

Sayyidatuna Ayesha Bint Abi Bakr: A Concise Biography

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Abstract:

Ummul-Momineen, Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) being the youngest and the most beloved wife of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is an iconic personality of Islamic world. This study revolves around two major parts of Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s life, a biographical approach and her contributions to Islam. The first part is on biographical study which comprehensively covers all the major events of Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s life including her birth, clan, wedding to Prophet Mohammad (SAWW), and relationship to the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The second part which is related to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA)'s contributions to Islam, constitutes her enormous efforts in educating Muslim world, writing hadiths, and playing a leading role after the holy departure of the Prophet Mohammad (SAWW).

Moreover, an attempt has been made to find out the fact about the real age of Sayyida Ayesha (R.A) at the time of her marriage. Most of the Muslim researchers, however, are reluctant to accept the generally accepted view about the age of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) at the time of her marriage.

Keywords: Ayesha Bint Abi Bakr (RA), Biography, Contributions, Islam,

Hadith.

Introduction:

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s first marriage was at the age of 25 to Hazrat Khadijah (RA) who was 40 years old. The wives of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are referred to as Ummahat-al- Momineen (Mothers of Believers)

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in Al-Quran, the Holy Book. Allah, The Lord of the Lords says in the Holy Quran,

“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their (believers’) mothers” (Chapter 33, Verse 6 (Al-Ahzab).

There are eleven (11) Ummahat-al- Momineen; their names are: Hazrat Khadija R.A, Hazrat Saudah R.A, Hazrat Ayesha R.A, Hazrat Hafsa R.A, Hazrat Zainab R.A, Hazrat Umm-e-Salma R.A, Hazrat Javeria R.A, Hazrat Umm-e-Habeeba R.A, Hazrat Safia R.A, Hazrat Memona R.A, Maria (R.A) Al Qibtiyya.

In accordance with the general Islamic credence, these marriages actually happened after the divine revelation based on the sound reasons such as to support the left alone widows of the Sahaba (RA)/ the Companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), building strong relationships with the Sahaba (RA) (The Holy Prophet (PBUH) married with the daughters of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and Hazrat Umar (RA) while Hazrat Uthman (RA) and Hazrat Ali (RA) got married with the daughters of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).), to preach Islam and transfer Islamic knowledge to the other communities through wedlock.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was the most beloved wife of Prophet (PBUH). She was a narrator of ahadith and used to teach Islamic practices to all the Muslim learners. She also played a role in Islamic politics and participated actively in many wars against non-Muslims during spread of Islam. Her contributions for Islam are tremendous.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA):

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was born in late 613 or early 614 (Ibn Saad, 1995). She was the daughter of Hazrat Umm Ruman (RA) and Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), the two of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s most trusted companions. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) belonged to the Quraish tribe. His father was ‘Uthman Abu Quhafah (also called Abu Quhafah) and his mother was Umm-ul-Khair Salma. They both belonged to the Banu Tamim clan of the tribe of the Quraish (Ibni Saad, 1996).

The exact date of birth or year of birth of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) is not confirmed, however, most of the historians are agreed upon 613 or 614 (Al-Nasa'i, 1997) as her year of birth. Tabari in his research on Islamic history, cites a quote of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) that Abu Bakr (RA) had four children and all of them were born during the Jahiliyyah, the pre Islamic

period (Al-Tabari, 1979). Ibn Hajar states that Hazrat Fatimah (RA) was five years older than Hazrat Ayesha (RA), whereas, Hazrat Fatimah (RA) was born at the time the Ka`bah was rebuilt and the age of Holy Prophet (PBU) was 35 years (Al-Asqalani, 15th century).

Marriage of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH):

When the boycott was finally lifted in the tenth year of the Call, Hazrat Khadijah (RA), the Holy Prophet (PBUH)'s beloved wife passed away. As marriage is a duty in Islam, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) began to pray for guidance about his second marriage. Allah showed him through a dream that He had chosen Hazrat Ayesha (RA), the daughter of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) to be his wife.

In the Islamic tradition, the closeness of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) suggested “a new basis for communal relationships forged in faith, rather than blood.” (Ibid, 32). The strength of the relationship between Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) strengthened the relationship between Hazrat Ayesha (RA) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), considered to be the “truthful man,” means that Ayesha (RA) has been titled “daughter of the truthful man.” (Spellberg, 1994). While other wives did, in fact, contribute a lot to Islam and are revered in the contemporary era, Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s own lineage, spiritual connection, and intimate practices set her (RA) aside from the other wives (RA).

Age of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) at the Time of Marriage:

According to a hadith reported by Bukhari, “the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) married Ayesha (RA) when she was a girl of six years of age, and he (PBUH) consumed [i.e., consummated] that marriage when she was nine years old” (Al-Bukhari, 1997). He (PBUH) was at this time in his early fifties. Karen Armstrong asserts that “Tabari says that she was so young that she stayed in her parents’ home and the marriage was consummated there later when she had reached puberty” (Armstrong, 1992). Unfortunately, her readers are unlikely to have volumes of Tabari on hand to check her assertion; contrary to Armstrong’s account, the Muslim historian quotes Ayesha (RA) thusly: “The Messenger of God married me when I was seven; my marriage was consummated when I was nine” (Al-Tabari, 1987).

Geldart in his book *Islam (Exploring Religions)* writes, “In 620 Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s wife Hazrat Khadija (RA) and uncle (Hazrat Abu Talib) died. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA)'s daughter Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was engaged to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), however it was decided that the

actual marriage ceremony would be held later. In 620 Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) was the first person to testify to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s Isra and Mi'raj (Night Journey)" (Geldart, 2000).

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Since, the exact year of Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s birth is not confirmed, thereby, it has raised a huge debate not only in Islamic world but in the entire globe about the age of Hazrat Ayesha (RA), particularly, at the time of wedding to the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Many western scholars pinpointed this marriage as a child marriage, because according to the World Health Organization (WHO) early marriage and child marriage, a marriage before the age of 18 are similar (Sarker and Rahman, 2012). In the light of resolution of early marriage and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is every human being below the age of eighteen years (UNICEF, 2001).

The Muslim scholars, irrespective of sects, agreed that for the marriage, the age of a girl or boy is not confined. Nevertheless, for a girl, mental and physical ability is restricted to the consummation of the marriage. None of the Islamic traditions that stick to 18 years before marrying a girl but emphasis was made on physical and psychological maturity on the bride. "Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said: 'If the "jariyah" (young girl) reaches nine years, then she is a woman". Al Munzhiri (the hadeeth expert) said: Narrated by Tirmizhi and Nasaai; Al Tirmithi said that Umayyah daughter of Abi Qays from Ghufar said: 'I am among the women who accompanied Hazrat Safiyyah (RA), in her marriage ceremony to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and I heard her say: I had not reached seventeen, the day I entered unto the Prophet of Allah (PBUH).'

For her own marriage, Hazrat Ayesha (RA) reported that Allah's Apostle (May Peace Be Upon Him) married her when she was seven years old, and she was taken to his house as a bride when she was nine, and her dolls were with her; and when he (the Holy Prophet (PBUH) died, she was eighteen years old (Sahih Muslim, 3311). In accordance with these two

quoted Ahadits of hazrat Ayesa (RA), even if her marriage was consummated at the age of nine (09), yet it may not be characterized as child marriage because the girl of 09 years is assumed as “jariyah” (young girl).

But Ibn Hajar cites that the Muslim scholars deduced from the context of this hadith. According to him, the permission to play with dolls regardless of age as a means to learn about matters of the home and raising children (Al- ‘Asqalani, 2013).

“Abu Dawud and Nasai’ related that Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said: when ‘Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) came from the battle of Tabuk or Khaybar, He (PBUH) uncovered the curtained area above my dolls. He (PBUH) asked ‘What is this Ayesha (RA)?’ Ayesha (RA) said ‘My dolls.’

The historians are agreed upon the age of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) as 14 years, in the battle of Khaybar, and in the battle of Tabuk absolutely more. Therefore, this hadith contradicts the “minority” opinion referred to in the previous hadith, because Hazrat Ayesha (RA) here is seen to have toys and dolls when she was at least 14 years old, and far beyond puberty (Al- ‘Asqalani, 2013). Hence, it may be interpreted on the bases of these firm sources of history that Hazrat Ayesha (RA) must have reached the age of puberty when her marriage was consummated, moreover, she was also a physically and psychologically mature adult.

Islam gives instructions of early marriage to discourage illegitimate sexual relations. Since puberty marks the onset of developing sexual urges, Messenger of Allah (PBUH) invigorated youngsters to marry. He (PBUH) says “O young people! Whoever among you can marry, should marry (Sahih Muslim, 74) ”. In the light of this Hadith, it may be stated that the early marriage is encouraged by Islam, but it doesn’t restrict any specific age for it.

In this research there is an extensive study on the age of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) at the time of marriage to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), so that the issues concerned with the child marriage, may be addressed.

Sayyida Ayesha (RA) as Beloved Wife of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH):

On one occasion someone inquired the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), “O Messenger of Allah! From among the people, whom do you love the most?” The Prophet (SAWW) of Allah (PBUH) responded, “Ayesha (RA).” He (SAWW) was then asked, “O Messenger of Allah! Who is it from among the men?” The Messenger (PBUH) of Allah, the Rehman, responded, “The father of ‘Ayesha (RA)’ (Sunan At-Tirmizi, 605).

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) remained Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s very closer to the heart of the Prophet Mohammad (SAWW). When the Last

Holy Prophet (SAWW) turned sick and His (SAWW) departure from this mortal world was obvious, He (SAWW) kept on knowing from Ummahat-ul-Momineen (RA) about his next stay as per turn. The Ummahat-ul-Momineen (RA) knew that The Messenger (SAWW) of Allah, The Rehman, wanted to spend these departure moments with the beloved Hazrat Ayesha (RA), therefore, with the mutual consent, all the Ummahat-ul-Momineen withdrew from their turn and the Prophet (SAWW) stayed at the apartment of Sayyadituna Ayesha (RA) and He (SAWW) spent His (SAWW) last days with Hazrat Ayesha (RA) (Abbott, 1942; Lings, 1983).

Prominence of Hazrat Ayesha (RA):

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (The Truthful Woman), being the daughter of “The Truthful Man” Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (RA) has been an iconic personality of Islamic World (Spellberg, 1994).

Firstly, the eminent scholar, Muhammed Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, mentioned referring to her position in the knowledgeable persons “the knowledge of Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was put on the right scale, and the knowledge of all women, including the other wives of Prophet (SAWW) was put on the left scale, Ayesha (RA)’s knowledge would dominate in its superiority” (Al- ‘Asqalani, 15th century). Abu Musa al-Ashari came with another description that gives a picture of her ability in the solving of logic or jurisprudential issues. “As the Companions of God’s Messenger, whenever we came across a complicated issue, we put forth it to the attention of Ayesha (RA) because she always had the information that could solve a difficulty” (Thirmudhi, 1996). Ata Abu Rabah described about her firm and sound view points in the various affairs as “Ayesha (RA) was the most intelligent, scholarly person and the one who had the best thoughts and opinions among the people”.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was discovered to be a renowned source of hadiths, due to her qualities of intelligence and memory (Elsadda, 2001). Hazrat Ayesha (RA) conveyed ideas expressing Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s practice (Sunnah). She expressed herself as a role model to women, which can also be seen within some traditions attributed to her. The traditions regarding Ayesha habitually opposed ideas unfavorable to women in efforts to elicit socialchange (Geissinger, 2017).

Umm-ul-Momineen Hazrat Ayesha Sadiqa (RA) quoted 2210 Hadiths. She (RA) had a vast knowledge of realities of Shariat. Her (RA) popularity and greatness in eloquence and knowledge of Fiqha (Islamic Jurisprudence) is proverbial. She (RA) used to give Fatwa (Legal verdict

decree) Hazrat Umer (RA) and Hazrat Usman (RA) used to consult her (RA) in matters related to the state. She (RA) was adept in Tafseer, Fiqha, verse and literature, Hilal and Haram (lawful and unlawful), religious duties and the knowledge of genealogy. Her (RA) sayings about Tafseer (Explanation of Holy Quran) and Fiqha are a great treasure of Islamic literature. (Tirmzi, Abwab Alber Walsala, 1/689.).

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Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (RA)'s Contributions to Islam:

Most of the historians represent Hazrat Ayesha (RA) as an authentic Hadith transmitter and is included in the group of those Sahaba Karam (RA) (Companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)) who have transmitted over 1000 hadiths. The traditions ascribed to her are categorized as the musnad and the musannaf.

In the Muwatta, Malik highlights her grip on the religious practices and teachings of Hajj (pilgrimage) rituals to the pilgrims with great accuracy. It is to be mentioned that some pilgrims who were learning the Hajj rituals from Hazrat Ayesha (RA) were only a group of women. In Sahih-al- Bukhari, Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s depiction is as a trustworthy source for reporting the authentic rituals of Hajj by witnessing the Prophet Mohammad (SAWW)'s Hajj performance (Geissinger, 2017).

Knowledge was the one of the foremost attribute of Hazrat Ayesha (RA), as it is widely recognized her depth in Holy Quran, Hadith, Tafseer, Fiqh, poetry, medicine, history and so on. From the adolescence until the final gasp, she kept in her life character of addressing and examination, and the adventure of looking for the truth, made her a leading figure in the world of knowledge and of its exchange in a better way. She did not narrow down her expertise only to the Holy Quran and Hadith but also prolonged it to medical science and poetry. Hisham Ibn Urwa says, "I did not see anyone more well-informed than Ayesha (RA) in medical sciences, Fiqh or poetry" (Abbott, 1942).

One can assume her magnanimous contributions by exchanging and inculcating the valuable pearls of knowledge to the thousands of the people. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) is the one who devoted the whole life for the core target of teaching and training of the Islamic spirit. The presence of the Prophet

(SAWW) in the center of her life opened a door for questioning, analysis, assimilation, contemplation, clarification and learning about everything with its intimate details that happened around her.

One can accept her selfless commitments and generous contributions by acknowledging her active participation in sharing the knowledge of Islam to the general population. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) is the person who dedicated the entire life for Islam with her focus on educating Muslims and preparing them to practice Islam in true spirit. The imminence of the Prophet (SAWW) opened an entryway for questioning, analysis, assimilation, contemplation, clarification and learning about everything that occurred around her.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was commonly accepted as an educator not only for the common people but even the renowned companions of the Holy Prophet (SAWW) also got benefitted from this ocean of knowledge. The gleams of her knowledge spreaded to towns after towns and countries after countries and her students travelled around the world for the spread of Islam. The room of Hazrat Ayesa (RA) was considered as the first Islamic academy in the world after Masjid-un-Nabavi (SAWW) and as the most influenced academic center in the history of Islamic. After the famous Camel Battle, Hazrat Ayesha (RA) confined herself spending much time on educating the people by narrating Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), issuing fatawa and answering queries and teaching them about his actions and movements on particular occasions.

It is very significant that she utilized maximum opportunities to educating and teaching. She used to give the lectures for whom came to visit the Medina and to pay the homage on the Holy Prophet (SAWW)'s tomb. Many people of various nationalities benefitted from these classes.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) as Role Model for Modern World Women:

In the current modern era, many Muslim women, round the globe, are studying hadith, Quranic exegesis, and fiqh. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) is an iconic Muslim personality who had expertise in the said subject and as an inspiration, modern Muslim women may follow her.

It is an absolute fact that Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was the most beloved better half of our Prophet Mohammad (SAWW). Her active participation in the affairs of general public and politics gave her an extraordinary position in the history of Islam. Before the Dawn of Islam, there were some tribes where the hierarchy was traced through mother's line which clearly exhibit the active role of women in dealing with the society as a leader (Elsadda, 2001).

Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s education and training was fostered by the Holy Prophet (PBUH). She was taken into account as an individual with superlative knowledge in matters related to history, poetry, medicine, Hadith and Quranic interpretation. She also made legal decisions (fatwa) on the basis of her firm Islamic knowledge and delivered public speeches with fluency and confidence.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) participated in early wars with non-Muslim Arabs (Pagans), with the Holy Prophet (PBUH). It is witnessed by many Companions (RA) of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that she was giving water to the injured Muslim combatants (Abdelkader, 2012). She was not involved in politics, right after her wedding with the Holy Prophet (SAWW) because she was very young for that but her political training was done by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and she literally started her political career right after the death of Hazrat Uthman (RA), the second Caliph of Islam (Elsadda, 2001).

Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s life is a splendid model for all current era women for gaining brilliance in learning, participating in politics and even take the charge of military leadership. Her eloquent speeches at public, commanding the troops on the battlefield and teaching the practices of Islam to man and women, both genders.

Without a doubt, Islam emphasizes on providing the due rights to women and the Islamic history is abundant with the golden pages of women empowerment. Hazrat Ayesha (RA)'s exemplary persona had set a paradigm for all women of the Muslim community across the globe to go for seeking every kind of healthy knowledge, play active role in politics, judiciary, medicine, in fact, every sphere of life.

Death of Hazrat Ayesha (RA):

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) left this mortal world at the age of, most probably, 64, on Ramadan 17 in 58th AH (Al- Nasai, 1997). The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)'s Companion Hazrat Abu Hurairah (RA) led her funeral prayer and her last abode was Jannat-al-Baqi (Ibn Khatir, n.d.).

Knowledge was the one of the foremost attribute of Sayyidath Ayesha (RA) and it is widely recognized her depth in Quran, Hadith, Tafsir, Fiqh, poetry, medicine, history and so on. From the childhood until the last breath, she kept in her life a character of questioning and contemplation, and the journey of seeking the reality, that made her a leading figure in the

world of knowledge and she will always remain a role model for entire Muslim community.

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