

Position and Role of Women During the Time of Khulafā'u-Ar-Rashidun

Dr. Afroz Ahmad Bisati*

Abstract

That Islam gave women a position, status and rights unequalled is becoming clearer with more scholarly works coming to fore. That Islam considers her equal to men spiritually, socially, legally, politically, ethically and psychologically is a long drawn fact to the saner scholarship around the world. And to this effect a number of works have been written by the eminent scholars of the field. However, on the position and role of women during the all-important period of Khulafā'u-ar-Rāshidūn not much has been written. The present article is a humble endeavor to this effect. It will essentially be a desk research with descriptive methodology.

Keywords: Khulafā'u-Ar-Rāshidūn, Islam, Qur'an, Hadith, Umm al-Dardā', Khawla bint Tha'labah, Umm Hakim, Umm Salm, KhawlabintQays, Shifa bint 'Abdullah.

Introduction

Al-Khulafā'u-ar-Rāshidūn (arabic: الخلفاء الراشدين) 'the Rightly Guided Caliphs' is a term used in Islam to refer to the 30-year reign of the first four caliphs (literary successors) following the demise of the prophet Muhammad (SAW), namely: Hadrat Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali. The concept of "Rightly Guided Caliphs" originated in reference to the Sunni discourse, "Hold firmly to my example (*sunnah*) and that of the Rightly Guided Caliphs".¹

The Caliphate of these four pioneers was a matter of free decision by the Companions, and also because of the predominant value of each of them, in his own age and time, over and above the rest of the Companions. This article will introduce, in brief, the personalities and the accomplishments of the four Khulafā'u-ar-Rāshidūn with an essential aim to delineate the position and role of women during their period.

* Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora (Pulwama), Kashmir

Khulafā' u-ar-Rāshidūn: A Brief Intro

Hadrat Abu Bakr (RA): Hadrat Abu Bakr was born in a highly respected family of Banu Tamim of the tribe of Qureysh in Makkah in 572/73 A.D. His name by birth was Abdullah and Abu Bakr was the inherited one. His father was 'Uthman, commonly known as Abu Quhafa and his mother was Salma, whose patronymic identity was UmmulKhair.

Hadrat Abu Bakr adopted the profession of trade and was well known for his integrity and honesty in business dealings and accompanied the Messenger (SAW) of God on a number of trade missions. When Hadrat Muhammad (SAW) told Hadrat Abu Bakr about his Prophethood and first Revelation of Allah SWT, he readily embraced Islam. He, unlike others, without giving a second thought to it, accepted the Message as true. Similarly, when the Prophet (SAW) had a Night Journey of Isra (moving from Ka'aba in Makkah to Bait-al Maqdas in Jerusalem) and Mi'raj (visiting the seven Heavens and Paradise), no one believed him. They came to Hadrat Abu Bakr to ask him about his opinion on this apparently looking dream of Rasulullah(SAW). He replied that he believed it to be true. They asked him again. Again, Hadrat Abu Bakr said that he had complete faith in each and every word of the Messenger (SAW). Upon this, Hadrat Muhammad (SAW) gave him the title of *As-Siddiq* (the one who is truthful and the most perfect in his faith).²

After the demise of prophet Muhammad (SAW), Hadrat Abu Bakr was appointed the first Ameer (Caliph) of Muslims when Hadrat 'Umar (R.A) reminded everyone about his great status and services to Islam. To summarize that was accomplished in Abu Bakr's Khilafah is, his emigration with the Messenger, leaving his family and children, and his remaining by the Prophet (SAW) in the Cave and on the rest of the journey (of the Hijrah). Then there are his words on the Day of Badr, and on the Day of Hudaibiyyah when the matter of delaying entry into Makkah seemed unclear to others. Later there is his steadfastness on the day of the demise of the Messenger (SAW) his addressing the people and his calming them. Then there is putting the Qur'an in single form (*mushaf*) to preserve it. Then there is the stand he took over those who reneged (on their Islam) and his exchange of views with the other Companions until he overcame their arguments with his proofs to fight the renegades. Then there is his equipping the armies to go to Syria to conquer it and his support of them. Then his appointment of 'Umar as Khalifah of the Muslims.³

Hadrat ‘Umar (RA): Hadrat ‘Umar was born in Mekka 13 years after the incident of the Elephant, in 583 A.D. ‘Umar belonged to the Adi clan from the Tribe of Quraish. ‘Umar’s family was considered among the families that served as arbitrators that would settle the tribal disputes and disagreements. “If there were to be a prophet after me it would be ‘Umar ibn al-Khatab” are the words of the Prophet (SAW). According to the story of Anas bin Malik one day, full of anger against the Prophet, he drew his sword and set out to kill him. A man from BaniZuhrah met him on the way. When ‘Umar told him what he planned to do, he informed him that ‘Umar’s own sister, Fatimah, and her husband had also accepted Islam and abandoned your faith. ‘Umar went straight to his sister’s house where he found her reading from pages of the Qur’an. He fell upon her and beat her mercilessly. Bruised and bleeding, she told her brother, “Umar, you can do what you like, but you cannot turn our hearts away from Islam.” These words produced a strange effect upon ‘Umar. ‘Umar went straight to the house where the Prophet was staying and vowed allegiance to him.

When Abu Bakr was dying he consulted Abdur-Rahman bin Awaf and ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan who considered ‘Umar highly. Abu Bakr himself was well aware of the ‘Umar’s powers and of his ability to succeed him. Abu Bakr appointed Hadrat ‘Umar as his successor. ‘Umar rule was to last ten years that are full of accomplishments. His most apparent achievements are in two major categories namely, the innovations in governance and the conquests.

In ‘Umar’s period the Khilafa remained stable and peaceful. Due to the sharpness of his personality and austerity he quelled many of the troubles with ease. Here is the brief of his major achievements: Establishment of Public Treasury; establishments of courts of Justice and appointment of Judges. Establishment of Postal service; establishment of the Land Revenue department. Survey and assessment of lands; and Public census. Building of Canals and Bridges; establishment of Public Rest Areas, hostels and *Wudu* (Ablution) stations. Fixing the date to the start of the Migration of the Messenger; dividing the state and the conquered territories into provinces; founding of new cities such as Kufah, Basrah and Fustat. Salary for Imams, *Muadhans* (Callers to prayer), teachers and public lectures. Stipends for the poor among the Jews and Christians who lived in conquered lands; establishment of accurate system of calculation of the inheritance, and in person making nightly rounds to check on the condition of the people first hand. ‘Umar was assassinated in the year 644 AD. Before his death ‘Umar proposed the office of Khalifah to one of the six (‘Uthman, ‘Ali,

Talha bin Ubiduallah, Zubair bin al-Awam, ‘Abdar-Rahman bin Awaf, and Sa‘ad bin Abi Waqas) to be chosen in three days.⁴

Hadrat ‘Uthman (RA): Hadrat ‘Uthman (R.A) was born in a noble family of Umayyah of the Makkan tribe of Qureysh, in 573 A.D. He was one among the very few youth of Arabia who knew the art of reading and writing. With the profession of cloth-merchant he earned a lot of wealth. He used his money in good cause, in removing the problems of the poor that earned him the title of “Al-Ghani” and a highly respected person in the city. At the time of Ghazwah-i-Tabuk, he did not hesitate to spend from his material goods and supplied Dinars (gold coins), horses and camels to strengthen the Muslim Army. After witnessing a remarkable spectacle of the generosity of Hadrat ‘Uthman (R.A), the Prophet is reported to have said: “From this day on, nothing will harm ‘Uthman regardless of what he does.”

After the death of Hadrat ‘Umar, Hadrat ‘Uthman was selected to be the third Khalifah of the Muslims by a joint committee consisting of the most righteous companions of the Prophet (SAW). He accomplished many victories and the Caliphate witnessed territorial expansion. Some of the important accomplishments are: the advancement of the Islamic rule to far off places; arrangement of the First Naval Muslim force leading to more efficient outreach to far-away regions of the world; defeating the Byzantine Empire of 500 ships; decisive elevation of Islamic ruling having conquests over Byzantine and Roman realms. He attained the great honour of martyrdom when he was assassinated at the age of 84.⁵

Due to his great command over the Arabic language and out of the extra-ordinary style of writing, Hadrat ‘Uthman (R.A) was chosen by the Messenger (SAW) to have the nobility of being one of the scribes of the Revelations (*Kaatib-e-Wahi*). He was one among the ten *Ashraya Mubashira* and also had the honor of being the only person to marry two righteous daughters of the Prophet, i.e. Hadrat Ruqayah (R.A) and Hadrat Umm Kalsum (R.A) and thereby he got the title of *Dhun-Nurain – bearer of Two Lights*. When the number of Muslims grew multifold with the expansion of Islam to non-Arabic areas, Hadrat ‘Uthman observed differences in the recitation of Qur’an, which lead to change of the meaning of its Instructions. He acted quickly to preserve the Qur’an bringing people to a single recital process, for which he is called *Jami‘ul-Qur’an* (the compiler of the Qur’an).

Hadrat ‘Ali(R.A): Hadrat ‘Ali was the son of Abu Talib, a prominent Qureysh chief and custodian of the Holy Ka‘bah. The real name of Abu Talib was ‘Abd-Manaf’. The mother of Hadrat ‘Ali was Fatima. She was the daughter of Asad who was a son of Hashim. Fatima was a cousin of Abu Talib. Thus, both the father and mother of Hadrat ‘Ali were Hashimites.

Hadrat ‘Ali (R.A) had a great honor of being the first cousin of prophet Muhammad (SAW), brought up under his kind and inspiring supervision for most of his life. He was the first among youth to believe in Allah’s Commandments. The time of migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madina was a great test for all the believers. The heads of the tribe of Qureysh had decided to kill Rasulullah at that time. Hadrat ‘Ali risked his life just for the sake of the Almighty and His Messenger (SAW) as he knew that the disbelievers might slay him while he was resting in the bed of Rasulullah that night.

Hadrat ‘Ali was highly recognized for gutsiness and boldness while fighting the infidels. Apart from Ghazwah-i-Tabuk, he participated in almost all the early battles against non-believers with great distinction. At the occurrence of Ghazwah-i-Khaibar, one among the toughest of the battles that Rasulullah faced, when the Muslims tried to capture the strong Jewish Fort, the Arabs witnessed the incredible valor of Hadrat ‘Ali. He killed Mahrab through vigorous blows of his sword. Then, the Prophet (SAW) bestowed him the title of *Asadullah*, the Lion of Allah.⁶

In the year 35 A.H, the martyrdom of Hadrat ‘Uthman (R.A) led to worsening of situation. On the advice of the closest companions, Hadrat ‘Ali reluctantly took charge and became the fourth Caliph of the Muslims. He also had to change the Muslim capital to Kufa (Iraq). Hadrat ‘Ali found the Caliphate to be a bed of thorns. During those years, he fought three battles: (i) the Battle of the Camel, (ii) the Battle of Siffin, and (iii) the Battle of Nahrawan. All the three battles were fought against the Muslims and led to considerable bloodshed. Some of the major achievements of Hadrat Ali (R.A) in the service of Islam include: Fighting and destroying the Kharijite (dissidents) movement; trying his best to keep the Muslims united; facing with great courage all the obvious problems caused by rebels who were followers of ‘Abullah ibn Saba and who had also assassinated Hadrat ‘Uthman (R.A); introducing and implementing reforms especially in taxes and collection of revenues.⁷

Among his spiritual attainments Hadrat ‘Ali was the first person to learn the Qur’an by heart. According to the some commentators, there are at least 300

verses in the Qur'an which have an implied reference to Hadrat 'Ali. After the Prophet (SAW), he was the Chief Judge among the early Muslims. He is regarded as the "father of *fiqh*." He is the first revivalist among the Muslims. He interpreted the doctrines of Islam and systematized them. He is regarded as the "father of Sufism." Most schools of Tasawwuf trace their origin to him. He was regularly consulted by the first three Caliphs during their time in power. Hadrat 'Ali (R.A) was martyred by a rebel, in the Ramadan 40 A.H, using a poisoned sword while he was performing Salah in the mosque.

Women during the period of Khulafā' u-ar-Rāshidūn

The Qur'an rebukes the people of the *jahiliyyah* for their negative attitude to women: *And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.*⁸The Qur'an warns of retribution for this gross atrocity on the day *When the infant buried alive shall be asked for what sin she was killed.*⁹

According to Islam the human rights and duties indicated in the Qur'an are pegged to two fundamentals that are same for men and women — namely their being creatures and slaves of God, their Creator and Lord, and their being the issue of a single human self.¹⁰And, if at all there was any doubt on the issue it was clarified and affirmed in this Hadith, narrated by Abd al-Rahman ibn Shaybah:

"I heard UmmSalamah, the wife of the Prophet (SAW) say: I asked the Prophet (SAW) — Why are we [women] not mentioned in the Qur'an as the men are mentioned? [...] Then I was alerted that day by his call on the pulpit. [...] At that moment I was combing my hair. I gathered up my hair and went to one of the rooms of my house; I listened hard. I heard him saying on the pulpit: O people, God says in His Book: *Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men who guard their chastity and women who guard, men who remember God frequently and women who remember—God has prepared for them a pardon, and an immense reward.*"¹¹So the duties and responsibilities owed to God does not rest on belonging to a particular group (say, the tribe of Quraysh rather than some other Arab or non-Arab people), or to a particular gender (men rather than women) or to particular social class (say, the nobility rather than slaves). It is a

function strictly of knowledge of and personal adherence to Qur'an and Sunnah. As such we will see by some of the innumerable examples that in the pursuit, transmission and in proactive preservation of knowledge the gender was never a consideration.

Muhammad AkramNadwi (2007) in a very seminal and well researched book titled *al-Muhadithat-the Women Scholars of Islam* has compiled biographies of 8,000 female jurists during Islamic rise.¹² The thesis of the book is that 'the female religious scholars were relatively common in Muslim societies' at the peak of Muslim civilization that lasted more than 1000 years. They were also specialists and masters of various sciences, mentoring some of the greatest and popular male scholars of Islamic history. According to M ANadwi there was a fair social involvement of women in the day to day activities. A prominent orientalist Ignaz Goldziher estimates that 15 percent of medieval Hadith scholars were women.

Women transmitters and preservers of Hadith

One of the leading Muslim scholars of the second generation after the Prophet, Umm al-Dardā' (d. after 81/700) was an important Hadith transmitter, teacher and jurist. An expert on the Qur'an (which she memorized at a young age), she met and transmitted Hadith from 'Ā'ishah, Salmān al-Farisī, AbūHurayra and other companions of the Prophet.¹³

After living much of her life in Medina, she moved to Damascus where she taught hundreds of students (both male and female) in the Great Mosque, many of whom would go on to become respected scholars in their own right (and one, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, who would eventually become caliph). In fact, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan used to attend her class in Damascus to learn the fiqh from her, and he sat as one among her other students.¹⁴ Since the detailed study on Umm al-Dardā' and other women is beyond the scope of the present paper as such for a more information, consult Asma Sayeed's *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (2013).

An example, of how seriously the information or an opinion of a female Companion was considered, is the hadith of Fatimah bintQays. She reports that when she was divorced from her husband, the Prophet did not require him to provide accommodation and expenses for her until the end of her 'iddah, the period after which she would be free to re-marry. 'Umr ibn Khattab rejected this hadith; so did Zayd ibn Thabit, 'Aisha, and other jurists. They argued that it contradicts the Qur'an's command that men must support divorced wives during

the *'iddah*. If they had been motivated by 'patriarchal attitudes', emphasizes M. A. Nadwi, they would surely have acted on the hadith of Fatimah, since it appears to favour men. In any event Fatimah was never stopped from narrating the hadith; it was recorded in all the books.

Another example is narrated by Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab about 'Umar ibn al-Khattab during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. "Umar divorced the mother of his son 'Asim, then saw her somewhere with their son and took him from her. She appealed her case to Abu Bakr. The caliph judged that 'Asim remain with his mother until grown up or until she re-married.¹⁵ This verdict followed the Sunnah, established by the report that a woman came to the Prophet and said: 'O Messenger of God (SAW) my womb was his vessel, my arm was his container, and my breast was his drink. And now his father claims that he is going to snatch him from me. The Prophet (SAW) said: You have more right over the child while you do not re-marry.¹⁶ Neither 'Umar's rank as one of the most senior of the Companions, nor his being Abu Bakr's dearest friend, nor his argument that he had more to give the boy, swayed the judgement in his favour. Abu Bakr said: 'O 'Umar, the moisture of her lips is better for him than the honey in your house.'

Women giving Fatawa

There is no difference of opinion among the eminent scholars of Islam that for giving fatwas gender is not a condition. Rather it is dependent on having the appropriate degree of knowledge. Imam Nawawi has stated explicitly that a woman can give fatwas. Ibn Muflih has also affirmed it; so has the greatest of Ibn Taymiyyah's disciples, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri says: 'If a woman attains *fiqh* in the sciences of the religion it would be incumbent upon us to accept her warning. That actually happened. These are wives of the Prophet (SAW), and his women Companions. Religious rulings have been narrated from them and the proof is established by their transmission. There is no difference among our companions [i.e. fellow Zahiri jurists] in this regard. Among them, other than the wives of the Prophet (SAW), were: Umm Sulaym, Umm Haram, and Umm 'Atiyyah.'¹⁷ Ibn Hazm counted the Companions known for giving the fatwas as 130 that included women also. Foremost among them is Hadrat 'Aisha.

Mahmud ibn Labid says: 'Aisha used to give fatwas in the time of 'Umar and 'Uthman until she died; [those] great Companions of the Prophet, 'Umar and 'Uthman, used to refer to her.¹⁸ The great jurists among the Successors used to attend on her to get juristic opinions. Abu Hanifa narrated from Hammad, from Ibrahim, from al-Aswad ibn Yazid, the great jurist of Iraq, that he asked Umm-ul-

moominin ‘Aisha: ‘What cuts the prayer? She said; listen, O people of Iraq, you think that a donkey, a dog, a woman and a cat [passing in front of the one praying] cuts the prayer. You have equated us women with them?! Push away [whoever is coming in front of you] as much as is possible for you. For nothing cuts the prayer.’ Muhammad al-Shaybani says: ‘We hold the opinion of ‘Aisha, and it is the opinion of Abu Hanifa.’

Women questioning the Caliph ‘Umar

That women can raise issues and discuss them with men should be beyond dispute. The wives of the Prophet (SAW) sometimes did so; a very Surah of the Qur’an was sent down concerning the discussion of a women with him (Prophet SAW). It will be more than worthwhile to relate the whole episode for that is one of the best examples of a woman being regarded an independent moral being in Islam.

The story of Khawla bint Tha'labah and her husband Aws ibn al-Samit is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud and quoted by Ibn Kathir in his tafsir at the beginning of Surat al-Mujadilah. Khawla said:

“By Allah, concerning me and Aws ibn al-Samit, Allah revealed the beginning of Surat al-Mujadilah. I was married to him, and he was an old man who was bad-tempered. One day, he came in and I raised a particular issue with him again. He became angry and said, ‘You are to me as the back of my mother.’ Then he went out and sat for a while in the meeting-place of his people. Then he came back, and wanted to resume marital relations with me. I said, ‘No way! By the hand of the One in Whose hand is the soul of Khuwayla (i.e., Khawla), you will never get what you want from me after saying what you said, until Allah and His Messenger (SAW) us.’ He tried to force himself on me, but I was able to resist because I was a young woman and he was a weak old man. I pushed him away. Then I went to one of my (female) neighbors and borrowed a cloak from her and went to the Messenger of Allah (SAW). I sat before him, told him what my husband had done to me, and began to complain to him about my sufferings because of my husband's bad temper. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, ‘O Khuwayla, your cousin is an old man, so fear Allah with regard to him.’ I did not leave him until Qur’an was revealed concerning me. He was overcome as he usually was when Qur’an was revealed to him, and when it was over, he

said: ‘O Khuwayla, Allah has revealed Qur’an concerning you and your husband.’ Then he recited to me:

*[Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to Allah: and Allah (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for Allah hears and sees (all things). If any men among you divorce their wives by zihar (calling them their 'mothers'), they cannot be their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave them birth. And in fact they use words (both) iniquitous and false: but truly Allah is One that blots out (sins), and forgives (again and again). But those who divorce their wives by zihar, then wish to go back on the words they uttered - it is ordained that such a one should free a slave before they touch each other: this are you admonished to perform. And Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that you do. And if any has not the wherewithal, he should fast for two months consecutively before they touch each other. But if any is unable to do so, he should feed sixty indigent ones. This, that you may show your faith in Allah and His Messenger, those are limits (set by) Allah. For those who reject (Him), there is a grievous Penalty.]*¹⁹

He told me, ‘Let him release a slave.’ I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah (SAW), he does not have the means to do that.’ He said, ‘Then let him fast for two consecutive months.’ I said, ‘By Allah, he is an old man, he is not able to do that.’ He said, ‘Then let him feed sixty poor people with a wasq of dates.’ I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, he does not have that much.’ He said, ‘Then we will help him with a *faraq* of dates.’ I said, ‘And I will help him with another *faraq*, O Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘You have done right and done well. Go and give it in charity on his behalf, then take care of your cousin properly.’ And I did so.”

Similarly, once the caliph ‘Umar gave a speech asking the people not to inflate dowries, and told him to keep them small. An old woman stood up and said: ‘God say in the Qur’an *And if you mean to take a wife in place of another and you have given one of them a qintar [of gold] do not take a thing [back] from it*’.²⁰ Possibly the women had in mind that a large dowry might serve to deter a husband from divorcing a wife in order to take another, but at very least the verse clearly states the permissibility of a large dowry. The caliph responded: “The woman is right and ‘Umar is wrong’.²¹

Women speaking Truth to the Power

Women of the time did not lack courage to challenge and correct misbelief and misconduct. They did not wait for men to establish the *din* for them but took that responsibility, even if they were to confront the powers of the time. Here is an example: Qatadah says: ‘Umar came out from the mosque and with him was al-Jarud al-‘Abdi. There was a woman on the main road. ‘Umar greeted her. She answered [his greeting] and [then] said: Be off, O ‘Umar! I have seen you [when you were] called ‘Umayr [little ‘Umar] in the market place of ‘Ukaz, tending the sheep with your stick. Then the days passed and you were called ‘Umar. Then the days passed and [now] you are called Commander of the Believers. So be wary of God in respect of the subjects [when you govern]. And she continued advising him. Then al-Jarud said: Women, you have said a lot to the Commander of the Believers. ‘Umar said: Let her be. Do you know her? This is Khawla bint Tha'labah, the wife of ‘Ubayd ibn al-Samit, whose word was heard by God from above the seven heavens.²² When Khawla brought her dispute with ‘Ubayd ibn al-Samit before the Prophet (SAW). So it is most fitting for ‘Umar to listen to her’.

Women Mujahidah

The Muslim society after the demise of the Prophet (SAW) followed the precedence, in all affairs of life. As such the women also played a proactive part in furthering the cause of the Muslim Community. Umm Hakim married Khalid ibn Saeed at the battlefield of Marjas-Safar. The next day, while the wedding celebrations were continuing, the Roman army launched a surprise attack. Khalid ibn Saeed was martyred in that battle. The fighting was intense and Umm Hakim fought all day, along with the other Muslims. She herself killed seven Roman soldiers in the daylong battle. Ibn Saad reports that in memory of martyred Khalid, she was using the spiked end of the tent stake in which they had consummated their marriage. It was with this spear-like heavy stake that she killed the seven Romans. While she fought, she was wearing a chain armor battle shirt. According to the historians, the battle took place in Muharram in the 14th year of the Hijrah calendar, during the caliphate of ‘Umar.²³

Umm Haram bint Milhan was a woman of great excellence and reputation. Umm Sulaim was her sister. Reports the author of the “*Women Companions of Prophet Umm Haram: Travelling by Sea for Jihad*”: One day the Prophet (SAW) visited Umm Haram and she gave him a meal. He lied down and she examined his head to pick up any stray insect. He dozed off. He then woke up smiling. She asked him the reason for his smile. He said: “I was shown some people of my community going on an expedition of jihad, riding at sea, like kings

on their thrones.” She said: “Messenger of God, pray for me that I will be one of them.” He said: “You are one of them.” He soon was asleep again. Once more he woke up smiling and she asked him why he was smiling. His answer was the same as he gave her the first time. Again she asked him to pray to God to make her one of them. He said: “No. You will be among the first ones.” Anas bin Malik (RA) has narrated this Hadith in *Sahih Bukhari*.

By the time the third Caliph, ‘Uthman ibn Affan, was in power, the Muslims had taken over Syria, Palestine and Iraq. Yet the Byzantine Empire continued to launch raids on the new Muslim land. Some of these raids started from Cyprus, using ships. Hadrat ‘Uthman, therefore, decided to invade Cyprus. He instructed his governor in Syria, Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan to prepare for such an attack. Hadrat Mu‘awiyah built a fleet and sent a force to Cyprus. Umm Haram was all the time looking for the opportunity to join an army traveling by sea. When she realized that preparations were under way for that attack, she decided to join the army. The fleet set off, and when they landed in Cyprus, the Cypriots decided to negotiate peace. A treaty was signed with the Muslim state.

However, Umm Haram was riding an animal in Cyprus when she fell off. Her fall caused her death, and she was buried in Cyprus in year 27 AH. People of Cyprus used to refer to it as ‘the grave of the goodly woman’. Even non-Muslims used to visit her grave and pray for rain near it, knowing that she was a most devout woman. As such we observe that during and after the Prophet (SAW) the Muslim women proactively participated in Jihad.

There are many instances of women participating in Jihad in the early days of Islam. Here we will present a few of them: Ibn Majah and Ahmad (in their narrations) said that Ateyya, the Ansari said: ‘I accompanied the Messenger of Allah (SAW) seven times, guarding the camp, making the food, treating the wounded and caring for the sick’. In fact first martyr among Muslims was a woman: SumayyahbintKhayyat.

The women as councilors and administrators

The Prophet (SAW) used to consult her wives in all important matters of both personal as well as concerning community. His consultation with his wife Umm Salma in a very perilous situation on the conclusion of Treaty of Hudaibiyah is a bold example. 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 three times.

Very distressed, the Prophet 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, but 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. This episode amply demonstrates that the Prophet unhesitatingly sought suggestions from his wives.

The Ashab of the Prophet (SAW) followed the Sunnah. Abdur-Rahman ibn 'Awf consulted the women in their rooms when he was charged of choosing 'Uthman or 'Ali as the third caliph after the death of 'Umar.

The Companions did not hesitate in appointing the deserving women on key administrative posts. Caliph 'Umar appointed Al-Shifa bint 'Abdullah as an administrator in Medina and Samra Bint Nuhayk Al-Asadiyya as a market inspector in Makka. Al-Shifa was among the Muslims who immigrated with the Prophet to Madinah. The Prophet 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 of religion. As she also attended the mosque, she became a good scholar in her own right.

As the Madinah society developed, 'Umar felt that it was important that supervision should be provided in the market place, where people buy and sell. He appointed Al-Shifa as the market controller in Madinah. Her duties were to ensure that business practices should always be consistent with Islam. She would go around the market, making sure that no cheating or tricks took place and that buyer and seller conformed to Islamic values. 'Umar told shopkeepers that if they were in doubt about the legality of a particular transaction, then they should ask Al-Shifa. He trusted her knowledge of Islam. However, should she find difficulty with any problem, she would put the matter to him.

The appointment of Al-Shifa was highly successful. Therefore, when 'Umar felt that it was advantageous to have a market controller, he appointed one in Makkah as well. What is contrary to our perceived ideas about Islamic society is that in Makkah also he appointed a woman, Samra' bint Nuhayk, as market controller.

This would also suggest, to many scholars, that in those early Islamic societies, there were women shoppers and women shopkeepers.

Did ‘Umar ban women from the mosque?

There is an understanding that Hadrat ‘Umar prevented women from attending the mosque. Let’s research the observation, the inference thereof will be quite relevant in assessing the status and role of women during Khulafā’u-ar-Rāshidūn.

KhawlabintQays said: “We were women, in the Mosque (in *Madina al-Munawwara*), who may have mixed with the men at times and perhaps even flirted (*ghazalna*) and even harmed themselves in this intermixing, so ‘Umar said: ‘I swear I shall make free women of you again. ‘So he brought us out (*akhrajana*) of the Mosque.’”²⁴ Otherwise ‘Umar (RA) never prevented nor forbade women from attending the mosque for the five obligatory prayers nor Tarawih. This general permission and conditional prohibition is how he understood the meaning of the Hadith of the Prophet: “Do not forbid the bondswomen of Allah from (going to) the mosques of Allah.” It is also related that he allowed them to pray Tarawih prayers in the Mosque at Madina far from the men and ordered Sulayman ibn Abi Hatma to be Imam for them, at the far end of the Mosque. Similarly, ‘AtikabintZayd the wife of ‘Umar would ask ‘Umar permission to go to Salat in the Masjid and he would remain silent. She used to go out for Salat al-‘Isha and Salat al-Fajr. And the day ‘Umar was stabbed to death in the mosque, she was present.

It is, however, Hadart ‘Aisha (RA) who tended to forbid the women from going to the mosques, including for the five prescribed prayers let alone Tarawih. She gave her reason in the popular statement: “If the Messenger of Allah had seen what the women of our time do, he would have forbidden them to go to the mosques just as the Israelite women were forbidden.”

The majority of the ‘Ulama, if not their Consensus agree - that if women go to mosques - for obligatory prayers or otherwise - then there should be (1) a separate entrance for them and (2) space for prayer and facilities they can use in isolation from mixing with and view by the men.

So Hadrat ‘Umar did not prohibit women from offering prayers in the mosque but only those who stayed there for loitering/relaxation (*istirwah*), not those attending FardSalat. JasserAuda an acclaimed contemporary scholar who writes considerably on the women issues proposes the thesis that can be well inferred

from the very title of his latest book *Reclaiming the Mosque: The Role of Women in Islam's House of Worship*, (2017).

Muhammad's widows

Hadrat 'Aisha was extremely scholarly and inquisitive. Her contribution to the spread of Muhammad's message was extraordinary and she served the Muslim community for 44 years after his 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. She was highly regarded for her intellect and knowledge in various fields, including poetry and medicine, which received plenty of praise by early luminaries, such as the historian Al-Zuhri and her student Urwa ibn al-Zubayr.

Umm Salama also became important transmitters of Hadith. The Hadith stand, second only to the Qur'an, as authoritative texts for Muslims searching for answers to daily questions. Upon his death, the companions of Muhammad (SAW), including his surviving wives, compiled stories of his saying and actions to assist Muslims in understanding how to live pious lives in the model of the Prophet. Because of their unique access to him, Muhammad's wives became particularly important figures in Hadith transmission, solidifying their historic contribution to Islamic law. Women are also important transmitters of Hadith compiled in *Sahih Sittah* (Six Collections of Prophet's Sayings). Ibn Hajr Asqalani places at high citadel the epistle of the female narrator of Hadith in *Bukhari Sharif* namely Bint Ahmad Maruziya.²⁵

Participation of women in politics

According to an opinion the Muslim women engaging in politics is not a new phenomenon and an early example of this is at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) when the leaders of Yathrib sent a party of Bani Khazraj to pledge their allegiance to him. This group was comprised of 62 men and two women who pledged allegiance.²⁶ The pledge of Aqabah is well known to have had both spiritual and political implications.

Women such as Hadrat Khadija and 'A'isha, as well as Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and the thousands later on, as the research like that in *al-Muhadithat* illustrates, that the women became key public figures in the earliest years of Islamic history. However, within the context of Arabian society, patriarchal social structures and attitudes continued to regard women as subordinate to men in many realms of public life. For example, as some important scholars observe, when

‘Aisha challenged the fourth Caliph ‘Ali, at the Battle of the Camel in 656 AD, the ensuing *fitna*—or crisis of Muslim fighting Muslim in warfare—led to a tradition that women should not engage in politics. Although, we see the women continued to play supporting roles in subsequent wars and politics. To conclude with the statement of William Montgomery Watt that “Muhammad, in the historical context of his time, can be seen as a figure that promoted women’s rights and improved things considerably”. He further explains: “at the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible - they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons. Muhammad, however, by instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, gave women basic safeguards.”

Summing it up

The movement of endowing women the position and status that was envisioned in the Ayaat of the Qur’an and actualized by the example (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) continued after his demise. The Khulafā’u-ar-Rāshidūn, the successors of the Prophet, and all other Ashab followed the precedence on women’s status and role, as expected of an exceptional and faithful community. During the period of Khulafā’u-ar-Rāshidūn, the women were provided the due status on the basis of their potential and ability rather than considering their sex. The Muslim women of the period posed questions to the Caliphs wherever they felt need to, not only on the mundane affairs but also religious, and continuously contributed to the public and social discourse without any hindrance. The wife of Hadrat ‘Umar did not hesitate to pose queries on women offering prayers (Salah) in the mosque. Hadrat ‘Umr on his day appointed a women, unhesitatingly, as the market observer, for he found her aptly suited for the job on the basis of her intelligence, aura and the ability to accomplish such an responsibility in the market place. In Hadrat ‘Uthman period we witness a women participating proactively in Jihad (Qital) in a place as far as Cyprus and achieving martyrdom. Thus we see there was no mental snag on Muslim women’s status and position among the Ashab as such she played role in all the affairs of life, within and without their homes.

References and Notes:

¹*Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood.*

²<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abu-Bakr>

³*Ibid.*

⁴Moin Qazi, *Umar Al Farooq: Man and Caliph*. Notion Press. ISBN 9789352061716.

⁵Dr. Muhammad Zaki. *History of Muslim Rule – The Prophet and the Early Rulers*. Google Books

⁶“Alī ibn Abu Talib”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Al-Qur’an, al-Nahl XVI/58-59.

⁹Al-Qur’an, al-Takwir, LXXXI: 8-9.

¹⁰Al-Qur’an, al-Nisa, IV/1. *O people! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and created from it its mate, and propagated from them many men and women. And revere God whom you ask about, and the parents. Surely, God is Watchful over you.*

¹¹Al-Qur’an, al-Ahzab, XXXIII/55.

¹²Mohammad Akram Nadwi. 2007. *Al-Muhadithat-the Women Scholars of Islam*. London: Interface Publications.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa-al-Nihayah*.

¹⁵*Al-Bayhaqi.*

¹⁶*Abu Dawud.*

¹⁷Ibn Hazm, *al-Ihkam fi-Usul al-Ahkam*.

¹⁸Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*.

¹⁹Al-Qur’an, al-Mujadalah LVIII:1-4.

²⁰Al-Qur’an, al-Nisa, IV/20.

²¹Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*.

²²Umar is here referring to the sending down of the opening verses of *al-Mujadalah*.

²³<https://ballandalus.wordpress.com/2014/03/08/15-important-muslim-women-in-history/>

²⁴*Kanz al-‘Ummal* from Ibn Sa’d’s *Tabaqat*.

²⁵Abdul Halim Abu Shiq. 2010. *Aurat Ahdi Risalat Main* (Urdu). Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies.

²⁶<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad>

