He used to visit Al-Shifa, and sometimes he would have a nap in her home. She had a special mattress and a cover for him. These remained with her family for a long time. During these visits, Al-Shifa would ask the Prophet (SAW) some questions on religion. As she also attended the mosque, she became a good scholar in her own right. It's the same Al-Shifa who was later appointed market controller in Madinah by Hadrat 'Umar.⁵⁸ (2) Umm 'Atiyyah: She participated in eight wars with the Prophet (SAW). Treating the wounded was among the services she rendered. She said: "One of my duties was guarding the belongings of the soldiers."⁵⁹ (3) Umm Ubayyah: She was one of the six women who made their way to the castle of Khaybar. The Prophet (SAW) asked them: "by whose order did you come here?" Umm Ubayyah said: "Since we could notice the sign of anger on his countenance, I said: 'We have come here with some medicine to treat the wounded,' so, the Prophet (SAW) agreed for us to stay. Our assignment in that war was treating the wounded and cooking food."⁶⁰ (4) Umm Ayman: She used to treat the wounded in the wars. (5) Haminnah: She used to deliver water to the wounded and treat them. She lost her husband, brother and maternal uncle in the battlefield. (6) Rabi'ah bint Ma'udh: She used to treat the wounded. She said: "We went to the battlefield with the Prophet (SAW) and transported the martyrs to Medina."⁶¹ (7) Umayyah bint al-Qays: She became Muslim after the migration (hijrah) to Medina. She said: "I went to see the Prophet (SAW) along with a group of women from Bani Ghaffar. I said: 'We want to be with you in going to Khaybar to treat the wounded and assist the combatants.' Showing his happiness, the Prophet (S) said: 'You move by the grace of God!'"⁶² (8) Layla al-Ghaffariyyah: She said: "I was a woman who used to go to the war along with the Prophet (SAW) to treat the wounded." (9) Umm Salim: While pregnant, she delivered water to the combatants in the Battle of Uhud.⁶³ She also participated

in the Battle of Hunayn. (10) Mu'adhah al-Ghaffariyyah. She used to attend to the sick and treat the wounded. (11) Umm Sinan Aslamiyyah. When going to the Battle of Khaybar, she said to the Prophet: "I want to go with you and treat the wounded, attend to the sick, assist the combatants, safeguard their belongings, and deliver water to the thirsty in the battle field. The Prophet (SAW) said: "You are permitted. Go with my wife, Umm Salmah." (12) Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra: Muhammad ibn Muslimah said: "In the battle of Uhud the women were engaged in looking for water and they were fourteen in all. Fatimah was also one of them." The women used to carry the food and water on their shoulders, engage in the treatment of the wounded and give water to them. (13) Umm Sulayt: 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said: "During the battle of Uhud, Umm Sulayt used to carry goatskins of water for us and engage in repairing weapons and equipment."⁶⁴ (14) Nasibah: She participated in the battle of Uhud along with her husband and son. She used to carry goatskins of water and give water to the wounded. When the war became intense, she also participated in the battlefield and sustained twelve wounds of the sword.⁶⁵ (15) Anisah: In the battle of Uhud she went to see the Prophet (SAW) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! my son, 'Abdullah ibn Salamah, was among the combatants in the battle of Badr. Now, in the battle of Uhud, he has been martyred. I want to bring him to Medina and bury him there so that his grave would be near (our house) and I would be near to him." The Prophet (SAW) gave her permission. Anisah transported the pure corpse of her martyred son by means of a camel along with the corpse of another martyr of Islam named Mujdar ibn Ziyad, which was wrapped in a cloak, to Medina.⁶⁶ This is a very pertinent instance against the arguers of the compartmentalization of male and female professions.

10. Conclusion and suggestions

To encapsulate, this was just a glimpse of the activities and role of women under the prophethood of the Muhammad (SAW). The Muslim women during the life time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and after, are thus seen playing a proactive and prominent role in all walks of life. They worked for the cause of Islam, its propagation and for the Islamic Movement as a whole with all their potential and enthusiasm. Inside the house, they proved themselves to be devoted wives, affectionate mothers, loving daughters and sincere sisters, and outside the house they proved to be able entrepreneurs, advisors, mentors and scholars. They displayed patience at the time of harshness, firmness at the hour of suppression and tyranny, laid down their lives at the time of sacrifice, sent instructions and marched to the battlefields at the time of war. History proves all these facts. No one can overlook the truth nor hide this reality that the glory and zenith that the Islamic Civilization achieved for more than one thousand years could have been possible without the proactive role of the Muslim women in the myriad field. The other 'half' of the humanity accomplished more than what was required of them as individuals as well as a community and as a result are model for us and all nations. The stereotype women prevalent among the Muslim societies, based on the literal or exaggerated interpretations of certain Ayat and Hadith needs to be revisited. At least some of the contemporary researches like *Al-Muhadithat*⁶⁷ and *Aurat Ahd-i-Risalat Main*⁶⁸ suggest so.

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