

Hazart Bibi Khadijah:
A Woman with a Veil of Fortune, Intellect, and
Enlightenment

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has been put in every heart” ~ Mawlana Rumi*

“Islam did not rise except through Ali’s sword and Khadijah’s wealth”

Saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

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Woman. What images appear in your mind when you hear the word *woman*? A woman may be understood according to the role that she may be playing in her life – a devoted daughter, a charming sister, a modest wife, or a caring mother. These threads are part of the fabric of a woman’s personality. They are radiantly displayed in her surroundings when she is engaged as a strong contributor in instilling ethics, passing along cultural-values, and creating generous opportunities. Some of the great women in Islamic history may or may not have worn veils, but they surely donned their veils of abilities, talents, wisdom, and enlightenment.

The present article, the first in the series, is about Hazart Bibi Khadijah, who was the first and only wife of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) until her passing (Sayeed, p. 35). She “endured many of the burdens of the call to Islam with the Prophet (pbuh) at the beginning of his message” (Bewley, p. 94).

Bibi Khadijah dearly known as Khadijah al-Kubra, which means Khadijah *The Great*, and al-Tahira, which means *The Pure One*, was the daughter of Khuwaylid ibn Asad, a prestigious merchant of the time. Born and reared in the aristocratic family she inherited the parental wealth, ability to understand people, and the trading business. Her strengths were her intellect and her insightful ability to use her knowledge, competence, and inherited fortune for the right path.

Today, centuries later, the stories of her calm demeanor and pious character are as refreshing as an oasis flower. Her loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his faith are still blooming in Islam as revitalizing olives. The tales of her sacrifices and affection toward the people of faith are pleasing and satisfying as dates of a palm tree.

Mawlana Rumi once said “[e]veryone has been made for some particular work and the desire for that work has been put in every heart” (Goodreads quotes, 2014). Did she know beforehand that she was destined to be the Prophet’s (pbuh) wife? To hear the first Revelation from the Prophet’s (pbuh) blessed mouth? Or be the first person after the Prophet (pbuh) to accept Islam, perform the ablution, and recite the holy verses taught by the blessed Prophet (pbuh) himself?

“Hadith tells of an early incident hinting about future partnership and prophesy” (Kahn, p. 17). Long before becoming the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Bibi Khadijah had several divine dreams about him. One night Bibi Khadijah saw a strong heavenly light radiating in her house, and into her bosom and illuminating the entire universe. She was perplexed by such a strange dream and decided to seek advice from Waraqah, who was her first cousin and spiritual confidant. On hearing Bibi Khadijah’s dream, Waraqah was immensely pleased and explained to her that the people will soon receive their last Prophet, who will guide them to the correct path, and she will become his pious wife.

The other crucial event that is reported is a message from a spiritual man to Bibi Khadijah: “The hadith states that a God-intoxicated man (*majdhub*), at a shrine during a religious festival, yelled out a message meant for Khadijah about marrying God’s messenger. He used the name *Ahmad*, which is another name for Muhammad (pbuh), who may not have been born when this prophecy happened. Most were disturbed, but the commentator notes that Khadijah stayed calm” (Kahn, p. 18).

During such divine encounters, Bibi Khadijah remained calm and composed. At the same time her heart was longing to meet and become a part of the imminent and extraordinary journey of Muhammad (pbuh), who was also known as al-Amin, *The trustworthy*.

Being a businesswoman, Bibi Khadijah often hired men to trade her merchandise on her behalf. Al-Amin’s (pbuh) uncle Abu Talib asked Bibi Khadijah to hire his nephew for the job. She was delighted with Abu Tablib’s proposal because she was already hearing many stories about al-Amin’s (pbuh) trustworthy character. With no further delay, she hired al-Amin (pbuh) and offered him the highest pay along with the help of a man named Maysarah for his journey. In her heart, Bibi Khadijah sensed that al-Amin (pbuh) was destined to become the Prophet (pbuh) whom her cousin Waraqah had prophesized. To know more about al-Amin (pbuh), she instructed Maysarah to follow al-Amin (pbuh) throughout the journey and report all the crucial incidences to her upon their return.

Bibi Khadijah's speculations about Muhammad (pbuh) turned into faith when Maysarah apprised her regarding two such events, which manifested that Muhammad (pbuh) was destined to be the last Prophet (pbuh). The first event that Maysarah mentioned was the prophesy of the Monk Nestor. During their journey to Syria, they decided to repose in Bostra, South Syria. Muhammad (pbuh) relaxed under a tree, which was close to Monk Nestor's cell. Watching Muhammad (pbuh) resting below the tree, Monk Nestor prophesized to Maysarah that the man could be no other than the last Prophet (pbuh).

The other event that Maysarah reported to Bibi Khadijah was that "he had often noticed that the heat was strangely unoppressive, and one day towards noon it was given to him to have a brief but clear vision of two Angels shading Muhammad from the sun's rays" (Lings, p. 34).

Bibi Khadijah rushed to Waraqah and mentioned the events reported by Maysarah. Without any hesitation, Waraqah said that if the events were indeed true, then Muhammad (pbuh) is the messenger of God and will be the last Prophet (pbuh).

Bibi Khadijah decided that it was time to be a part of Muhammad's (pbuh) journey. She was a beautiful woman. At this time she was about forty years of age and Muhammad (pbuh) was twenty-five. She consulted her friend Nafaysah about marrying Muhammad (pbuh). Nafaysah approached Muhammad (pbuh) on behalf of Bibi Khadijah with the marriage proposal. On hearing the proposal, Muhammad (pbuh) was pleased but hesitated to marry such a wealthy woman

because he did not own a fortune and had no means to marry her. Nafaysah took it as yes because she knew Bibi Khadijah was not seeking material wealth but the pious character of Muhammad (pbuh). It was Bibi Khadijah who from the beginning knew that al-Amin (pbuh) was no ordinary man and followed his life with great reverence and curiosity. She proposed to the beloved Prophet (pbuh) and became his soul mate to console him in difficulties and provide him strength and every speck of her fortune to help the Prophet (pbuh) spread the message of Islam.

Throughout her married life with the Prophet (pbuh) she remained his most reliable confidant. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once said to Bibi Ayisha, the Prophet's (pbuh) youngest wife and the daughter of Abu Bakr that, "she (Bibi Khadijah) believed in me when all others disbelieved; she held me truthful when others called me a liar; she sheltered me when others abandoned me; she comforted me when others shunned me; and Allah granted me children while depriving me of children by other women" (Saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)).

Devoted and caring, Bibi Khadijah protected and brought "warmth, strength, status, dignity, and modesty" (Ramadan, p. 68) to the Prophet's (pbuh) life. Marrying the Prophet (pbuh), she knew she had a dual responsibility toward his life: as a wife and as a partner of the divine soul. The caliber of her strength and calmness was revealed when the Prophet (pbuh) heard the first Revelation and came shuddering to her and asked to *cover* him. Understanding the intensity of the hallowing experience that the Prophet (pbuh) had witnessed, she covered him with a cloak and

calmly waited for him to disclose the experience. Thus, “[h]er capacity to hold a calm and insightful attitude allowed Khadijah to ‘cover’ her husband and help him return to his senses at the moment of enormous crisis” (Kahn, p. 16).

After witnessing the first Revelation, she knew she was destined to witness many more such blessed experiences. The Revelations sometimes shattered the Prophet (pbuh) physically and emotionally. Bibi Khadijah always stood at his side, believing in him, and initially helped him too believe that he was the chosen one.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) dearly loved and showed enduring faith in his beloved wife, Bibi Khadijah. He once said, “The best women in all the world are four: The Virgin Mary, Aasiyaa the wife of Pharaoh, Khadijah Mother of the Believers, and Fatima, daughter of Muhammad” (Saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)). When the Angel Gabriel taught ablution and postures and movements of the prayers to the Prophet (pbuh), he returned home and first taught Bibi Khadijah. She dedicatedly learned from him and educated the women about ablution, its importance before the prayers, and the significance of correct postures of the prayers.

Bibi Khadijah was a pious woman. She followed every ritual taught by the Prophet (pbuh) and would spend the majority of her time chanting the holy verses and performing the ritual prayers. We know that the Angel Gabriel manifested the Revelations to the Prophet (pbuh). During one such occasion, the Angel Gabriel asked the Prophet (pbuh) to greet Bibi Khadijah and convey, “the ‘Greetings of Peace from her Lord’ [and] on hearing the message when Khadijah could find

words to speak, she answered; ‘God is Peace, and from Him is Peace, and on Gabriel be Peace’” (Lings, p. 50).

Bibi Khadijah made a remarkable contribution to help the Prophet (pbuh) spread his message. The desire for the work was sown in her heart before anyone other than she could recognize it. In her contribution toward the faith, her character as a strong and nurturing woman emerged and became acknowledged, appreciated, and revered by the people.

Bibi Khadijah was known for her kind and empathetic nature. She understood the importance of the life of the beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and deeply respected the people who were connected with his life. The stories of the venerated soul have been depicted through many of her life incidences. “Khadijah was with him at that center, loved and honored by all who came within the wide circle of their radiance, a circle which also included many of her relations” (Lings, p. 40). One of the most well-known incidences was her fondness for Bibi Halimah, the foster-mother of the Prophet (pbuh). “It was the custom of all the great families of Arab towns to send their sons, soon after the birth, into the desert, to be suckled and weaned and spend part of their childhood amongst one of the Bedouin tribes” (Lings, p. 23). Bibi Aminah entrusted to offer her nursling (young Muhammad (pbuh)) to a woman of the Bani Sa’d ibn Bakr tribe, who “had a highest reputation in for nursing and rearing children...” (Lings, p. 23). At this time, baby Muhammad (pbuh) had already lost his father, and his mother had little wealth. None of the women were ready to accept young Muhammad (pbuh) as a nursling because though it was a

dishonor to accept direct remunerations for nursing a baby, women would desire an indirect fee in the form of material goods to support themselves. Bibi Halimah was amongst the poorest of the nursing women. She and her husband were stricken with the plight caused by the drought. She did not have much to offer to a nursling, and she was rejected by all the mothers as a nurse for their infants. When Bibi Halimah heard about the baby Muhammad (pbuh), she decided to take him with her in the form of a blessing and became the pious foster-mother to the Prophet (pbuh).

Bibi Khadijah understood all of this and appreciated the importance of Bibi Halimah in the Prophet's (pbuh) life. Therefore, during the time of her marriage with the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Bibi Khadijah went to great lengths to find the foster-mother and humbly invite her to acquire her blessings in recognition of the significant occasion of the Prophet's (pbuh) life.

Innumerable tales of Bibi Khadijah's generosity are widely known. After the first Revelation, she followed the Prophet (pbuh) in spreading Islam. She would personally talk to the people and preach the teachings of Islam to them. To spread the teaching, the Prophet (pbuh), Bibi Khadijah, Ali Abu Talib, and Zayd would host dinner parties at their home. Bibi Khadijah would cook and generously spend her fortune to host the dinners. To spread the teachings of Islam, she sacrificed every fragment of her monetary wealth till nothing was left even to support her own personal living. Admiring Bibi Khadijah's generosity, sacrifices, financial assistance, true spirit, and devotion to the faith, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said,

“Islam did not rise except through Ali’s sword and Khadijah’s wealth” (Saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)). When she was informed that Bibi Halimah and her family were facing dire adversity due to a similar horrifying drought, to honor the milk kinship Bibi Khadijah generously gifted Bibi Halimah “forty sheep and a howadh camel” (Lings, p. 39) and personally made sure the family received good care.

Bibi Khadijah’s motherly love was impeccable. She stood beside the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when he decided to share the responsibilities of his uncle Abu Talib until the uncle’s pecuniary situation improved. Ali Abu Talib, son of Abu Talib, who later in his life became the first Imam of the Shi’a sect of Islam, was reared in the guidance of the Prophet (pbuh) and his wife Bibi Khadijah. Bibi Khadijah amiably accepted the young Ali Abu Talib, who was approximately ten years of age at the time. Young Ali Abu Talib shared the household with the Prophet (pbuh), Bibi Khadijah, and their four daughters Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum, Zaynab, and Fatimah.

The other member of the household was Zayd, who also shared the parental love and affection of the Prophet (pbuh) and Bibi Khadijah. Zayd belonged to a prestigious family. One day during the Banu Qayn raid, Zayd was taken and sold into slavery. He was a slave in Bibi Khadijah’s parental household for several years. On the day of their marriage, Bibi Khadijah gifted Zayd to the Prophet (pbuh). Soon after, Zayd’s father came to know about his lost son. With no further delay, he came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked for his son in exchange for the highest

ransom that he could afford. The Prophet (pbuh) graciously left the decision to Zayd, and Zayd chose the shade of the pious household. If he had been treated as a slave would he have chosen to stay with the holy Prophet (pbuh) and the pious Khadijah? Later, the Prophet (pbuh) adopted Zayd as his son.

Bibi Khadijah also showered her fondness toward her sister Halah's son Abu I-As. She loved him dearly as her own son. Abu I-As revered Bibi Khadijah as his mother and frequently visited her to seek her advice on crucial matters. When it was time for Abu I-As to marry, she offered her own daughter, the precious Zaynab, as his bride.

I would end the article from where I began. Bibi Khadijah. What images appear in your mind when you hear the pious name *Bibi Khadijah*?

This article conveys a very small piece of Bibi Khadijah's deep contribution to Muslim womanhood. Today, she remains close to people's hearts and is highly revered in Islamic history. She was a competent businesswoman, a strong contributor to Islam, a meritorious wife, and a nurturing mother. Her veil was her fortune, intellect, and education, which she used to serve and educate people of the faith. She serves as an exemplary role model for every woman who strives to be a woman with independence, integrity, and intelligence. Above all, she portrayed the fine gifts of wisdom, strength, and enlightenment, which she used to maintain her dignified persona to embrace *the pious* and maintain *the virtuous*.

By ~ Noori Mamdani

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