



Prophet Mohammad's Treatment of Women: An Analytical Study

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ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى الكشف عن الأبعاد الإنسانية في حياة الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم، وموقفه تجاه المرأة، والطريقة المثلى للتعامل مع المرأة. تم تطبيق المنهج الوصفي في هذه الدراسة، تم من خلاله عرض وتحليل مجموعة متنوعة من القصص والمواقف بناءً على الأحاديث النبوية وبعض المراجع المعروفة، مثل سيرة ابن هشام (سيرة ابن هشام). وخلصت الدراسة إلى عظمة شخصية الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم وموقفه الإيجابية تجاه المرأة ومعاملتها باحترام، مما جعلها عضوًا بارزًا في المجتمع، مما ساعد على انتشار الإسلام في العالم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النبي محمد، المرأة، الأخلاق النبوية، البعد الإنساني.



Prophet Mohammad's Treatment of Women:

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the human dimensions in Prophet Mohammad's life (PBUH), his attitude towards women and the ideal way of dealing with women. This research applies the descriptive approach through which a variety of stories and situation are manifested and analyzed in accordance with prophetic traditions and some well-known references, such as Ibn Hisham's Biography (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*). The research concludes by highlighting the great character of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and His positive attitudes towards women and their respectful treatment that established them as great members of the society, which consequently helped in the spread of Islam all over the world.

Keywords: Prophet Mohammad, Women, Prophetic manners, Human dimension.



Introduction

Handling the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his call (Da'awa) seems challenging and inspiring as seen in the revelation of the Holy Qur'an and the divine legislation. During that period the dimensions of legislation and the good manners of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were clearly manifested. When Allah addressed him: "*Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you*" (Al-Imran, 2: 159; Khattab, 2015)¹. His life events witnessed such great morals and respects as evidenced by biography books and the reliable books of Hadith. Thus, one cannot ignore his life as a great source of influence on his companions (*Sahaba*) and those who lived in his time. At the same time, one could not forget that Prophet (PBUH) spent around two thirds of the forty years before launching his Islamic call (Da'awa) (Al-Khudary, 1988), leading an ordinary life in the Arabian Peninsula.

However, that period is taken as a preparation for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to launch his call with its burden and hardships to convey the rulings and divine laws of Almighty Allah. Therefore, it has been noticed that the highest merits of honesty and loyalty manifested in his spirit and good manners attracted the attention of the people of Mecca. He (PBUH) was the most incredible speaker, the most compassionate, the most righteous and honest, so that they entitled him as the honest and sincere man for what touched them by his delicate qualities and virtuous morals (Albar-kfury, 1980).

Therefore, the human morals of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had been deep-rooted before the mission and the message of Islam, so that those morals constitute the strongest evidence of his eligibility to receive the divine revelation and the word of Allah. Such evidence inspires scholars to study the human dimensions of Muhammad's character (PBUH), though he is a true human being in the full sense of the word as stated by the Holy Qur'an : (Say (O Prophet): I'm only a man like you (Al-Kahf, 18: 110; Khattab, 2015). No one can denounce or deny this truth. He would even prefer loneliness, meditation and contemplation for so long in his life. Accordingly, he was

¹ All the translations are the researcher's otherwise mentioned.



qualified and prepared for the revelation and the Message of the new religion of Islam (Ibn Hisham, 2001).

Such morals, eligibility and pure merits were touched by Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) enemies, opponents as well as family and companions. Those epithets reveal the greatness of humane treatment and humanity of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Since the Message requires dealing with all people regardless of their classes, intellectual or moral standards, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) embodied the greatest moral and humanitarian model. Therefore, the present study traces some of those dimensions in three images that embody the classes of society which include women and families, captives, oppositionists and enemies. This paper explores the dimensions of women and families, and how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) dealt with them. The other dimensions are discussed in two separate researches.

Women and the Family

Being chosen to deliver the message of Islam and having the honor of conveying it to all people as requested through revelation at the Cave of Hera'a, Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) wife *Khadija bint Khuwailid* was the first one in his family to receive him and ask about this affair as narrated by Imam Muslim:

"... So he overwhelmed me for the third time and then released me saying: 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists)... Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous'. Then, the Messenger of Allah, (PBUH) returned home with his heart trembling, he said to his wife *Khadija bint Khuwailid*: "Zammiloni, Zammiloni" (*Wrap me, wrap me*); therefore, she wrapped him in garment until he felt safe and sound, then he said: "Oh, Khadija! What's happening to me?" He told her the story. He said: "I felt afraid on myself". Khadija replied: "No. It is good for you; God will not shame you at all. For by Allah, you keep contact with relatives, honest, endure all, give the poor, generous, and assist the sufferers" (Al-Qushairi, 1992, 139).

In this context, it has been realized that the human dimension is so impressive that it reveals two aspects: seeking Khadija's advice before referring to anyone else, and the wise response provided by Khadija inferring



and heartening him. As can be seen, the Prophet (PBUH) went directly to Khadija, his wise and compassionate wife, to express the situation to her, though he could have gone to his uncle Abu-Talib, who supported him before and during his call. However, the human dimension was manifested in the act of the Prophet (PBUH) by consulting a woman; Khadija, who was endowed with tenderness, compassion and warm cuddling, telling her what happened to him. This can be attributed to the fact that a man is naturally in need of his wife, his partner who keeps his secrets, understands him and his attributes. She is the one who is knowledgeable of everything in his life. The Prophet's wife, Khadija, was the closest person to him. She was the one who could understand and support him in such a situation. All this made him head directly to Khadija asking her for help saying "Oh, Khadija! What's happening to me?", said the Prophet. As if he wanted to make sure about what happened to him; whether this event was good or else, so that she was so helpful and sincere to the extent that he could rely on. Entrusting her with all confidence and secrets, Prophet Muhammad narrated the full story in detail to her seeking her advice and opinion.

Another aspect is that Khadija's positive response when she said, "No: *Abshir*", which means (Don't worry, rejoice, be ecstatic). This indicates that she realized that who had such good manners as truthfulness, honoring kinship ties, helping the needy, being hospitable and being righteous which is a conclusive evidence that the matter is only from Almighty Allah, which is all good for him. Hence, she became his most trustworthy advisor whom he sought advice thereafter (Ibn Hisham, 2001). Besides being his wife, Lady Khadeja knew him and the details of his life as well; she avowed everything she knew, touching his heart and being compassionate with her gentle feminine kindness. This is considered one of the deepest human dimensions of a woman who understands and believes her husband on the one hand, and the appreciation of her position and concern for Da'wah, and other women in the following days, participating with men in bearing the burden of Da'wah for Islam and being a real Muslim to help dissemination of the new religion, on the other. The utterance "*Zammiloni Zammiloni*" (*Wrap me, wrap me*) indicated the significant role exemplified by his wife, Khadija, who helped and took care of him in such a critical situation. This is attributed to the fact



that when a man seeks advice, he usually goes to the most reliable person, who best knows his needs and accordingly supports him. Therefore, Khadija was the first person to whom Muhammad (PBUH) referred and sought advice.

Moreover, other evidence of the Prophet Mohammad's moral principles was his marriage to *Sawda bint Zama'a* after the death of Khadija. The story started when *Sawda's* husband died after they returned from Ethiopia. She was a Muslim from a reputable and honorable family who were non-Muslims and who hated Islam. Thus, it was unacceptable to return to a family of the roughness and hatred of Islam, otherwise she would be forced to leave Islam or be tortured because she violated her family's religion and belief. In addition, as a woman from a reputable family, it was improper for her to marry a man from a less honorable family (Al-Khudary, 1988,31).

The human dimension indicated the way the Prophet treated a woman with honor and decency, who converted to Islam and whose husband died, having no shelter or support in a violent and arrogant society such as the Meccan community. She was afraid of loss or strife in her religion and faith. Therefore, it was an unexpectedly great opportunity for her to get married to the Prophet who is the noblest and most respectful man in Mecca and who could provide her with home, which is the greatest human dimension of mercy and compassion. This revealed the fact that the Prophet Mohammad, (PBUH), was of a great character who cares for women and respects their personal needs despite all the difficulties he encountered at the beginning of Islam. This is a very touching human sign in comforting a woman's soul, modestly treating her and accepting her as a wife, which is far more influential on the self than just consoling her otherwise.

In addition, there are many other examples that do not only show the human dimension of the prophet Muhammad in treating his wives and relatives, but also in dealing with all women. One of those situations is the story of "*Al-Mujadilah*" (*The woman who disputes*, whose name is Khaulah bint Tha'labah), which is a Surah in the Holy Qur'an. That woman disputed with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) telling him that her husband turned their marriage unlawful by *Zihaar*, which means his wife became like his mother, that is he swore not to touch or approach her (divorced). The woman came to



the Prophet saying that her husband made their marriage unlawful by *Zihaar* (Al-Qurtubi, 2006, 1). The Prophet (PBUH) said "Nothing has been revealed to me about this *Zihaar*". She said surprisingly: "O Messenger of Allah, everything has been revealed to you, but this was concealed!". He replied: "It is what I said". Then she murmured: "To Allah, I complain not to his Messenger" (Al-Qurtubi, 2006, 1). Allah heard her and revealed: " *Indeed, Allah has heard the argument of the woman who pleaded with you 'O Prophet' concerning her husband, and appealed to Allah. Allah has heard your exchange.1 Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*" (Khattab, 2015: the Clear Quran).

The argument between the Prophet (PBUH) and the woman concerning such a private issue indicates that the situation was so critical since the woman felt astonished when the Prophet told her that he had no idea about her situation. Despite responding kindly, he had no answer to her problem. In spite of his status as the Prophet and Messenger of Allah, the response of the woman lacked grace when she said: "To Allah, I complain not to his Messenger"(Al-Qurtubi, 2006). As a result, Allah sent the answer that has held the solution (e.g. legislation and rule) for such a problem encountered by both men and women; a solution, which had a psychological and moral relief, not just for the woman, Khaulah bint Tha'labah, but for all Muslims.

This indicates that the Prophet (PBUH) had care and courtesy to the woman's condition and weakness. He answered her briefly, honestly and kindly, which is appropriate for the question and associated with the human dimension. His answer was short and concise, which cut the argument to maintain her effort and consideration. She was about to make the argument longer, but the Messenger of Allah shortened it. Such a situation enabled the woman to feel relaxed and relieved by seeing the one concerned with the decision, calm and courteous so she becomes satisfied.

The human dimension of the Prophet goes beyond the personal female matters that make women feel shy and anxious. This is demonstrated by the condition encountered by a young woman whose name is Umayya bint Qais Al-Ghefariah. She narrated, with women from the same family "Ghefar", she asked the Prophet (PBUH) to go out with him to Khyber in order to heal the



wounded and help Muslims in the battle. The Prophet allowed them to go and told her to ride on his luggage behind him as she was a young girl. When they arrived and got down, she noticed that there was blood from her on the luggage. It was her first menstrual period; therefore, she felt shy. The Prophet (PBUH) saw the blood and knew that she had a period. Then he told her not to worry, clean herself, and wash the blood on the bag with water and salt. She said that after the battle, the Prophet (PBUH) gave her a necklace as a gift that made her very happy as he hung it in her neck by his hand (Ibn Hisham, 2001, 316).

Such a situation indicates the Prophet's humane compassion and fatherly tenderness towards the young girl, who had her first menstrual period and who felt embarrassed when he saw the blood on his luggage. Although he was the leader of the army with all responsibilities, he did not neglect the girl or feel angry; instead he dealt with her very kindly from the very beginning. He only told her to clean it with water and salt. The first gesture, for instance, was when he allowed her to ride on the camel behind him on his luggage because she was a young and weak girl. Secondly, he intended not to make her feel tired and suffer from roughness or cruelty of the ride. Such behavior reveals the Prophet's mercy and sympathy manifesting the psychological effects on the girl. He did not only do that, but he also gave her a necklace and hung it on her neck which made her feel relaxed and so happy that she never took it off.

In addition, this case reflected the deepest and most impressive effect on the girl who had her first womanhood experience of the menstruation period. This makes any female feel anxious and sick, which is evidenced by the nature of women. Therefore, it has its psychological effects on the female. Seeing blood on his luggage when the girl got down, he did not feel disgusted nor did he upset her. He only asked her peacefully to clean the blood with water and salt with consolation, compassion, and tenderness with humanistic prophetic merciful treatment. This is a profound gesture for two reasons; the first was his attention to what happened to her from a psychological perspective, while the second was his seeing the blood and directing her to look after herself. Besides, He did not dissociate her for a situation where she had no hand. He



did not only do so, but he also gave her a necklace and hung it himself in order to make her feel happy and have peace of mind.

Moreover, another situation was stated in the Hadith narrated by Aisha, who was the youngest wife of the Prophet. She said that the Prophet (PBUH) covered her with his garment while she was watching a group of children playing hide- and- seek in the mosque until she felt bored, demanding to appreciate the young girls, who are keen on playing (Al-Bukhari, 1994). Such a situation indicates the eagerness of a young girl to entertainment until she felt bored, allowed in the presence of the Prophet (PBUH) to watch and have fun and recreation, which reveals a deep psychological impact that motivates the spirit and makes one feel happy in pure pleasure with no sin and without disturbing the follow-up. This also shows the human dimension by allowing all those who wanted to watch any entertainment until they refresh their souls in order not to be distressed or bored with their daily lives and routine.

This state reflects two facts regarding the human dimension of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). First, he allowed children to play hide- and- seek in the mosque, the place of worship and meditation perhaps because Medina did not have a spacious place to perform better than the mosque that was protected from the heat of the Sun. At the same time, it also shows that practicing such type of play by a group of children is broad-minded since at the time they had no other place to play in Medina than the mosque where they could play and perform some of their traditions and heritage in jousting with bayonets. The Prophet (PBUH) was watching them and did not restrain them, which indicates his satisfaction with their performance, accepting women to watch but without being seen (Al-Bukhari, 1994). Such a satisfaction is due to the fact that the Muslim society used to live in challenging and difficult conditions. Therefore, he believed that it was worthwhile watching children playing hide- and- seek and amusing people, since humans are in need for entertainment from time to time, so that they can refresh themselves and be more active and stronger, which is one of the greatest human psychological dimensions.

Another situation that shows the Prophet's human dimension where women are respected and appreciated, is when the Prophet gave a woman, the right to



choose. This happened after the fight between Muslims and Bani-Lmustaliq and the former defeated the latter. In consequence, the Muslims took many people as captives. One of the captives was the daughter of Al-Harith bin Abi Dhirar, whose name is Juwayriya. As narrated by Ad-Dahabi, (1993), Juwayriya's father, who was the chief of his tribe, came to see the Prophet after his daughter had been in captivity. The man was angry telling the Prophet that he was a reputable man so his daughter should not be kept in captivity. The Prophet replied: "Why not seeking her opinion?". The man directly went to his daughter and told her that the man, meaning Muhammad, gave you the right to choose to stay or to leave with him; her father, warning her to choose the Prophet. However, she directly said that she chose the Prophet (Ad-Dahabi, 1993, 263).

Such a situation reveals another human dimension represented by the Prophet's statement "Why not seeking her opinion?", although he had the right to refuse her father's request as she chose him and agreed to marry him. However, he dealt with the man in a gentle manner and with sharp mindset in such a situation where the paternity and its compassion to one's children play a significant role. This is a manifestation of the deepest dimension of humanity when the Prophet allowed the man to ask his daughter if she wanted to go with her father or to stay. This showed that the Prophet had left the matter to her because he knew that the paternal emotions may have touched her that his daughter was forced or obliged by pressure. Therefore, he left the matter between the father and his daughter, taking into account the human paternal situation, and he responded to the father with utmost kindness and appreciation respecting his position.

Additionally, the story showed that the Prophet realized that the woman was an adult, and so she was more entitled to herself than her father. Therefore, he allowed her to choose who she desired without influence in order to teach people about women's rights, taking into account the nature of their kind hearts and that she had the absolute will to choose. This is evidenced by her father's words, that the man, meaning the Prophet, gave her the choice. It is apparent from the choice when he said that man but did not say the Messenger of Allah or the Prophet, where he claimed that her choice



would be more abstract and stronger on herself. Furthermore, the Prophet allowed her father to address her alone in order to be fairer and more reasonable, which is confirmed by her father when he told her not to disgrace him; traditionally, he could not have said that in front of the Prophet or other people (Al-Dahabi, 1993, 263). This indicates the human dimension, which was reflected by the Prophet's treatment of women through giving them the right to choose and select without any pressure or coercion.

Furthermore, as narrated by the books of Hadiths, that marriage turned out to be fortunate for Juwayriya's family and tribe. When Muslims heard that the Prophet married Juwayriya, freed and released the captives from her family, they said that her family became the Prophet's relatives-in-law, and so did they release all other captives from her tribe. Aishah narrated that having the Prophet married Juwayriya, a hundred of her family, Banil-Mustaliq, were released, and so she was the greatest woman who brought happiness to her people at the time (Assaf, 1978, p. 236). This reveals the unique humanitarian gesture of the Prophet (PBUH) that has its deep impact on his companions and the people he was dealing with. Despite the critical situation with people, who were enemies for Muslims and had fights with them, the Prophet changed it for the good of both sides by his delicate behaviour and respect to a woman giving her the right to choose her ideal partner.

In addition, the position of women is manifested in another story, showing respect for their opinion and consultation in Islam. At that time, the Arab society used to ignore women's role and prevented them from being seen, or consider them as an inferior race, with few exceptions. However, when Mohammad (PBUH) started his Call (Da'awah), the image of women was changed. The incident occurred at Al-Hudaybiyah (an area between Medina and Mecca), where the *Treaty of Hdaybiyah* between Muslims and Quraysh took place. When the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) finished the issue of writing the agreement, he informed his companions to sacrifice and shave, but surprisingly, no one did what he said though he told them three times (Ibn-Qayyem, 1985, p. 295). It was an unusual behaviour for them not to do what they were told to do. Therefore, the Prophet entered his tent and told his wife Um Salama about the situation. Um Salama said, "O the Prophet of Allah!



(PBUH) Do you want your orders to be carried out? Go out and don't say a word to anybody till you have slaughtered your sacrifice and call your barber to shave your head." So, the Prophet (PBUH) went out and did not talk to anyone of them till he did that. Seeing that, the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) got up, slaughtered their sacrifices, and started shaving the heads of one another (Al-Khudary, 1988, 215).

The Prophet (PBUH) was bewildered and disappointed by his companions' reaction that nobody responded to his demand. It was the first time for them not to follow his orders. He even feared that they might be punished by Allah for not obeying him. Thus, he went to Um Salama and told her about the situation and that his companions might be doomed since none responded to his request (Assaf, 1978, 236). She knew that the Prophet (PBUH) was thinking of his companions while talking to her, seeking her advice in order to solve the problem and save them, and so she suggested the solution to the problem. This indicates the Prophet's compassion with his companions in different dimensions. First, he stated the situation to his wife Um Salama, which reveals his bewilderedness and apprehension about his companions for not applying his demand and his fear that they might have been tormented and doomed.

In addition, the second dimension was when he listened to his wife's proposal and acted accordingly in practice in front of his companions, and so the problem was resolved, and they were secured. In addition, in such a difficult and critical situation, the Prophet sought the opinion of his wife, who saved the situation and avoided all the consequences of the situation. He also accepted her opinion and carried out her advice without thinking whether it was from a man or a woman; his only objective was to save his companions and continue the Treaty of Hudaibiyah as he perceived it was a good opportunity for the Muslims to stop fighting at that time and sign the treaty.

Conclusion

These are only few stories and some news that were narrated in the Prophet's biography (PBUH) showing how he treated women and advised men (Muslims and non-Muslims) to be so kind and gentle with women. There are also many other stories that showed women participating in all aspects of life



being supported and encouraged by the Prophet to show his companions the importance of women's role in the Islamic society and to teach them how to treat women and deal with them as important members in that society. Women showed honesty, wisdom, courage, integrity, sacrifice and patience at the beginning of Islam as a result of all the support and kind treatment presented by the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions and so helped in the spread of Islam.

It is noteworthy that the first person to believe in the Prophet (PBUH) and his Call to Islam was Khadija; his wife. Moreover, the first woman who was martyred to defend the religion of Islam was a woman; Sumaya bint Khayyat. Asma'a bint abi Bakr also helped the Prophet in his emigration from Mecca to Medina, where she used to bring him food, drink, and news of Quraish. In fact, it is high time to show Islam in its real and true morals represented by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his companions in treating women and dealing with them as important members of the society not as has been common in the world about Muslim women that they are treated badly and have no rights in Islam.

Many studies and researches have been conducted and written in Arabic about Prophet Mohammad's life (PBUH). However, few studies have been conducted in English and other languages concerning that rich and fertile life of morals and wisdom. People around the world should know and learn those great aspects. Therefore, it is recommended that more researches should be conducted in English and other languages to show the life of the Prophet and his companions, concerning not only women, but also children, grown-ups, captives and enemies.



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