

## **The Biography of Lady Khadija and its Legal and Moral implications on Muslim Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

*Muslim women of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are faced with numerous challenges associated with adhering to the moral values which can guarantee their well-being in this world and success in the hereafter. The challenges range from choosing a suitable marriage partner, maintaining a beautiful marriage, single motherhood and widowhood to the struggle for maintenance and provision. This study has employed a descriptive inductive method to review the scholarly work on Lady Khadija's biography and then draw its legal and moral implications. The main objective of the study was to study Lady Khadija's biography in relation to the current Muslim women life socio-economic life style. The study concluded that despite the wide generation gap between women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and Lady Khadijah who lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, lady Khadija's life style as a business woman, a wife and a mother gives relevant insights and implications on the moral values, which if adhered to can offer solutions to the numerous contemporary challenges faced by Muslim women today and secure for them successful life here and in the hereafter.*

**Key words:** *Khadija, Jahiliyyah, moral values, women*

### **Introduction**

“In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are not companions, relatives or wives of prophets, but we certainly are part of the real world where we face difficult decisions every day. Muslim women from all walks of life daily confront issues such as widowhood, having to maintain one's family, being the household head, deciding on a suitable marriage partner, maintaining a beautiful marriage and most importantly, trusting God's plan through the signs that God sends. Today, Muslim women are managing a wide variety of difficulties, all the while doing what they can to spread goodness, and who better as a role model for them than Khadija bint Khuwaylid....She is certainly not a parallel female prophetic figure; however, on the level of women's expression of faith, when we read Khadija's life story holistically, we are presented with a uniquely female way of being Muslim. It is a way that is inspirational, not merely because of Khadija's piety, wealth and role as a wife, but also because she faced and overcame numerous obstacles that are familiar to women in our own 21st century context”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zahra Ayub, A Saint Woman of our times, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, Azizah magazine.com, p. 2.

Lady Khadija is an exceptional and distinguished personality in the life of Islam that has been described with heroic statements. Her life as a wife of the acme of humanity, Prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him- the mother of the majority of his children, and as a business woman in an “anti-women” business environment is a sufficient reference in achieving the objective of home-work balance, which is one of the greatest challenges for the corporate Muslim women today.

This paper presents the virtuous biography of Lady Khadijah as an exemplary character and benchmark for the Muslim women fraternity as a practical translation of the Qur’anic verse which states that “*But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world*”.<sup>2</sup>

This paper presents Lady Khadija’s lineage, her moral character and conduct before Muhammad’s prophethood, her contact and marriage to Muhammad peace be upon him, her commitment as a wife and mother with implications of each of them on the moral values of Muslim women today.

### **Her Lineage**

Ummul Mu’minin Khadijah was born in 555 AD. Her father was Khuwaylid and her mother was Faatimah. Khuwaylid was the son of Asad the son of Abdul Uzzah the son of Quswayy and belonged to the Quraish tribe born in 555 AD. Quswayy is the common progenitor of her lineage with that of Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him in the clan of Banu Hashim.<sup>3</sup> On the maternal side, Khadijah’s lineage meets with that of Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him at the maternal grandmother of Aaminah, the mother of Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him, who was a sister of Khuwaylid.<sup>4</sup> Her father Khuwaylid was a well -known chief of Makkah and a successful merchant who traded in oils, linen, perfumes and other rare merchandise.

Since her childhood, Khadijah (R.A) possessed noble qualities as a pious, intelligent and generous woman who used to extend a hand of help to the poor, the needy, the orphans and the widows.<sup>5</sup>

Despite coming from a noble wealthy family, Lady Khadijah remained humble and down to earth. Her characters of humility and socialization couldn’t be anticipated from her contemporary counterparts of similar noble status. The Holy Qur’an confirms the character of reaching out to the low-class people. It states that “*And be patient with those who call to their Lord in the morning and evening, desiring His Face. And do not turn your eyes away from them desiring the good things of this life, nor obey he whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance; so that he follows his own lust, and his affair has become excessive*”.<sup>6</sup> Salman Al-Faarisi reported that a group of non- Muslim noble Meccans came to the Prophet peace be upon him and urged him to pay attention to them and turn away from the low-class Muslims such as *Salman* and *Abu Dharr*. Allah revealed this verse instructing the Prophet Peace be Upon him to dedicate his time with the

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<sup>2</sup> Surat Al-Qasas, 28: 77.

<sup>3</sup> Syed A A Razwy, Khadijatul Kubra, A short Story of her Life, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Rashid Ahmad Chaudry, Hazrat Sayyedah Khadija (May Allah be pleased with her), Islam International Publications Ltd, UK 2009, pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Surat Al-Kahf, 18:28.

companions and spend time with them. It was thus concluded that nobles should be generous to the indigents, cooperate with them, respect them and associate with them.<sup>7</sup>

This life style is an opposite of the norm to many young women from noble and rich families who are in many cases taken by the pride and wealth of their families and make them under look those of low socio-economic status. Muslim women of this century should draw near to the vulnerable members of the society for social cohesion and cooperation without regard or reference to the social classes.

### **The Socio-Economic Environment in Arabia**

Makkah in the sixth century A.D was an important emporium in Arabia. Besides being known as an epicenter of socio-economic evils, it was at the crossroads of international commerce and trade. Cargoes coming from India such as spices, fruits, grain, ceramics and textiles, were unloaded at the ports of Yemen, and were carried from there, with the produce of Southern Arabia itself, such as coffee, medicinal herbs, aromatics, and perfumes, by camel caravans to Makkah, and thence, to Syria and through Syria to the Mediterranean world.

It wouldn't be easy to make an economic impact and visibility in such a central business district of Arabia, but from her home in Makkah, Khadijah controlled and developed an ever-growing business which spread into the neighboring countries in such an "anti-woman" orientation of the Arab society. This is proof of her ability to master her destiny by her intelligence, strength of will and force of character.

### **As a business Woman**

The socio-economic life in Arabia was not conducive for a woman to thrive and make a significant business stride. This is due to the fact that women were being seen generally as signs of bad omen and thus could easily be dragged into and or associated with evil.

Khadija came from a noble, wealthy trade family within the tribe of the Quraysh. She inherited her father's vast wealth and business savvy, and continued to maintain her family's business. It is reported that her caravans exceeded the number of caravans owned by all the rest of the traders of the Quraysh tribe, combined.<sup>8</sup>

Khadija thrived in this notorious and male-dominated socio-economic environment rose up as an outstanding successful lady in both business and character. Her affluence and excellence in business made her earn a public recognition and acknowledgment as the princess of Makkah, while her excellence in morality and character earned her the recognition of "Tahira" which means "the pure one".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir, Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay Al-Qur'an, Dar- Al-Ma'arif, Egypt, Vol. 18, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Zahra Ayub, A Saint Woman of our times, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, Azizah magazine.com, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Razwy, Khadijatul Kubra, page: 12

Many women in this century have been victims of sexual harassment and exploitation in their bid to acquire positions or and promotions in administrative positions, academic excellence, political appointments, etc. Khadija's prosperity in business and adherence to moral values is a great message to the contemporary corporate women workforce that self-confidence and consistence can earn them recognition as well without necessarily sacrificing their modesty.

It also sends a clear signal to the men workforce to create or and facilitate a conducive environment for women to prove their potential to make a contribution to society in the spirit of mutual cooperation and fulfilling their complementary roles as partners in development. Allah says "*The believers, both men and women, are guides to each other. They order what is just and forbid what is evil; they establish their prayers and pay the obligatory charity and obey Allah and His Messenger. On these Allah will have mercy. He is Mighty, Wise*".<sup>10</sup>

### **Earlier marriages**

Like to any other woman, time had to come in the cycle of Khadija's womanhood to get a partner for marriage. When she grew up her father gave her hand in marriage to Abu Haallah, son of Zaraqah. Abu Haallah was a merchant.<sup>11</sup> They lived happily and were blessed with a son named Hind and a daughter called Zainab. According to some historians, Abu Haallah had three sons, Haallah, Hind and Haarith. A few years later Abu Haallah died and later married to 'Ateeq, son of 'Aaiz, a rich trader. After sometime Khadija became a widow for the second time when 'Ateeq also passed on.

Her outstanding character insured and preserved for her honor in society that made noble and influential men not bothered by her state of double widowhood to express interest in marrying her. However, she decided to reject the offers and concentrate on business while rallying on the support of her father for guardianship and protection.

Muslim societies today are facing big challenges of preserving family values. Divorce rates are high due to lack of proper guidance in the establishment and maintaining of marital relationships.

Khadijah's relationship with her father in fulfilling her marital agenda is a lesson to parents to undertake and redefine their guardianship role that has been neglected and reduced to earning bride price at the time of sending off their daughters in marriage. It is the guardian's obligation to ensure his daughter physical, mental, emotional and psychological growth to be put into account while choosing or and approving for her suitable and compatible partner.

Her readiness and acceptance to enter into the first marriage and the second is a confirmation of the society's expectation of any grown-up woman to fulfil her natural role of engagement in marriage and not to reduce it to a mere option due to her sound economic status. Her family owes

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<sup>10</sup> Surat Attauba, 9: 77

<sup>11</sup> Rashid Ahmad Chaudry, Hazrat Sayyedah Khadijah, May Allah be pleased with her, islam publication limited, uk 2016.

her a duty to look for a suitable partner who can safeguard her integrity before she reaches an age of being at the mercy of those interested in marrying her.

This conduct further sends a strong message to high status ladies that the role of the family in decision making is indispensable. Given the current trends in the society, involvement of the family especially parents, is paramount even when the woman commands a high socio-economic status and recognition.

### **Marriage to Muhammad (SAW)**

Khadija continued to reject proposals from the Arab nobles until the time when she came to know about Muhammad's character as a modest and trusted young man. She had known him as a young man of integrity, honesty and principled behavior. She offered to him and sent a job offer to him to head her trading caravans. He gladly accepted the offer and started working for her. The first assignment was to lead her business trip to Syria with her old and trusted slave Maysarah being delegated to accompany and serve him.

Maysarah was impressed by the Prophet's integrity, strength of character, adherence to principles, his amicable dealings and his business abilities. On return, Maysara narrated the story of Muhammad to Khadija and the profits he made for her. Khadija found it more interesting especially his character and personality that was full of honesty and sincerity.

After knowing him for a considerable length of time and employing him on a few caravan trips to Syria. She was so impressed with his conduct, honesty in business and kindness to servants and developed interest in proposing him for marriage.

Though there is dispute among historians on her age by that time<sup>12</sup>, many sources established that Khadijah who was at forty years of age by the time she moved to propose Muhammad who was twenty-five years old. She consulted her best friend Nafeesah, who approved of the idea and offered to help her approach Muhammad.<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad's modesty was seen when he declined to express his acceptance to the offer from such a highly placed and wealthy lady. It was after assurance from Nafeesah that he accepted.

When Nafeesah reported back to Khadijah, she went ahead to make an offer for marriage through Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib. Muhammad sought the approval of Abu Talib who later held a talk with Khadija's uncle 'Amr bin Asad to conclude this marriage deal and it was settled.

Khadija's marriage plan to Muhammad has a number of implications:

1. By appointing Muhammad as an agent for trade, Khadija had the opportunity to test the depth of the waters before stepping into them. It gave him opportunity to study and evaluate Muhammad's suitability and reliability as an agent but also as a prospective husband. Her interest in marriage to Muhammad was after confirmation of his honesty and strength as

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<sup>12</sup> See: Zahra Ayub, A Saintly Woman of Our times Khadija, p. 2

<sup>13</sup> Razwy, Khadijatul Kubra, p. 25.

considerable qualities of a good husband. Qura'n states: "*one of the two [daughters]: "O my father! Hire him: for, behold, the best [man] that thou couldst hire is one who is [as] strong and worthy of trust [as he]!... Behold, I am willing to let thee wed one of these two daughters of mine on the understanding that thou wilt remain eight years in my service"*"<sup>14</sup>

2. The success of society is tagged on our success to plan, establish and organize the family institution. It calls for not only striving to look for best compatible spouses for ourselves but ourselves to be the best. The worst injustice is to look for a better wife for the worst husband in character. Her preference to Muhammad in the presence of the many noble and wealthy contenders was a confirmation of the Prophet's later pronouncement that "*When someone with whose religion and character you are satisfied asks your daughter in marriage, accede to his request. If you do not do so there will be temptation in the earth and extensive corruption.*"<sup>15</sup>
3. Khadijah's conduct with Muhammad laid down the principle of balancing between preservation of modesty and integrity and expression of interest for attaining an honorable and lawful endeavor. Some successful business women have reduced themselves to a level of cohabitation with young men who quench their sexual urge secretly outside the circles of legality.
4. The consultation made to Nafeesah and the role played by her in this marriage plan speaks to the necessity of having sincere and honest friends who could execute some sensitive duties without stabbing our backs and or revealing our secrets.
5. The marriage offer made through Abu Talib is yet another lesson picked from this process. This confirms to the indispensable requirement of involving elders in the decision-making process on both the sides of prospective husband and wife.

### **As a House Wife**

After her marriage, Khadijah appeared to have lost interest in her mercantile ventures and in her commercial empire. Marriage changed the character of her dedication and commitment to business to only one overriding interest of securing the comfort and happiness of her husband. She made the house of the Prophet an "island" of peace, contentment and happiness in a sea of conflict and strife.<sup>16</sup>

This creates a discussion on the wife's priorities after marriage especially when her potential and opportunities for financial contribution to the family welfare seem to be better than that of the husband. The preference has always been on economic development and in many cases at the expense of securing the comfort and happiness at home. This is left to the spouses to chart their course in light of home-work balance.

Khadija was "an "eye-witness" of the birth of Islam. She nursed it through its infancy, through its most difficult, and through its most formative years. Islam was given shape and design in her home. If any home can be called the cradle of Islam, it was her home. If any home can be called

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<sup>14</sup> Surat Al-Qasas: 28: 26

<sup>15</sup> Sunan Ibn Majah: No. 123

<sup>16</sup> Razwy, Khadijatul Kubra, p.31.

the "axis" of Islam, it was her home. She played a stellar role in the history of nascent Islam when she chose to blend her personality with the personality of Islam and thus became its heart and core.

Khadija stood firmly with the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him at the inception of inspiration. He sought refuge in her when inspiration occurred to him in a frightful way that made him run to her and repeated the statement "cover me" under which circumstances Surat Mudathir and Muzammil were revealed.

Her suggestion to consult her cousin Waraqah bin Naufal, a Christian hermit on this matter was a positive gesture for her readiness to find out the truth behind this strange experience, but also to offer support as much as it was needed. On verifying the information on this incident and confirming it as a sign of prophethood, Khadija became the first person to believe in the Holy Prophet.

Khadijah's conversion to Islam is a clear testimony to the women's freedom of expression and self-determination in Islam. It is an individual obligation to look for guidance and once found he is bound to follow it.

Khadija's contribution to Islam was not reduced at a level of mere conversion and taking a spectator role to the unveiling events in the newly introduced faith. Instead, she participated actively in the propagation of Islam by offering emotional, physical and financial support.

Her conduct as a wife speaks volumes of the humility and cooperation needed from both partners for successful marriage life. Khadijah's humble nature before Muhammad cannot be taken for granted especially when one recounts the rebellious and defiant characters of the wives of Prophet Noah and Luut *alaihima ssalaam*.

Khadijah asked her husband to recount the phenomenal moment to her so that she could help him decipher what he had just experienced, an encounter with an angel or a demon. Khadija's verification and examination methods which involved requesting the Prophet to sit on her lap, removing her veil and opening her robe to reveal her form, which led to appearance and disappearance of angel Jibril made her to conclude that "*Rejoice and be of good heart; by God he is an angel and not a satan*".<sup>17</sup>

This full participation in establishing the truth, and taking an active role in examining and verifying the veracity of strange experiences was a great sign of bravery and courage that went beyond the maximum expectation of the wife's support to a husband in any trial moment. It was a demonstration of Khadijah's wisdom, patience and steadfastness in the face of events that occurred in her husband's life.

The Social boycott which lasted for three years demonstrated Khadija's resilience and selfless service to Islam. Besides standing by the side of the Prophet, she spent most of her fortune on buying water to Muslims in exile.

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<sup>17</sup> Seerat Ibn Ishaq: 107

The level of recognizing Khadijah's sacrifice to Islam couldn't come from any better and high-profile source apart from Allah. Abu Huraira reported that Gabriel came to Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) and said: *Allah's Messenger, lo. Khadija is coming to you with a vessel of seasoned food or drink. When she comes to you, offer her greetings from her Lord, the Exalted and Glorious, and on my behalf and give her glad tidings of a palace of jewels in Paradise wherein there is no noise and no toil.*<sup>18</sup>

Based on this and many other events, the Holy Prophet used to praise Khadijah most often and stressed her virtues and the sacrifices that she had made for the cause of Islam. On one such occasion Aisha could no longer control herself. She said to the Holy Prophet, 'O, Messenger of Allah! Why do you talk so much of the old lady? God has given you better, younger and more attractive wives.' The Holy Prophet was overcome by emotion when he heard this. He said, 'Oh, No, Aisha! You have no idea how good Khadijah was to me. She believed in the truthfulness of my claim when others rejected me. She became my best companion and helper when others forsook me. Moreover, God has blessed me with children from her.'<sup>19</sup>

Muslim wives of this century ought to create a conducive environment for participation in family development morally, socially and economically. This is in general implementation of the message in Qur'an where Allah states that "*And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression*".<sup>20</sup> and "*The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise*".<sup>21</sup>

### **As a Mother**

Prophet Muhammad and Khadija were blessed with two sons; Qaasim, Abdullah, and four daughters; Zainab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum and Faatimah. All his sons died in their childhood while all daughters grew up and accepted Islam but the Prophet was only survived by Fatimah who also lived about six months after the demise of the Holy Prophet.<sup>22</sup>

As a mother, Khadijah raised her children with moral values that were later seen in their conduct after her death. It was due to their high moral values that they were all chosen for marriage by distinguished men such as Uthman bin Affan, Arr-abiyy bin Al-as, and Ali bin Abi Talib who married Ruqayyah and Ummu Kulthum, Zainab and Fatima respectively. No historical record was made about Ruqayyah and Ummu Kulthum as wives to Uthman, but devotion, humility, honesty and other moral values were documented about Zainab and Fatima.

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<sup>18</sup> Sahiih Bukhari: Book 44, Hadith No. 103

<sup>19</sup> Seerat Ibn Ishaq: 107

<sup>20</sup> Surat Al-Maida, 5:2

<sup>21</sup> Surat Al-Tauba, 9:71

<sup>22</sup> Chaudry, p.13



The household is the first learning environment for children that is ought to be maximumly utilized by the mother due to the long time they spend with children and the emotional attachment they enjoy with them. This should be the norm that should be taken on by Muslim women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>23</sup>

Khadijah's role as a mother was a great contribution to the maintenance of the moral character of the Prophet's family members. In some cases, the moral character of some family members had been shameful to such an extent that family head finds it difficult to call others towards the right path like in the case of Nooh and his son.

Additionally, Khadija and the Prophet took in Ali ibn Abi Talib whose father, an important elder in the tribe, was under financial stress. They also adopted an orphan boy named Zayd, whose mother had been captured and sold into slavery; the couple raised these two young males as their own.<sup>24</sup>

This speaks to Khadija's generosity and concern to the disadvantaged members of the society as a culture that should be adopted in our families under the spirit of cooperation on good and righteousness.

### **Demise**

After the social boycott of the Banu Hashim, the health of both Khadija and Abu Taalib started deteriorating. Shortly after return to normal life, the Prophet's uncle and his beloved and faithful wife Khadija, both passed away, one after the other. Khadija died at the age of sixty-five in the tenth year of Prophet-hood (619 AD) in the month of Ramadhan and was buried in the Makkan cemetery of Hajoon.<sup>25</sup>

Her death is reported to have had a profound impact on the Prophet. More than losing her financial support, he suffered from the loss of his closest confidant and partner in life.<sup>26</sup> Women should always strive to create an impact before, during and after the marital relationship.

### **Conclusion**

If Muslim women are in search of happiness in this world, and salvation in the Hereafter, they must live in imitation of the sainted life of Khadija. She is the "guardian" of the secret of winning the pleasure of Allah; and she is the "custodian" of the key that will unlock for them, the gates of success in the two worlds.

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<sup>23</sup> Saiful Bahri, Maria Ulfa Batoebara, The position and Participation of Khadijah in Developing Daawah in Islam at the First period, Udapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal (BIRCI- Journal), p. 291

<sup>24</sup> Zahra 18

<sup>25</sup> Chaudry 34

<sup>26</sup> Zahra 19

The impact of Khadijah's insightful biography is not only limited to women but lessons learnt from it are of great significance in reorganizing the Muslim society into an order that can make it a role model society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. May Allah bless Khadijah and her family.

### **Recommendations**

1. The approach to the study of Islamic history including personalities should focus on drawing implications for improvement of the Muslim society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
2. Muslim organizations embark on studying and publishing short biographies of prominent personalities for the purpose of imparting values in the young generation.
3. Preachers should prepare and deliver sermons on Khadijah's biography and its implications on the 21<sup>st</sup> century Muslim women for the benefit of the Muslim society.

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