

About the Prophet's Marriage with Aishah - Part 1

Most of the western orientalist scholars who have published extensive literature on Islam have not always been inspired by the purest spirit of scholarly impartiality. They have worked with the clear intention of belittling Islam and its adherents and were encouraged by the bigot missionaries and imperialistic colonial powers. Western writings on Islam are biased either due to willful distortion or sheer ignorance. They often refer to quotations from books by the secularists who have heretical ideas or the writings of the deviant sects that hate the Prophet's Companions and revile them or even by some ignorant Muslims who lack Islamic knowledge.

The foundations of Orientalism are in the maxim "Know thy enemy". When the "Christian Nations" of Europe began their long campaign to colonize and conquer the Muslim World they brought the Orientalists and missionaries in order to assist in the task. They were the servants of the church or the imperialist governments used as a way to subdue or weaken the enemy.

For instance, the notable orientalist William Muir, was an active missionary who authored several books on Islam. His biased books continue to be used as references for those wishing to attack Islam. From the fanatical distortions of John of Damascus to Peter the Venerable and Sale whose "translations of the Qur'an included additional chapters, they were attempts to degrade the religion of Islam and its followers!

In fact the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him - PBUH) and his great companions set the good example for all mankind in their characters and personalities. Therefore, the orientalists never ceased to slander them by inventing stories, or relating fabricated or unauthentic narrations. In this context, the opponents of Islam has selectively placed a magnifying glass on some acts done by these prominent Islamic figures so as to distort their images and assassinate their characters.

Islam has the most humane and just system of marriage and divorce that exists. A woman is highly respected and allowed to reject any marriage proposal made to her. The western influenced media portrays the Islamic system of marriage to be oppressive. They never ceased to criticize the Messenger of Allah for polygamy generally and in particular for marrying an underage wife, namely Aisha the daughter of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with her and her father) so as to show the Prophet as a man of lust!

Aisha was brought up by a family which was greatly respected. Her father was a man of wide knowledge and gentle manners. She was very clever and had strength of personality since she was quite young. Therefore, she was neither tricked nor forced to marry the Prophet.

Some narrations say that Aisha was nine when the Prophet consummated the marriage with her. That was when she reached the age of puberty. For that reason she used to say: "when a girl reaches nine years she becomes a women " [Ahmed and Al-Termidhi]. Imam Al-Shafi said: "I saw a grandmother who was only twenty one years old. " This means that she and her daughter as well became pregnant before the age of ten years!

Some other narrations says that Aisha became the Prophet's third wife in Makkah when she was most likely in the tenth year of her life but her wedding did not take place until the second year after the Hijrah when she was about fourteen or fifteen years old. However, the Prophet did not take her to his house as bride until she reached the age of puberty.

The life of Aisha is proof that the wife in Islam is not only a feminine source of pleasure to her husband, but can also be a scholar and can infuse both men and women with inspiration. The utterances of this illiterate lady are studied in faculties of literature, her legal pronouncements are researched in colleges of law for centuries. Through the great retentive power of her memory she preserved so many of the priceless sayings of the Prophet while she was still quite young.

The Prophet referring to her extensive knowledge of Islam is reported to have said: "Learn a portion of your religion from this red-colored lady." "Humayra" meaning "Red-coloured" was an epithet given to Aisha by the Prophet. Her house thus became a school and an academy for men and women who came from far and wide to benefit from her knowledge. Besides answering enquiries, she took boys and girls, some of them orphans, into her custody and trained them under her care and guidance. If she was abused or unhappy in her marriage with the Prophet she would suffer the trauma and never become a leader in every field in knowledge, in society, and also in politics.

Aisha, the self-confident wife of the Prophet was quoted as saying: "I was not, jealous of any other wife of the Prophet as I was jealous of Khadijah, because of his constant mentioning of her. Whenever he sacrificed a sheep he would send a fair portion of it to those who had been her intimate friends. Many a time I said to him: "It is as if there had never been any other woman in the world except Khadijah." If the Prophet was a man of lust, why his young and beautiful wife was jealous of his late wife Khadijah, who was old and already dead?

What is recorded in the authentic biographies of the Prophet is that he married Khadijah when he was 25 years old and she was 40. He remained with her, not marrying any other, until the noble lady was over 65. She died when he was just over 50 years of age. No one of his staunchest opponents dared to accuse him of any immorality or indecency, and in this period of his life, the most active and crowded of any man's, the star of chastity and nobility shone on his forehead wherever he went.

If he had wanted to marry another woman there was no law nor reason nor custom to stop him. Polygamy was a tradition among the Arabs, known as part of the religion of the father of Prophets, Ibrahim (Abraham - PBUH). Nevertheless, he contented himself with one in whom he could find comfort, even though she was in her old age while he was at the peak of manhood. What place does pleasure have in the life of a man who rejected it in his youth? How could he immerse himself in lust as an old man?

When Khadijah died and the Prophet wanted to remarry, the beauty was not the criterion by which he selected his wife. His main consideration was to strengthen his ties with those men who had dedicated their lives to the message of Islam and da'wah. He chose Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, in spite of her tender age, and he chose Hafsa, the daughter of 'Umar, in spite of her lack of beauty. Then he chose Umm Salamah, the widow of his commander who was martyred in the way of Allah. His wife Sawdah, was a woman who had given up the idea of marriage because of her old age. Life with these four was not expected to be full of fun and joy.

Surely the conditions surrounding the other wives made living with them a part of the burden that the Prophet had to bear. Is there any place for pleasure in the life of a man who never rested a single day from the toil of exhausting jihad? Surely as a great leader and in his capacity as head of state he was so fully occupied with the problems of the community and every individual in it, that he hardly enjoyed an hour's rest. He was always busy in his endless struggle to establish good and eradicate evil.

However, the Prophet's life was not based on abundant food, drink, pleasures and luxurious living. It was a simple life of a man whose entire concern was for da'wah and the truth alone, a man who exerted himself to the utmost to gather the people around Islam. This was a man who was chosen and purified by Providence. His aspirations were towards lofty ideals and to what will be one's fate when one returns to Allah.

His life with his wives was an austere path that no one could bear. Bukhari transmitted on the authority of Anas ibn Malik (RA): "I do not know the Prophet to have seen flat loaf of bread before he passed away."

Aisha reported: "We used to look at the new moon (crescent) three times (i.e. two months' duration) and no fire for cooking food was lit in the Prophet's homes!" Urwah ibn al Zubayr asked Aisha (his aunt): "What did he (the Prophet) give you to eat?" She replied: "The two black things: dates and water." Aisha also reported: "Allah's Messenger died, and in my cupboard there was only a piece of barley-bread in one of my shelves!"

(To be concluded)