

The Ideal of Womanhood

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Her birth revolutionized the status and position of women after ages of oppression. It gave to the world a practical paradigm for the daughters of Eve to mould their lives upon by ending the sordid practice of denying the female her rights – as is still the case in the depraved and decadent societies of the modern world where freedom today means more wanton exploitation of women. Islam is a synonym for humanity and all humanitarian values, and if not for her birth and subsequent role in the budding Islamic society of Mecca and Medina, the most upright creed or code of behaviour, would have remained imperfect. That is the reason God Almighty has hailed her in the Holy Qur'an as "Kowsar" or the "Spring of Perpetual Felicities" that will never be exhausted. That is also the reason that the Divine Words of the Surah of the same name end with the phrase: "Indeed your enemy is issueless."

This was no ordinary honour for her father, the Almighty's Last and Greatest Messenger to mankind. In fact, it was an honour that no previous Prophet had ever been granted by God the Glorious. In an age when the ignorant prided on male issue as a means of lasting name and fame, the All-Wise Creator called the daughter as the perennial proof of the Prophet's progeny till the end of the world, and went on to prophesy in explicit words that those trying to mock this revolutionizing decree, will soon be without any posterity.

Thus in view of this undeniable reality, what better occasion to celebrate Mother's Day and Women's Week than the 20th of Jamadi al-Akher, the day the light of the All-Radiant (az-Zahra) lit the house of Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) and his faithful wife, the Mother of all true believers (Umm al-Momenin), Hazrat Khadija (SA).

Born in Mecca five years after God formally appointed her father as the Seal of all Prophets, the peerless position of Hazrat Fatema az-Zahra (SA) could be gauged from her title "Seyyedat-nisa al-'alamin min al-awwalin wa'l-akherin" (Chief of women of the worlds of all time). It was bestowed upon her by no less a personality than her father who hailed her as the Pride of the Virgin Mary (peace upon her), explaining to the believers that the virtues of the Mother of Prophet Jesus (AS) were time bound, while those of the Baz'at ar-Rasoul (Part of the Prophet) were to transcend time and place.

No daughter has ever been hailed as the Mother of her own Father (Umm Abiha) as the orphan Fatema (SA), for the care and concern she had for her widower father after the passing away of her mother. In Medina, after marriage to the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali ibn Abi

Taleb (AS), she was the last person that the Prophet would bid farewell before leaving the city and the first one he would visit on returning from his trips.

Like her father, she had a mission to perform. She was virtue personified. If Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) was the best exemplar for the human race, as the Qur'an calls him, she was to be the ideal of womanhood. At every stage of her life she gave a lesson in the rights and duties of women in society.

Her peerless position is evident from the following narration found in one of the six famous Sunni compilations of hadith, the Sihah as-Sitta: "Kaanat Fatema iz dakhalat 'ala Rasoul-Allah qaama ilayha fa qabbalaha wa ajlasaha fi majlesahu (Whenever Fatema would enter the presence of the Messenger of Allah he would rise to his feet in her honour and seat her in his own place)." (Sunan at-Tirmizi, vol. 2, p. 205)

Despite her lofty merits, Hazrat Fatema (SA) used to personally do all household work. After marriage and a very simple dowry given by her father consisting of basic amenities, the couple shared the blessings of a blissful life, whose fruits were four immaculate children –sons Imam Hasan (AS) and Imam Husain (AS), and daughters Hazrat Zainab (SA) and Hazrat Umm Kulsoum (SA). The husband was responsible for all outside work while the wife took care of household affairs. They made an excellent husband and wife pair. As the supreme symbol of feminine virtues, she displayed the highest ethical traits in marital life in view of the hadith: "jihad al-mar'a husn at-tab'al (a woman's jihad [striving in the way of Allah] is to behave excellently with her husband)."

She also enjoyed very cordial relations with her mother-in-law Fatema bint Asad (SA), the lady who had brought up her father the Prophet as her own son when he became orphan and to whose care the Prophet had entrusted Hazrat Fatema (SA) after she was orphaned on Hazrat Khadija's (SA) death. She never allowed her mother-in-law to trouble herself with household chores and left to her the social relations for keeping the necessary contact with family members and friends. In 7 AH when the Prophet provided her with the virtuous Abyssinian maid, Fizza, she divided the work equally, by giving rest to her maid a whole day after a day's work and discharging the duties that day herself.

Another instance of Fatima's (SA) revered status is the revelation of the verse: "Make not the addressing of the Messenger among you to your addressing of one another..." (Holy Qur'an 24:63), which obliged the companions of the Prophet to address him as O' Messenger of Allah, instead of calling him by his name or agnomen (kunya). When Fatima (AS) addressed her father with the words "O' Messenger of Allah", the Prophet was rather disturbed, and told his beloved daughter: "O' Fatima this verse was not revealed for you, neither for your family nor for

your descendants. You are of me and I am of you. This was revealed in relation to the oppressors and the ill-mannered of the Quraish. (When you address me) Say 'dear father', for this word is more life-giving for the heart and more pleasing for Allah".

The Most Truthful Lady (Siddiqat al-Kubra) who was unsullied from all worldly impurities (Batoul), and who is the central figure in the revelation of the Verse of Purity (Holy Qur'an 33:33), continues to be the blessed spring of the Prophet's progeny, inspiring women and men alike with egalitarian ideals, while the offspring of those who had mocked her birth have long disappeared.

Over the past fourteen centuries, dynasties have appeared in different places, from Morocco to Indonesia claiming descent from her. The famous University of al-Azhar in Cairo which was founded one thousand years ago by the Fatimids – who also claimed descent from her – is named after her epithet, az-Zahra. In our own days, the father of the Islamic revolution, Imam Khomeini, who incidentally was born on the auspicious birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatima (SA), was a direct descendant of that blessed lady, and so is Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the present leader