

Islam's Ideal Woman *Faqihah*: The Legacy Of 'Ā'ishā Bint Abi Bakr

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Abstract:

'Ā'isha bint Abi Bakr is regarded as one of the most fascinating characters from Islamic history. She was not only one of Messenger Muhammad's ﷺ wives, but she also contributed to Islamic knowledge and her role in the establishment of the very first Islamic state are immeasurable. The historical contribution of 'Ā'isha (R.A.) in disseminating the knowledge and practices of the Messenger ﷺ to the Muslim world is significant. She is possibly one of the greatest significant conduits or connections connecting the Muslims and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Her significance to Islamic history cannot be overstated, especially in light of how Islam handled the problem of women in society. Through 'Ā'isha (R.A.), the Prophet ﷺ demonstrated to women how Islam uplifted them and made them equal partners to the message of Allah. 'Ā'isha (R.A.) was considered as the deputy or representative of women before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during her time with him. Stated differently, she played a direct role in the Prophet ﷺ's actualization of the Qur'anic message.

Owing to her exceptional brilliance and boldness, 'Ā'isha (R.A.) is considered the ideal Islamic woman scholar. Her critical, inquisitive, and curious intellect was her greatest quality. 'Ā'isha (R.A.) established a link between the life of the modern Muslim and the period of the Prophet ﷺ by the inquiries she had been able to pose. It is necessary to carefully evaluate and underline the significant role she had in the scholastic endeavors of Muslim men and women in studying and imparting knowledge. Her excellent knowledge of Islamic subjects include, but is not restricted to, the Hadīth, Exegesis, Law, literature, as well as poetry. The purpose of the article is to elucidate 'Ā'isha's (R.A.) crucial role in the establishment of Islamic doctrines and to demonstrate how exceptional her life was. The article asserts that by highlighting the fact that 'Ā'isha (R.A.) was a companion and active participant in the intellectual endeavors and purpose of the Prophet ﷺ, she represents the kind of perfection that modern Muslim scholars might strive for and achieve.

Key Words: 'Ā'isha's (R.A.), Prophet's ﷺ, Fiqh, Woman, Knowledge ('ilm).

Introduction

Islam views women as representing half of humanity.¹ Ignoring them would be the same as ignoring half of humanity. Because there is unquestionably an astounding wealth of feminine characteristics as well as enticement, brilliance, and beauty that Muslim scholars have saved from oblivion in later periods. This will shock those who view the Muslim world primarily as a man's domain, and they are numerous both inside and outside of Muslim circles. When the Prophet ﷺ was in the company of more than a thousand women, these ladies either witnessed or

took part in events pertaining to him, and they recounted his sayings and deeds. Islamic women were highly skilled in a variety of subjects, including poetry, calligraphy, Qur'anic exegesis, and phonetics. A narrow-minded individual would overlook the enormous impact.

Many Muslim women, particularly the wives of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, were considered to be important keepers of Islamic knowledge ('ilm) after his departure from this world. In Islamic history, the wives of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are particularly significant. They are referred to as Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn, or "Mothers of the Faithful," in the Quran.ⁱⁱ The Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn played a significant role in promoting and distributing Islamic knowledge, or 'ilm), particularly among women. There was no formal system of educational institutions in place prior to this time. As a result, learning was primarily seen as an informal, individual process for which the homes of Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn functioned as Islamic schools. These provided services to persons in many domains of expertise. Islam benefited greatly from these institutions, which were numerous as the Prophet ﷺ left behind nine Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn at the time of his death. They were all present for the Prophet's social and private life. They varied, though, in how they retained and shared the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ's teachings. Following the Prophet ﷺ, Muslims continued to get direction and inspiration from his wives in their position as mothers of believers (this is what the word Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn actually means). The Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn provided the Muslims with the answers to their questions as they were ignorant of numerous Shar'iah-related matters. One of them passing away was regarded as the biggest loss, even by Ibn 'Abbas considered it as the sign among the signs of Allah.ⁱⁱⁱ

'Ā'isha (R.A.) stood out among Muslim ulama for her exceptional intelligence and intuitive gift. She was a successful scholar and educator who maintained strong and unwavering opinions in all the core subjects of the major Islamic sciences, including hadith and fiqh. The argument put forward in the article is that 'Ā'isha serves as a model for the kind of quality muslim women academics today might strive for and achieve because she was a companion and member in the Prophet's message and intellectual endeavors.

As the mother of the faithful, A'isha was among the Prophet's principal students and pupils; it was through him that A'isha's qualities and capabilities were refined. According to Fethullah Gulen, 'Ā'isha's life and her contributions to Islam after marriage demonstrate that such a remarkable individual was deserving of being the Prophet's wife and the mother of the faithful. When the time was appropriate, she rose to become one of the most eminent experts on the Prophetic tradition, a superb interpreter of Islamic text, and a distinguished and well-versed specialist in Islamic law. With her distinct knowledge and scholarship, she really embodied the inner and outer qualities of the Prophet.^{iv}

Role and Legacy of 'Ā'isha (R.A) in the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam:

'Ā'isha's authority as a carrier of Muhammad's ﷺ preferences and opinions was probably largely influenced by her role as his favorite wife. 'Ā'isha undoubtedly held a special position among the Prophet's companions. From the outset, she scrutinized all that transpired, took in fresh data, resolved unclear matters through questioning, and discovered private knowledge that others were unable to see by asking the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ personally. 'A'ishah (R.A.) was a truly exceptional individual who was meant to have a singular and significant role in the

history of Islam. Though she had a brilliant countenance, was incredibly graceful and lovely, and was affectionate, her greatest assets were her remarkable memory and sharp mind. She inherited her father Abu Bakr's (R.A) quiet strength and self-assured demeanor. She was raised in a dignified and charitable environment and gained a solid understanding of the language, poetry, history, and ancestry of Arabia from his education. She has a very captivating and fascinating personality thanks to the combination of all these character features.

Learning the Qur'an, its interpretation and mysteries, the Prophet's ﷺ Sunnah, and the dense and complicated topics of Islamic law and jurisprudence are extremely difficult tasks that can only be completed by someone with exceptional intellectual prowess. Despite having mastered various secular disciplines of studies, her intellectual bent of mind allowed her to become the authority in many Islamic subjects.

Her life revolved around the Prophet ﷺ, and she made every effort to spread his message. Because of her proximity to the Prophet's ﷺ Mosque, 'Ā'isha was able to ask the Prophet ﷺ anything and everything, including private questions that others were afraid to ask. The Prophet ﷺ would always respond. 'Ā'isha also attended sermons and speeches held in the Mosque. She used to ask the Prophet when he would return to her room to get rid of any nagging questions or concerns.^v She enjoyed thinking things through and asking questions, and she never trusted anything she heard until she had all the information. Ibn Abī Mulayka described this quality of A'isha as follows: “ 'Ā'isha was not able to stand without learning more when she was faced with something that she did not know.”^{vi}

A'ishah's greatest contributions were to knowledge and religion. She became one of the most important jurists in Islam by preserving the Ummah a large amount of the Prophet's ﷺ Ahadith. Numerous well-known and educated sahabah came to her for advice. She had a great understanding of the Qur'anic Knowledge and its interpretations in addition to narrating several Ahadith from the Prophet ﷺ. When she first started learning the Qur'anic verses, she was a playful child who could correctly pinpoint the place and time of their revelation. Furthermore, 'A'ishah (R.A) preserved a record of a significant portion of the Prophet's ﷺ private life better than anyone else She remained the same curious person she had been before she married the Prophet ﷺ. Knowledge is a very deep well, and the question is its bucket, according to an Arab saying. She understood that the only way to fill her bucket with water would be to ask questions, so she did just that, asking the Messenger ﷺ of God anything and everything that occurred to her. She questioned her spouse whether there were any inconsistencies after contrasting the brand-new facts with what she already knew.

Among Sahabah^{vii}, 'A'ishah (R.A.) is recognized as one of the greatest and first Fuqaha^{viii}. Imam Zuhri has said with authority that she is Ummah's greatest Faqihah out of all of the Faqihat.^{ix} After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, 'Ā'isha (R.A.) gave Fatawa (legal views) during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (R.A.) and 'Umar (R.A.) until her death. Among the one hundred and thirty-nine (roughly) Sahabah individuals whose Fatawa has been preserved is her name. Three groups have been assigned to their names. 1. Individuals who provided extended Fatawa 2. Individuals who provided an average amount of Fatawa 3. as well as those who provided few Fatawa. Only seven Sahabah were able to enter the first group, and 'A'ishah (R.A) is one of those. If

all of their Fatawa were to be collected individually, a sizable book would result^x. Furthermore, Ibn Hazm included the names of the Sahabah whose Fatawa about the Ahkam (shari'ah rules) have been extensively recounted; he has chosen to start with the name of 'A'ishah (R.A.)^{xi}. She has done Islam a big service. 'A'ishah (R.A.) is credited with providing one-fourth of the Shari'ah, according to famous Muhadith Imam Hakim.^{xii} According to Ali bin Mashar, 'A'ishah was the most learned individual in the fields of the Qur'an, inheritance, poetry, Arab history, and ancestry. She was also the most skilled at differentiating between what was Halal and Haraam (lawful and forbidden).^{xiii}

Scholars from all eras have highly praised this wonderful lady's service to Islam. Not only was her persona the only focus of the classical era's scholars, but she also holds a significant position in the classical Hadith literature as well as in the biographies of the early Islamic scholars. The degree to which biographers have focused on 'A'isha's function as a religious knowledge-transmitter has varied^{xiv}. They concur that she outperformed the majority of her contemporaries because she used a critical interpretation of the meanings of Muhammad's traditions and a knowledge of the legal ramifications of those traditions (fiqh). Renowned scholars have gathered numerous examples of 'A'ishah (R.A.) criticizing hadith, demonstrating her acute critical faculty. The first scholar to evaluate her exceptional intellectual capacity was Abu Mansur 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Baghdadi (411-489 A.H.), who lived in the fifth century A.H. He has attempted to compile 'A'ishah's (R.A.) criticisms of other Sahabah with reference to the Prophet ﷺ's hadith. Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Allah Zarkashi (d. 745 A.H.) added to and refined the work. He frequently quoted Baghdadi in his book, Bahadir Al-Zarkashī, Al-Ijābah li Irādi Ma Istadrakathu 'Ā'isha 'ala al-Şahāba. Sa'id al-Afgani (1909–1997) conducted research and editing for the same book, which was originally released from Damascus in 1939 A.D. In addition, Sayuti, a distinguished scholar from the 9th century (A.H.) who passed away in 911 A.H., abridged Zarkashi's book and republished it under the title "Ayn al-Isabah fi Ma Istadrakathu 'Ā'isha 'ala al-Şahāba" under the heading of legal issues. In actuality, researchers from succeeding eras have used the book as a source. Sayuti has compiled the narrations of 'A'ishah (R.A.) that are referenced in various Hadith collections into a compilation called Musnad 'A'ishah min Jawami al-Kabir fi l-Hadith. This is an excellent resource for conducting research to demonstrate the proficiency of 'A'ishah (R.A.) with reference to the Prophet ﷺ's Hadiths, how she excelled the subject.

Ibn Sa'd predicts the rise of 'A'isha's stature as a legal scholar (faqihah). He quotes a conversation in which it was inquired of Masruq (d. 63/683) if 'Ā'isha was knowledgeable about the regulations pertaining to inheritance and distributive shares (al-fara'id)^{xv}. Masruq swears by God that the elder Companions referred to her as an authority and that she was in fact knowledgeable in this area.^{xvi} 'Ā'isha's competence in this domain suggests her advanced mathematical skills, which are relevant given the intricate restrictions surrounding Muslim inheritance. While Ibn Sa'd gives scant emphasis to her intelligence and concentrates more on her bond with Muhammad and her turbulent relationships with her fellow wives, biographers from the fifth and eleventh centuries onward have paid progressively more attention to her legal knowledge. The Masruq tradition previously mentioned by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, along with other traditions related by early luminaries such as 'Ata' b. Abi Rabah (d. 114/732f.) and 'Urwa, who states, "I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable in matters of fiqh, medicine, and poetry than 'Ā'isha," add to the evidence of 'Ā'isha's intelligence. He also quotes the eminent scholar al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) who said

that "the knowledge of 'Ā'isha would be greater if the knowledge of 'Ā'isha were to be weighed against that of all the wives and the other women combined." The portrayal of 'A'isha's intellectual achievements by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr is further developed by his successors, such as Ibn Hajar and al-Mizzā^{xvii}. In the modern era, Kahhala represents the pinnacle of the movement. "The greatest muhadditha of her age, distinguished by her intelligence, fluency, and eloquence, who had a profound influence in the dissemination of knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ^{xviii}," is how he begins his biography, praising her beyond words. Furthermore, she is the only early Islamic female whose legal reasoning has been recorded and examined in a contemporary collection of fiqh.^{xix}

Conclusion:

Looking at 'Ā'isha's (R.A) existence in 7th-century Arabia through modern eyes reveals surprising things. It is necessary to thoroughly analyze and appropriately highlight the significant contribution she made to Muslim women's academic endeavors in both acquiring and imparting information. 'Ā'isha is not merely a religious role model for Muslim women today; they can also emulate her intellect, reasoning, and curiosity. 'Ā'isha educated both Muslim women and men and instructed the Muslim society. She established the foundation for modern scholarship. She demonstrated to Muslims how a woman may be a teacher or scholar in society while still remaining humble. Modern Muslim women do not have to act immodestly to maintain their academic status, just like 'Ā'isha did. She is able to be brilliant in every area of life while still maintaining her modesty.

References:

ⁱ al-Albani, *silsilat ul Ahadith as Sahiha*, hadith no. 178.

ⁱⁱ The Quran, 33:6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibn 'Abbas (R.A) was informed about the death of someone among the wives of the Prophet after the *Fajr* prayer and he prostrated he was asked why did he prostrate at that time? He replied that didn't the Prophet said "When you see any sign prostrate then so which sign is the greatest than the demise of the Prophet's wives". See Tirmidhi: *Kitab al Manaqib, Bab fi fadl Azwaj an Nabi*

^{iv} M. Fethullah Gülen, *Questions and Answers About Islam*, vol. 1 (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010), pp. 2–3.

^v Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. VI (Egypt: Mu'assasah al-Qurtuba), p. 75., no. 24507, 24511, 24514; Reşit Haylamaz, *Aisha: The Wife, The Companion, The Scholar* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2014), pp. 165–6.

^{vi} Abū Muḥammad Badruddīn Mahmud b. Ahmad b. Musa al-Hanafī Al-'Aynī, *Umdah al-Qārī Sharh Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), p. 136.

^{vii} Badruddīn Muḥammad bin Bahadır Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Ijābah li Irādi Malstadrakathu 'Ā'isha 'ala al-Şaḥāba* Al-Maktabah al-Islami, Beirut, 2000, 4th Ed, p.65.

^{viii} *Fuqaha* plural of *Faqih*

^{ix} Plural of *Faqiha*

^x Ibn Imad Hanbali, *Shadhrat al Dhahab*, Dar al-Kutub, 'ilmiyyah, Beirut Lebanon, n.d., Vol.I, p.62.

^{xi} Zarkashi: *op.cit.*, p.65.

^{xii} Zarkashi: *op.cit.*, p.65.

^{xiii} Sayuti Musnand 'A'isha_, trans. W. 'Uthman, 'Atiqad publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, Preface

^{xiv} For fuller treatment of 'A'isha's biography and historical roles, see Nabia Abbott's *Aishah: The Beloved of Muhammad* (1942; repr., London: al-Saqi Books, 1985). A more recent study of her legacy is Spellberg's *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*.

^{xv} Ibn Sa'd used the term in its technical sense to refer to the law of inheritance and the distribution of shares of inheritance.

^{xvi} Muhammad b. Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1904–18), 8:45.

^{xvii} Yusuf b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifat al-Ashab* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahdat Misr, 196–), 4:1881–85; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhib al-Kamal*, 35:227–36; Ibn Hajar, *al-Isaba*, 13:38–42.

^{xviii} Kahhala, *A'lam al-Nisa*, 3:9–131.

^{xix} Sa'id Fayiz Dukhayyil, *Mawsu'at Fiqh 'A'isha Umm al-Mu'minin: Hayatuha wa-Fiqhuha* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1989).