

HADRAT ZAINAB

BINT-E-JAHASH

Hadrat Zainab Bint-e-Jahash is one of those ladies who are of great significance in the history of Islam. She was first cousin of the Holy Prophet (SAW) from his father's side. She is considered to be one of the ten most prominent women of Islamic history. Her name was Zainab and her surname was Umm-e-Hakam.

The Holy Prophet's life had two phases. One phase pertained to his stay at Makkah i.e. till he was fifty-three years old. It shows that he stayed at Makkah for thirteen years as the apostle of Allah. The second phase of his life concerns the period after his migration to Madina. This period is extended over ten years. The Makkah period deals with the early years of Islam when his activities were only restricted to preaching. Ten years of Madinite period deal with the establishment of Islamic state and its formative period.

In the Makkan period, when the Holy Prophet (SAW) announced his apostleship and called the people to Islam, the conditions were most unfavorable. Some of the people knew that Islam is nothing but truth but could not declare it in open, because anybody who appeared to be sympathetic towards Islam, or the Holy Prophet Mohammad (SAW), had to face the hostility and enmity of the whole Makkan society. The plight of the women was much worse, because during those days women were maltreated and their status was low. Burying the newly born girl babies alive was a normal routine. On reaching the age of puberty many parents used to sell their daughters to let their girls turn into bond-maids (*However certain good families cared about daughters too, but on the whole, women-hood was a maltreated lot*) and slave girls. Cruelty of husbands was order of the day and the fair sex was meted out the most unfair treatment. The women could not imagine of any honourable social status, they could not generally acquire knowledge and education or embrace any faith or creed uncommon to the society. Those were the conditions in which Hadrat Zainab Bint-e-Jahash embraced Islam.

After embracing Islam, her life was turned into a hell for her. When the Holy Prophet (SAW) allowed the Muslims to migrate to Madina, Hadrat Zainab also accompanied the migrants. Hadrat Zainab was no ordinary woman, she was a renowned poetess, a knowledgeable intellectual and highly respected figure in the Arab literary circles.

Islam is a revolutionary and matchless ideology. It proves that ideas are more precious and valuable than ordinary human beings. A perusal of the human history would reveal that Islam is not one of those ideologies which prop up with the help of some human efforts and vanish after a few decades. Rather, this is a divine truth which enlightens every thing that comes under its focus. The life of Hadrat Zainab Bint-e-Jahash is of historical significance. Her life portrays the practical implementation of Islamic teachings of equality of all human beings, brotherhood, love, fraternity among all classes and zenith of morality. All Muslims are proud of her life. The marriage of Hadrat Zaid bin Harith with Hadrat Zainab is of no lesser significance. In those days, nobody could ever think of such a marriage. Hadrat Zaid was a slave and Hadrat Zainab hailed from a respectable family of Quraish and a great intellectual. This marriage proved the equality of all believers in Islam:

“None of you is more respectable than others except by virtue of being more pious and of good conduct” .

The history of human race cannot present another example prior to Hadrat Zaid and Hadrat Zainab’s marriage, when a slave had married a woman of high gentry. This marriage was also strongly resented by Quraish but Hadrat Zainab agreed to it because it was being arranged at the instance of the Holy Prophet (SAW). This marriage confirmed that a white man is not superior to a black man, because according to Islam, superiority is always judged on merits of piety, virtuous conduct and superior faith. Hadrat Zaid bin Harith had all these qualities and so in appreciation of Hadrat Zaid’s merits, Hadrat Zainab was married to him.

At the time of her marriage, Islam was having a two-pronged orientation. On one hand Muslims were preaching to non-Muslims about the teachings of Islam and on the other hand the Muslims were imparted training, education and discipline. The people could never have understood the spirit of the new faith if the Muslims had not presented a new faith if the Muslims had not presented a new set of codes and morality through their actions and deeds. The marriage of a slave to a woman from the aristocracy undeniably demonstrated the social equality that Islam stood for.

After a few months of marriage, Hadrat Zainab and Hadrat Zaid developed matrimonial differences. Divorce is not a welcome step and Islam considers it to be one of the worst permissible acts. Narrow minded societies, cultures and religions had negated the right of divorce as in Christianity. But negation of this right creates many immoral practices. Islam provided a way out and allowed it only when it is inevitable. The differences between Hadrat Zaid and Hadrat Zainab increased until Hadrat Zaid came to the Holy Prophet (SAW) and complained, “Zainab is quite rude to me. I cannot pull on with her and wish to divorce her.”

The Holy Prophet (SAW) consoled him, called Hadrat Zainab and admonished her. A few more months passed but the cleavage could not be bridged and finally Hadrat Zaid, divorced Hadrat Zainab. This behaviour is an example for all Muslims. It proves that we should not be hasty in deciding to terminate a marriage.

After spending a few days, everybody started asking about the future of Hadrat Zainab. The Holy Prophet himself proposed her for giving a chance of rehabilitation to Hadrat Zainab. This proposal created a lot of confusion as Hadrat Zaid bin Harith had lived, with the Holy Prophet (SAW) as a son since his childhood. Everybody used to call Hadrat Zaid as son of Hadrat Mohammad (SAW). Then Allah, through a revelation, approved this marriage. This approval from Allah further showed that prohibition of marriage applies only to blood relations such as real paternal or maternal uncle, nephew, brother, sister etc. and not with reference to other relations. And so, Hadrat Zainab was married to the Holy Prophet (SAW) and thus became the mother of the faithful. Hadrat Zainab's marital life has another significant even to its credit. The order of *Hijab (The order for hiding of face and body, from all others than blood relations, to the Muslim women)* is attributed to, due to Zainab. The background of this policy decision is as follows. After the marriage of Zainab and the Holy Prophet, meals were offered to the Muslims. People came in great number. Some people stayed back after eating and gossiped. The Holy Prophet waited for them to. Holy Prophet did not like it, because he knew that free mixing of men and women leads to sin. On this occasion, he received the holy revelation from Allah through Gabriel in these words:

"O people who have the faith. Do not enter the dwellings of the Prophet without permission, nor stay watching for the time of meal except that you are invited to meals. Do come then and disperse when you have taken food and don't indulge in (undue) conversation, for such act of yours creates uneasiness for the Holy Prophet, but he is shy of saying anything and Allah does not feel shy is telling the truth. And whenever you ask for something from the wives of the Holy Prophet, do so from behind the door or curtain".

After this revelation from Allah, the Holy Prophet (SAW) hung curtains at the entrance of his houses and forbade the people not to enter the house of the Holy Prophet (SAW) without permission. This incident resulted in an important commandment of Islam i.e. Hijab, and further substantiated the importance of Hadrat Zainab.

Hadrat Zainab used to take pride in her marriage and said, "My marriage has been accorded with the will of Allah. It is unlike other marriages of the Holy Prophet (SAW)."

Hadrat Mohammad bin Umar reported that one day Hadrat Zainab addressed the Holy Prophet and said, "O Prophet of Allah I am not like your other wives,

who got married to you due to the consent of their father, brothers or families but I was married to you with the consent of Allah”.

Apart from this, she excelled in many other aspects as well. Hadrat Ayesha once said, “Among the wives of the Holy Prophet (SAW), Zainab was the only one who claimed equality with me”.

Hadrat Zainab’s marriage repealed a few old customs prevalent prior to Islam, and established some new rules and policies as under:

Prior to this marriage, there was an old Arab tradition that the adopted son was considered as good as real son. Allah clarified that adopted relations cannot be taken as blood relations.

This marriage bridged the cleavage between a slave and so called aristocracy. A clear concept of divorce, how and when to exercise this right, also evolved. An important commandment of Islam, i.e. Hijab came into force.

Hadrat Zainab had an excellent character and only a few other women of her era could match her. She was generous, beautiful, had full faith in Allah. She was a contented woman. She always patronised the poor and helped the orphans and needy. Ibn-e-Sa ‘ad has reported in one of his chronicles in these words:

“Hadrat Zainab Bint-e-Jahash did not leave anything as inheritance after her death. Whatever she got during her life, she doled out as charity to the poor, needy and orphans”.

Although, she had a high social status, and was in a position to exploit her status for her benefit being wife of the Holy Prophet (SAW). But she never did so, neither during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (SAW) nor after his death. She loved to earn her livelihood by hard labour and never shirked work. She knew the skill of tanning animal skins. She earned much through this art but always gave away all as charity, that was superfluous after meeting her needs. By virtue of these qualities, whoever met her, was deeply impressed. Another incident expresses the qualities of honesty and straightforwardness she possessed. During the reign of Hadrat Umar as the second pious Caliph, he fixed a stipend of twelve thousand Dirhams per annum for Hadrat Zainab as the Holy Prophet’s wife to meet her day to day expenses. For the first time, she did not decline and accepted it, but said, “O, Allah don’t give it to me next year because this is nothing but a trouble”.

She immediately distributed the money among her relatives and poor people. When Hadrat Umar came to know of it, he remarked, “She is a great lady”. Then he visited her place, waited outside for quite some time, then sent the

following message to her, "I have come to know, what you did with the money".

Later he sent another thousand Dirhams for meeting the expenditure of her personal needs, but Hadrat Zainab, distributed that money too among the poor and the needy.

She was a God-fearing and pious lady. Once the Holy Prophet (SAW) was distributing some goods and cash out of war spoils among the common Muslims. She interrupted him on some trivial matter. Hadrat Umar, admonished her and said, "Don't interfere". The Holy Prophet (SAW) came to her rescue saying, "Umar, don't say anything to her. She is a very pious lady".

This is no less a credit that she got from the Holy Prophet (SAW). Hadrat Ayesha praised her in these words:

"No woman has better than Zainab in traits of truthfulness, kind heartedness, sacrifice, knowledge of religion and piety".

On another occasion, Hadrat Ayesha said, "Zainab excelled every other contemporary woman as far as religious knowledge is concerned". She further said, "May Allah take pity (*This is a very common prayer in Islamic traditions and is used in positive meaning*) on Zainab. In this world she was blessed with a great status. Allah married her to His Prophet and she was the main reason for revelation of certain holy verses of Quran".

Hadrat Umme-e-Salma commented, "She was of good disposition, courteous and spent her time in worship prayers".

She had a successful life. She served the people in need until she died at the age of 53 during the caliphate of Hadrat Umar. She distributed all the belongings among the poor to earn the pleasure of Allah.

Her closet was later bought by Walid bin Abdul Malik (*Walid bin Abdul Malik was a king of Ummayad's dynasty*) for fifty thousand Dirhams from her family. He demolished the house and annexed the land with Masjid-e-Nabvi (*The Mosque of the Holy Prophet (SAW), situated at Madina*).

She was so sensitive about her honour, that she advised her near ones before she breathed her last, "I have bought and prepared my coffin. If Umar (*The then Caliph*) sends the coffin, give that to some poor as charity".

During his life, the Holy Prophet (SAW) had also great sense of appreciation for her beautiful nature. Since all his wives loved him, so every one aspired to meet him in the next world after her death as early as possible. Once the Holy

Prophet (SAW) addressed his wives and said, "One of you, having a bigger hand will meet me sooner than others in the next world".

After the death of the Holy Prophet (SAW), his wives used to measure their hands to see who would meet him first. Hadrat Zainab died earlier than the rest. The wives of the Prophet then came to know the real meaning of the Holy Prophet's words. Hadrat Ayesha explained, "Zainab had a bigger hand than all of us because she used to give away charity in abundance out of her own earning".

This incident shows that the Holy Prophet (SAW) loved Hadrat Zainab's habit of giving alms.

Hadrat Zainab was fortunate in another aspect too. She had left a will that after her death, she should be carried to graveyard, on the same bier, which carried the Holy Prophet (SAW). After she breathed her last, she was taken to the graveyard on the bier, she had desired. She was the first lady who was lifted on the same bier on which the Prophet's body was carried. Prior to her, only Hadrat Abu Bakar was carried on that bier. Hadrat Ayesha was deeply shocked on Hadrat Zainab's death. She commented on her death in these words:

"She was a blessed woman and a matchless wife. Her death had deprived the widows and orphans".

Hadrat Zainab was a great woman; her personality was overwhelmed by her beautiful conduct. May Allah rest her soul in peace.