

Ḥaẓrat Khadijatu'l-Kubrā, *'alayha's-salām*

Imām-i zamān, Mawlānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī gave the following guidance in September, 1960 to the Tariqah and Religious Education Board, then called the Ismailia Association, at Karachi, Pakistan:

“Now to some of the work which the Association has ahead of it. The most important problem by far for us today is to create students who are capable of going back and of reading these texts in Arabic, of reading them in Persian, of reading them in Urdu, of reading them in Gujrati, of reading them in any language in which they have been written. More than ever today we must be able to publish authoritative documents based on primary sources. There is no point in us rereading and rereading and rereading third hand or fourth hand documents. We can only get tied up in other peoples' interpretations, get further and further away from the original concept and thoroughly muddle and cloud what should be the truth.”

The profound wisdom of this *farmān* has become more and more evident as the years have gone by and the academic world has become more aware of the biases and misrepresentations that are present in the books available on Islam. The matter becomes even more serious and urgent in the context of the esoteric interpretation of Islam. The following article is a humble attempt to demonstrate the wide gap between the primary sources and the ‘third hand or fourth hand documents’, as well as the great difference in the exoteric and esoteric representations of historical events and personalities.

Pick up any book on the history of Islam and what do we learn about Ḥaẓrat Khadijah?

- That she was a very successful business woman who had been twice widowed
- That she was fifteen years older than the holy Prophet Muḥammad when they married and that she proposed marriage to him through an intermediary
- She was the first woman to convert to Islam

However, when the trouble is taken to refer to primary sources,¹ a very different picture emerges about Ḥaẓrat Khadijah's status and contribution to the history of our holy Prophet and Islam.

Ḥaḏrat Khadijah was the first life-companion² of Prophet Muḥammad Mustafā', the Chief of Messengers and the Seal of Prophets, may Allah's peace and salutation be upon him and his progeny. She is renowned in the history of the True Religion (*da'wat-i haqq*) for her great services. Her services impacted two cycles, namely the one before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad and the one which he inaugurated.

She was the daughter of Ḥaḏrat Khuwaylid, the son of Asad, son of °Abdu'l-°Uzzā, son of Mawlānā Quṣayy. Her mother was Fāṭimah who was the daughter of Zā'idah, son of al-Aṣamm, son of Rawāḥa, son of Ḥajr, son of °Abd, son of Ma'īs, son of °Āmir, son of Mawlānā Lu'ayy. Mawlānā Quṣayy and Mawlānā Lu'ayy are *mustaqarr* Imams of the fifth cycle, therefore her lineage is linked with the holy Prophet's on her father's side with the fourth ancestor and on her mother's side with the ninth ancestor. In other words, she shared the same blessed ancestry as the holy Prophet Muḥammad as both their families are the direct descendants of Ḥaḏrat Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him.

She was born in 555 AD. From her very childhood she displayed signs of greatness and leadership. In recognition of her purity, nobility and qualities of leadership, she was popularly known as “*Tāhirah* (pure)” and “*Sayyidatu'n-nisā'* (Chief of the ladies)”. In addition to her ethical attributes God had endowed her with material plenty. According to the author of *Nāsikhu't-tawārikh*, Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī Sipehr, she possessed 80,000 camels! She was the chief of the successful businesswomen of Makkah, which at the time of the Prophet's birth, was a flourishing trading city and a centre of pilgrimage, etc. She was endowed with an even more significant attribute: her religious character. She was among the *ḥudūd-i din* (religious hierarchy) of the fifth cycle of the True Religion, about whom the Qur'an says: “Those whom We have given the Book, recognise him (the Prophet) as they recognise their children.” (2:146; 6:20)

This article relies heavily on a primary source for Ḥaḏrat Khadijah's religious status. This source, *Sarā'ir wa-asrāru'n-nuṭaqā'* is written by Sayyidnā Ja'far bin Manṣūr al-Yaman, a great Fatimid scholar and writer. In it, he says that she was a highly elevated dignitary of religion. She was Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib's *ḥujjat*. Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib³, whose birth names were °Abd Munāf and °Imrān,⁴ was the final *mustaqarr* Imam of the cycle of Prophet Jesus. His position was that of “*sābiq*” i.e., the

manifestation of the Universal Intellect and Ḥaẓrat Khadijah was “*tāli*” i.e., the manifestation of the Universal Soul. In other words she was *ḥujjat-i sāhibu’l-waqt*. This means that the Prophet progressed on the ladder of *ḥudūd* and received spiritual knowledge from Ḥaẓrat Khadijah before progressing to the stage of receiving it directly from Ḥaẓrat Abū Ṭālib, *‘alayhi’s-salām*.

In order to understand *da`wat-i ḥaqq* and *ḥudūd-i dīn*, it is important to understand that the light of Imamāt has functioned in two positions from the time of Ḥaẓrat Ibrāhīm to the time of Ḥaẓrat Muḥammad: permanent (*mustaqarr*) Imamāt and temporary or entrusted (*mustawda‘*) Imamāt. The line of permanent Imamāt worked secretly and the line of temporary Imamāt openly, for the True Religion. After Ḥaẓrat Ibrāhīm his elder son, Ḥaẓrat Ismā‘īl was the *mustaqarr* or permanent Imam and *mustaqarr* Imamāt continued through his son, Mawlānā Qaydār till Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib. Their spiritual status is demonstrated by the well-known story of the miracle at the time of Mawlānā ‘Abdu’l-Muṭṭalib, when the Ethiopian general Abrahātu’l Ashram attacked Makkah. The miracle is also mentioned in *Sūratu’l-Fīl* in the holy Qur’ān.

The chain of *mustaqarr* Imamāt is not mentioned in Isma‘īli books only. It is also mentioned in other books, such as ‘Abdu’l-Karīm al-Shahrastānī’s *al-Milal wa’n-niḥal*, in the second part of which he writes that the Light (*Nūr*) which descended from Ḥaẓrat Ādam to Ḥaẓrat Ibrāhīm, was split into two parts: one continued in the children of Israel (another name of Ḥaẓrat Isaac) and the other in the children of Ismā‘īl. The light in the children of Israel functioned openly and is usually referred to in history as the Prophets of Israel, whereas the light in the children of Ismā‘īl worked secretly. Shahrastānī further adds that in history Ḥaẓrat Ismā‘īl’s progeny are known as “*Ālu’llāh*” or “*Ahlu’llāh*” and Ḥaẓrat Isaac’s descendants are “*Ālu Ya`qub, Ālu Mūsā, Ālu Hārūn*”. The hidden work of *mustaqarr* Imams is also highlighted by the following *Ḥadīth* of the holy Prophet, in which he says:

“*Yā ‘Aliyyu kunta ma`al-anbiyā’i sirran wa ma`i jahran* (O ‘Ali you were hidden with all the Prophets but with me you became manifest)”.

To revert to the main focus of this paper, the holy Prophet and Ḥaẓrat Khadijah by virtue of their ancestry belonged to the True Religion of God, as He says in the Qur’ān: “Verily Abraham was an *ummah* (nation) obedient to Allah, by nature

upright, and he was not of the polytheists; thankful for His bounties. He chose him and guided him unto a straight path. And We gave him good in the world, and in the Hereafter he is among the righteous. And afterward We inspired (*awḥaynā*) you (Muḥammad) that you follow the religion of Abraham, as one by nature upright (*ḥanīf*) and he was not of the polytheists.” (*Sūrah* 16, āyats 120-123)

Further He says in the Qur’ān: “And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then you will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muḥammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the polytheists.” (2:135)

It should be understood from the above discussion that the Arabian peninsula was home to a number of beliefs and practices – there were certainly some Jews and Christians as well as pagans and idol worshippers. But there were also the *ḥanīfs* who were following the religion of Ḥaẓrat Ibrāhīm with its belief in the Oneness of God. It was this religion, which continued in his direct descendants, the families of the *mustaqarr* Imams, and these are the families of the holy Prophet and Ḥaẓrat Khadijah.

In esoteric literature, Ḥaẓrat Khadijah is not simply an ordinary *ḥanīf*, but among the spiritually elevated *ḥudūd-i dīn* who could see both the physical and spiritual worlds, whom God describes in the Qur’ān as those who could recognise the Prophet as they recognised their own children. She could judge the holy Prophet’s spiritual position and his destiny as the next *nāṭiq* or the speaking Prophet, as mentioned in *Nāsikhū’-t-tawārikh* that when the holy Prophet after receiving the first revelation returned home, she looked at him and enquired about the light, which she saw on his face. He replied: “This is the light of Prophethood, say: *Lā ilāha illa’llāh, Muḥammadu’r-Rasūlu’llāh.*” Ḥaẓrat Khadijah replied: “It is years since I know you as a Prophet.” Then she recited the *shahādah*.⁵

In this context, very different from the usual story, Ḥaẓrat Abū Ṭālib arranged her marriage to the Prophet physically and spiritually, and in the *khutbah* he recited he indicated to the Prophet’s future position:

“Praise belongs to God, Who made us to be the off-spring of Abraham and of the seed of Ismā‘īl and of the stock of Ma‘add and of the race of Muḍar. He made us the caretakers of His House and administrators of His Sanctuary, which He made for us a house to which [people] make pilgrimage and a secure Sanctuary. He made us rulers of the people and blessed us in our country in which we dwell. Then this my nephew,

Muḥammad, the son of my brother ʿAbdu’llāh is not weighed against a man of Quraysh but weighs more than him in eminence, nobility, excellence and intellect, nor is compared with anyone but [proves to] be greater than him. He has no equal among the people, even though in terms of wealth he is in straitened circumstances. However, wealth is indeed a vanishing shadow, an ever-changing thing and something borrowed which demands to be returned. And Muḥammad is the one whose kinship you know. He has a desire for Khadījah and Khadijah too, has a desire for him. We have come to ask you for her hand in marriage in accordance with her consent and decree. And the dowry that you have asked for now and in the future is upon me in my property. And henceforth, by the Lord of this House, he has great news, a universal religion, a perfect opinion and a majestic and grand importance.”⁶

The phrase in the *khutbah* “he is in straitened circumstances” shows that economically speaking the Prophet was not strong. However, marriage to Ḥazrat Khadījah solved this problem and he could concentrate entirely on his spiritual progress, attaining the position of the sixth *nāṭiq* and the Seal of the Prophets. This is referred to in the Qur’ān: “Did He not find you destitute and enrich you?” (93:8). The holy Prophet started his mission of inviting people to the True Religion and in this Divine mission he had the unfailing support, understanding and love of Ḥazrat Khadījah, who was the first to support his mission and declare her faith in him.

At this point it is important to rectify a wrong concept, that is, that Ḥazrat Khadījah was first among those who used to worship idols and then she became the first woman to accept Islam. This wrong concept, as has already been indicated, is based on a superficial understanding that before the Prophet’s advent all the people in the Arabian peninsula were idolaters in the time of *Jāhiliyyah* or Ignorance. As has been discussed earlier, there was a diversity of beliefs and practices in Arabia of this time. More important from the point of view of this article, the *daʿwat-i ḥaqq* or the invitation to the True Religion had continued under the *mustaqarr* Imams and was known as the *millat-i Ibrāhīma* or *dīn-i ḥanīf* (cf. 16:120-23; 2:135). Therefore, although the majority of the Arabs were idol-worshippers, there was a minority, which continued to follow the True Religion under the guidance of the *mustaqarr* Imams. Mawlānā Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq says: “The Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) is of two kinds: the ignorance of disbelief (*kufr*) and the ignorance of deviation (*ẓalāl*)”.⁷ Sayyidnā al-Muʿayyad fi’d-Dīn Shirāzī explaining this saying, says: “The ignorance of disbelief is

that which used to be prior to the advent of Prophet Muḥammad and the ignorance of deviation is not recognising the Imam of the time”. This is supported by the speech of God, as He says: “Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizement of the time of the former Ignorance.” (33:33). The former is the ignorance of disbelief. Then the former necessarily requires a later, and that is the ignorance of deviation.⁸ That is to say that, the term Ignorance is given on the basis of the majority and not that the true faith did not exist at all in Arabia.

In the context of the above explanation, there are two groups of people who declare their faith in the Prophet’s mission. The first is the group who do so in the light of recognition, that is, those who “recognise the Prophet as they recognise their own children”; the second group were idol worshippers to begin with and who later came into the fold of Islam. There is a world of difference in the acceptance of Islam by these two groups. Thus, if somebody includes Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib,⁹ Ḥaḏrat Khadijah or Mawlānā °Alī¹⁰ in the second group, they invite the criticism of perpetrating a great injustice and stand accused of great deviation. The first group’s acceptance of Islam, when Prophet Muḥammad began his mission, was in the sense that they, despite great opposition and tribulations, assisted him in his mission with all the physical, spiritual and intellectual means at their disposal. For the second group, accepting Islam was a totally new thing. Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib, Ḥaḏrat Khadijah and Mawlānā °Alī indeed belonged to the first group.

Another popular misconception, which needs to be laid to rest, is that when Prophet Muḥammad began to receive the Divine revelations in the cave of Mt. Hira, outside Makkah, he sought solace and comfort with Ḥaḏrat Khadijah. In the exoteric books of history this time is always portrayed as though neither the Prophet nor Ḥaḏrat Khadijah were aware of what was happening to him. Let us look at a complete quotation from the book *Muhammad – A western attempt to understand Islam* by Karen Armstrong, which as stated by the author, relies heavily on the *Sira of Ibn Ishāq* translated by A. Guillaume as the *The Life of Muhammad*. The quotation in full is as follows:

“Khadija hastened to reassure him. God did not act in such a cruel and arbitrary way. Muhammad had tried honestly to live in the way that God required and in return God would never allow him to fail: ‘You are kind and considerate toward your kin. You help the poor and forlorn and bear their burdens. You are striving to restore the high moral qualities that your people have lost. You honour the guest and go to the assistance of those in distress. This cannot be, my dear.’ To reassure him further, she

suggested that they consult her cousin Waraqa, who was learned in the scriptures and could give them more expert advice. Waraqa had no doubts at all. ‘Holy! Holy! He cried at once: ‘If you have spoken the truth to me, O Khadija, there has come to him the greatest *namus* who came to Moses aforetime, and lo, he is the prophet of his people.’”¹¹

The dimension given in the esoteric literature is very different. Ḥaẓrat Khadijah was the *hujjat* of the Lord of the time and as such she was in charge of 30 *da‘is* who worked under her to spread the True Religion. Waraqa ibn Nawfal, her cousin was actually one of the *da‘is* working under her supervision. Thus, the story as described in the exoteric books of history, which form the basis of much of the history written and available to us, does not do justice to the real status of Ḥaẓrat Khadijah. There seem to be grains of truth in such stories, but they seem to have been presented according to the respective author’s understanding of Islam. For instance, again in Shi‘i sources, Waraqa was informed not to seek any guidance, but only for the sake of information.¹²

She was physically and spiritually a source of peace and happiness for the holy Prophet. Her spiritual elevation is evident by the many *Aḥādith*, for example: “There are four pre-eminent women in the world: Khadijah bint-i Khuwaylid, Fāṭimah bint-i Muḥammad, Maryam bint-i ‘Imrān and Asiyah bint-i Muzāḥim, wife of the Pharoah.” In another *Ḥadith*, the holy Prophet says: “God gave me fermented bread, silken clothes and married me to Khadijah for whom I bore love in my heart.” During her lifetime, the holy Prophet, contrary to the custom of the time, did not take another wife. She was his sole life companion and this proves the profound respect that he had for her. There are differences amongst historians regarding the number of their children, however they are unanimous about Ḥaẓrat Qasim and Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah. Ḥaẓrat Qasim passed away in his childhood, but Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah survived her father by about six months. She was part of his *nūrāni ahl al-bayt* (Qur’ān 3:61; 33:33) as well as his physical *ahl al-bayt*. Her greatest attribute is that she is the mother of our Imams, because the line of Imams continues through her progeny. Quoting Qur’ānic *āyat* (33:40): “Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah is aware of all things”, ‘Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr Hunzai says it is crystal clear that the cycle of Prophethood came to an end with the holy Prophet, but the cycle of manifest Imamāt started with Mawlānā ‘Ali and Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah.

The holy Prophet used to stand up when Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah entered the room and holding her hand would kiss her forehead and sit her down in her place. In another place, °Allāmah Naṣīr Hunzai does the *ta'wil* of the same verse as: “it is a clear wisdom-filled allusion to the fact that his light had transferred to Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah and Mawlānā °Alī (may peace be upon them both).” In view of the great spiritual and religious status of Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah when her descendants, the pure Imams, ruled North Africa, Egypt and other parts of the Middle East they called it the Fatimid Caliphate. The worldly and spiritual achievements of Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah’s progeny sheds honour on Ḥaẓrat Khadijah, who is their illustrious forebear.

Ḥaẓrat Khadijah’s Companionship on High:

In 619 AD Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib and Ḥaẓrat Khadijatu’l-kubrā joined Companionship on High one after the other. Both these personalities had helped the Prophet spiritually and physically and had protected him from his opponents and shared in his seven-year exile in the desert. The Prophet was greatly grieved by these sad losses and he named this year °*Āmu’l-ḥuzn*, that is, the Year of Sadness. After their departure from this world, the Prophet’s adversaries intensified their enmity and even plotted to assassinate him. However, according to the Divine programme, he migrated to Yathrib, later re-named *Madīnatu’n-Nabī* (City of the Prophet). Islam started to progress from here and became a universal religion, about which Ḥaẓrat Abū Ṭālib had prophesied in his *khuṭbah* at the time of the Prophet’s marriage to Ḥaẓrat Khadijah. The holy Prophet continued to remember these two extraordinary personalities for the rest of his life.

¹ This article is based on an Urdu article written by Dr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai based on the primary source of Sayyidnā Ja'far bin Maṣū'ir al-Yaman's "Sarā'ir wa-asrāru'n-nuṭaqā".

² This epithet is preferred to the use of 'wife' to convey her exalted status in the life of our holy Prophet.

³ Abū Ṭālib was his *kunyā*, that is, in Arab society after the birth of the first son, fathers and mothers customarily take an honorary title. Literally it means father of Ṭālib, who was his eldest son.

⁴ See also Question 83 in *Hundred Questions, Part IV* by °Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr Hunzai, (Karachi, 1978), pp 22-24.

⁵ Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī Sipehr, *Nāsikhū't-tawārikh: Ḥaẓrat °Īsā* (a.s.), (Tehran, 1352 Solar), III, 380. ⁶ *Nāsikhū't-tawārikh*, III, 332; °Abd Allāh al-Khanīzī, *Abū Ṭālib: Mu'min Quraysh* (Beirut, 1978), p. 141.

⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad fi'd-Dīn Shirāzī, *al-Majālisu'l-Mu'ayyadiyyah* (Oxford, 1407 A.H.), II, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 5.

⁹ This misconception about Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib can be found in the most respectable books of history. Martin Lings book "Muhammad – his life based on the earliest sources" (Islamic Texts Society, 1991) informs the readers that "This book was awarded a prize by the government of Pakistan and selected as the best biography of the Prophet in English at the National Seerat Conference held in 1983 at Islamabad. ... In 1990, after the book had attracted the attention of the Azhar University in Cairo, the author received a decoration from President Mubarak [of Egypt]." On page 50, it is stated: "Abū Ṭālib made no objection to the Islam of his two sons Ja'far and °Alī, but for himself he said he was not prepared to forsake the religion of his forefathers".

On page 52 is recounted the story of how the leaders of the Quraysh came to Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib to persuade him to bring pressure on the Prophet to stop his mission. "But the Prophet answered him saying: 'I swear by God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on condition that I abandon this course before He hath made it victorious, or I have perished therein, I would not abandon it.' Then, with tears in his eyes, he rose to his feet and turned to go, but his uncle called him back: 'Son of my brother,' he said, 'go thou and say what thou wilt, for by God I will never forsake thee on any account.'"

On pages 96-97 is described the final moments of Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib, when the leaders of Quraysh had once again come to seek his help to stop the Prophet. It reads: "When they had gone Abū Ṭālib said to the Prophet: 'Son of my brother, thou didst not, as I saw it, ask of them anything out of the way.' These words filled the prophet with longing that he should enter Islam. 'Uncle,' he said, 'say thou the words, that through them I may intercede for thee on the day of the Resurrection.' 'Son of my brother,' he said, 'if I did not fear that Quraysh would think I had but said the words in dread of death, then would I say them. Yet would my saying them be but to please thee.' Then, when death drew near to Abū Ṭālib, °Abbas saw him moving his lips and he put his ear close to him and listened and then he said: 'My brother hath spoken the words thou didst bid him speak.' But the Prophet said: 'I heard him not.'"

These long quotations have been included here to show how the misconceptions about Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib are being perpetuated by such histories based on the earliest sources in Islam. In the body of the article it has been shown by quoting Qur'ānic references that the close family of the Prophet were following the *din-i Ibrāhīm*, the central belief of which was the Oneness of God. When Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib is supposed to have stated (see above quotation of page 50) that he was not prepared to forsake the religion of his forefathers, he appears to be saying that the Prophet was bringing a new religion, whereas according to the Qur'ān itself, Ḥaẓrat Ibrāhīm was a "Muslim" (one who had surrendered to God).

The scenario of Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib's deathbed and his refusal to recite the *Shahādah* goes against the grain of esoteric teachings about the continuity of the True Religion through the *mustaqarr* Imams. The lesson to be learnt is that the earliest sources, such as Ibn Ishāq (d. c. 767), Ibn Sa'd (d. 845), at-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and al-Wāqidi (d. c. 820) were histories compiled during the time of the Umayyads or the Abbasids, who were the sworn opponents of the Prophet's successors from his *ahl al-bayt*.

Once again, reference to primary sources paints an altogether different picture. Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib is famous for his poetry and he himself writes: "*Wa laqad °alimtu bi-anna dina Muḥammadin, Min khayri adyāni'l-bariyyati dina* = Indeed I have known that Muḥammad's religion, as a religion is the best of the religions of the people." (Quoted in *Abū Ṭālib – Mu'minu Quraysh*, by °Abd Allāh Khanīzī (Beirut, 1978), p. 161.

¹⁰ See also Question 94 in *Hundred Questions, Part IV* by °Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr Hunzai, (Karachi, 1978), pp 47-50.

¹¹ Guillaume, A. (trans. And ed.), *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (London, 1955), p. 84.

¹² *Nāsikhū't-tawārikh*, III, 380.