

RUSHDIE'S TEAM: THE MODERN DAY CRUSADERS

Anisa T. Masood, Canada

Today in the West a person may have as many premarital and extramarital affairs as he or she pleases. But when it comes to marriage there is an absolute and almost militant insistence on monogamy. What an amazing paradox! Salman Rushdie's agenda of slandering and defaming Islam was dying its own death in the decade of the nineties. The unfortunate and tragic events of 9/11 have among other problems given birth to new propaganda machinery that in the guise of fiction, science and religion plan on maligning Islam and personalities associated with Islam. The knights of this new Crusade are Prof. Richard Dawkins, Sherry Jones, Irshad Manji and many others.

The human condition is, as Plato would make Socrates say in the Republic (7.514a ff.), comparable to that of prisoners of an underground cave, whose unfortunate fate is to confuse reality with passing shadows created by a fire inside their miserable abode and kept in motion by clever manipulators, who in the name of politics, religion, science, and tradition control the human herd. The agenda of this crusade is to keep the focus of discussion on slanderous topics so that the masses can be kept away from the beauty of Islam. The idea being that if you ask the 'wrong questions' the 'answers' will not matter, and any positive discussion about Islam can as such be avoided. All the writers mentioned here do not make an individual effort at their writings. It is a concerted effort to defame Islam one way or the other. Professor Richard Dawkins claims in his book *the God Delusion* that he was one of the 37 authors who were chosen to defend Rushdie at the time of publication of his so called novel, *Satanic Verses*.

Sherry Jones' book *the Jewel of Medina* has become controversial around the globe. Reason? Intentional mingling of truth and reality, a threat to affect the reverence of most venerated Holy beings of the second largest faith in the world. While going through all the aspects of the author's intentions, purposes and aims conveyed by her in different interviews and other statements for writing the book, one gets to hear some noble and haughty claims. She very extensively claimed that after 9/11 she wanted to write a book to form a bridge between Muslims and other communities, and remove the misconception about Islam. According to her this book elaborated the pious status and kind personality of the Prophet Muhammad^{saw} and honor his wife her Holiness 'Aisha^{ra}' as a wise and witty personality. But after reading it this is not proved. She rather posed her as an average woman who followed only her desires and had no respect or regards for the values that she was taught. According to the author's own statement in the initial stage she just wrote a book of facts about the lives of these Holy beings but later on she says she was advised, for commercial reasons, to put some ingredients of novel in it so that it became interesting and thrilling, her greed for fame and money made her readily

put at stake the forming of a bridge to bring the two communities closer. She deliberately ignored the consequences of hurting the status of the Holy Prophet^{saw} and the status of respected and graceful personality of 'Aisha^{ra} and the sentiments of Muslims all around the world. It is absolutely unbelievable, an act by a person who claims to have a wish to remove hatred from among the people and who asserts to have possessed good understanding and knowledge of Islam. Unfortunately in spite of all the knowledge she claims to have she is yet unaware of the intensity of reverence for these Holy beings in the heart of every Muslim. She statutes herself as an understanding and considerate person who cared for the betterment of humanity and peace but then deliberately mingles fiction in the reality, threatening the purity of characters of most revered personalities of a worldwide faith, just for the sake of mere thrill and commercial reasons. It seems that God intervened here, and she herself confessed that she had mixed in fiction to make the story interesting. Fiction and research are oxymoron, but the frenzy that has resulted from the tragedy of 9/11 has hijacked rationality of some and in their Islam phobia they are willing to accept any accusations leveled against Islam and the Muslims.

Sherry Jones completely ignored the fact that these two holy beings are venerated by millions around the world and deliberately brought restlessness in the society. It is understood that she must have gone through a thorough study of the Islamic history she must have known that it is a part of faith for every Muslim to love the Holy Prophet^{saw} more than their lives, parents and every relative. To Muslims his wives are like mothers. So if we weigh this common element of respect for a mother by a child, even on the average worldly standard, to hear something bad about a mother is intolerable for any individual even if it was true. But if it is a wrong accusation, anger and rage is unimaginable. Doer of such an act is answerable and owes an apology, to the whole world, in the sight of every decent person. Now we come to the main story. She projects that the marriage of respected 'Aisha^{ra} to the Holy Prophet was not consented by her. It is a very well known fact that respected 'Aisha^{ra} came into the Holy Prophet's wedlock at a very tender age. An age in which she was said to be playing when called to be prepared as a bride. She was like a blank paper and the very first image of man on it was that of the holy Prophet's. His pious company, affection, kind character and image left an undelatable print thereafter on her. Her constant care and love for him show that she had a very happy relation with her husband. The people who take pity on respected 'Aisha^{ra} to have been chosen as the wife of Prophet Muhammad^{saw} should not forget that it was she who took pride in being his wife. In fact all his wives tried to surpass one another when it came to show their love. It is related that before his demise prophet told his wives that who ever has longer hands amongst them will meet him first in paradise. His wives took it literally and began to measure the length of their hands. To see who would be that lucky one. The Holy Prophet smiled and said that by long hands he meant the one who was more generous. This is something by which

everyone can judge the standard of love, care and respect of his wives for him. It is amazing how his wives adored him so much that not only in this life did they want to be with him but also in the hereafter they wanted his holy companionship. Can we show such an example of love and understanding in today's life? Such was the love and affection that 'Aisha^{ra} had for her husband. At another time, after the demise of the Holy Prophet^{saw} plain bread of finely ground wheat flour was presented to her but instead of eating the bread and enjoying its softness she tearfully recalled that the Holy Prophet all his life ate very hard bread made out of hand mill crushed wheat. And that too was most of the time not enough to fill the hunger. Hence she could not eat it out of grief. This cannot be the face of a forced marriage?

In the case of the lost necklace of respected 'Aisha^{ra}, the incident has been exaggerated to the utmost level of ignorance in the novel. The author is fabricating a plan of respected 'Aisha^{ra} leaving the Holy Prophet and marrying another man. According to the filthy mind of the author the story of the lost necklace and staying behind of 'Aisha^{ra} was a plot to accomplish the plan. It may be a common talk in the West to be infidel or have relation outside the marriage or to cheat on one's spouse or to have a secret relation or to have an open access to other gender in the name of friendship or so called freedom. It maybe a thrill to some but human nature disapproves of it and abhors it as it brings shame and ruins the peace of families, promotes infidelity, brings disgrace, thus it is regarded as a lewd act that is unacceptable. Such infidelity pollutes the societies with evil and mars the progenies to come. At the same time an issue as serious as marriage which is a contract of lifetime, becomes a child's play. With this attitude men and women become irresponsible. A marriage is not a relation of two individuals but a whole generation's fate relies upon it. Islam makes men and women realize it hence teaches them to maintain a very high standard of loyalty, respect and deep affection towards their life partners. The one who adheres to it is given the tiding of great rewards thereafter in the Holy Quran. Purity of character and modesty are the hallmarks of Islamic world. Had the author known Islam she would have refrained from this fabrication. To Muslims her novel is only a heart aching ignorance. One feels pity on her level of ignorance and moral bankruptcy. As the real incident about the necklace was nothing but a simple day to day accidental happening. It is mentioned in the verses 12 and 13 of Sura Nur in the Holy Quran.

The truth is that once on the way back to home from a journey the caravan of the Holy Prophet^{saw} stopped to rest at a certain place. His wife respected 'Aisha^{ra} was accompanying him. It so happened that respected 'Aisha^{ra} had to go aside for call of nature and hoping to be back in time. But there she lost her necklace and she started searching for it. It delayed her return. In her absence her howdah or litter was lifted by the people and put on the camel, as she was light weighted, no body noticed it was

empty so the caravan left without her. On her return she was shocked to see what had happened. The misery and agony of being left alone in the wild for a young girl is imaginable, she sat under a tree in tears and waited there and prayed to be helped. It was customary for the Holy Prophet that he always appointed someone to come after the caravan to take care of the things that might have been left behind mistakenly. So a man named Safwan was given this task at that time. When this man came there he saw respected 'Aisha^{ra} asleep under a tree. He had seen her before the revelation of the verse for the veil. So recognizing her, he quickly turned his face aside uttering the words of seeking the refuge of God, and made the sound of cough to make her aware of his presence. At this she woke up abruptly and seeing a man before her she covered her face. Then the person respectfully like a servant brought his camel to her on which she quietly mounted and they set off towards home. The man kept walking along at the back quietly like a humble servant, until they reached her home in Medina. That was all. But the people who did not want to miss any opportunity to defame the Holy Prophet^{saw} and his family took advantage and started gossiping evil about them. And are trying to do so till today. But God, the Almighty, the Wise, the Most Beneficent and the Merciful cleared her from all the accusations by revealing her innocence in the Holy Quran. It is in Sura Al Nur the chapter 24. It darkened the faces of the accusers and disappointed them and wasted their efforts. If there had been any truth in the accusation she was still very young, twenty two years old, when the holy Prophet passed away, she still could act upon her plan to remarry if she had any. She lived almost sixty two years afterwards but there is not a single incident or report that she ever wanted to remarry anyone at all. If someone says that she did not remarry because wives of holy Prophet were not allowed to do so then they should know that the same condition applied during his life. Then how could she have tried it then?

Touching the topic of the veil or *hijab* Sherry Jones very elusively gives the impression that the wives of The Holy Prophet did not like the command of veil hence they spoke of it as an undesired obligation or burden that had taken their freedom and confined them. She also tried to pose this revelation as the result of the constant influence and urge of his friend Abu Bakr^{ra} making the revelation suspicious. As she has already admitted it, it is again the recipe of the brilliance of fiction that she talked about. In reality on an occasion that demanded the need for veil the verse descended to the Holy Prophet from God through His Angel Gabriel. To this not only the wives of the Holy Prophet but also other Muslim women readily adopted. And they solemnly with contentment and ease practiced it. It is related that when Respected A'isha felt that her time was near she advised to her maid that her funeral should be very well covered and be taken out to bury only in the dark of the night so that she would not be seen by lay people in the streets. What can be said on the details of Sherry Jones that she has very painfully woven in here novel to take the sympathy of readers for her factious heroine in the

novel? All one can say is that every writing in some way is autobiographical and so the main character of Sherry Jones' novel perhaps reflects Sherry's own life and fantasies.

The book also suggests that the Holy Prophet's many marriages (God forbid) were a result of being afflicted by the beauties of women. If this was the case then why did he not readily agree to the offers by the tribe Quraish, early in his ministry when he was still young, to give him with as much wealth as he wanted and to give him in marriage any of the beautiful girls of his choosing? Had he been keen for this he had the golden chance to avail in his youth. But instead he rejected these offers. What we see in his biography is that at the prime of his youth, at an age of twenty five years he married a pious lady Khadijah in spite of her age of forty years. In that era when people married young and few survived into forties and fifties, the age of forty was considered advanced middle age. He remained loyal to her until her death when he was fifty years of age and she was sixty five. The span of their holy companionship stretches over twenty five years. He spent an absolutely happy life with her. If someone thinks he married her because of her wealth they should rethink! All her wealth with her consent was given to the needy ones and in other charitable causes. Many a times she would also stay without food for days without any complaint or without his love or respect diminishing in her heart. Such is the life history of the pious that is unheard of among the worldly people.

The West today seems to be intoxicated in their self pleasing addiction. The talk of chastity to them is the tale of the past, purity forgotten and lost. Such a misery has befallen on them that they have become insane thus do not even feel the need of it. But the chosen people or God loving souls are heavenly beings. There is no match of them with the worldly ones. Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} always missed his first wife respected Khadija^{ra} on many occasions of his life saying words of praise for her so much that sometimes his other wives would envy her. After her demise the Holy Prophet did not remarry until almost two years. Then he married to a noble lady named Sauda of the same age of his, fifty two. All his wives other than respected 'Aisha^{ra} were either widows or divorced. His marriages to them were for the reason of making good relation to the tribes living around as this was the best way of spreading the word of God in these tribes. Hence all his marriages were mainly for the sake of preaching the word of God to the people. There was not any personal reason or need behind it. Two of his marriages were actually proposed by God for him. One with respected 'Aisha^{ra} and the second one was that to the lady Zainab^{ra}. The Prophet was somewhat reluctant about marriage with Zainab^{ra}, but God revealed to him that he should marry her. She was the ex-wife of a boy that was raised in his home. The prophet took him as a son. But God clearly revealed to him that a child must be known by the name of his real father. And an adopted child may be treated affectionately and given anything on mutual understanding but cannot be the heir. So every wife that he took was for the sake of

spreading the word of God. There was a time when out of some reason which for the fear of length can not be explained here, God commanded him to refrain from his wives to which he responded obediently. He went aside in segregation and waited for a month or two until God allowed him to return to them. At first common people and even his wives and friends feared that he had divorced all his wives. But later they were told that it was for the will of God a temporary segregation. So it is very important that one should keep these aspects in mind before saying any thing about his marriages.

The Western nations do believe in the freedom of speech but there is limit to such freedom. There are laws against slander and defaming in Europe, USA and Canada. There is no freedom to malign or libel! The novel of Sherry Jones like the one of her predecessor Salman Rushdie falls in the category of slander and libel.

POLYGAMY

The Holy Quran takes up the issue of polygamy, in relation to the rights of the orphans, in the fourth chapter titled Al Nisa (The Women).

"And give to the orphans their property and exchange not the bad for the good, and devour not their property with your own. Surely, it is a great sin. And if you fear that you will not be fair in dealing with the orphans, then marry of women as may be agreeable to you, two, or three, or four; and if you fear you will not deal justly, then *marry only one*." (Al Quran 4:3-4)

To review the commentary of these verses go to the five volume commentary that is available at Alislam.org:

<http://www.alislam.org/quran/tafsir/guide.htm?region=E1>

AGE OF HADHRAT AISHA AT THE TIME OF MARRIAGE

"The timing of puberty varies from person to person and from country to country owing to genetic, environmental, and other factors," according to Encyclopedia Britannica, "but usually occurs between ages 11 and 16. Among moderately well-off British or North American children, puberty on the average peaks at about age 12 for girls and age 14 for boys."¹

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, under the heading adolescence, "Alexander the Great (356–323 bce) was still a teenager when he set out to conquer a large part of the known world at the head of his father's Macedonian armies. Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92) was an adolescent when his father sent him to Paris to work out subtle financial deals with the king of France. On a less exalted level, until a few generations ago, boys as young as age five or six were expected to work in factories or mines for 70 or more hours a week. In almost all parts of the world, girls were expected to marry and take on the responsibilities of running a household as early as possible."²

Marriage at a very young age has been prevalent in most cultures throughout human history, but has gradually diminished since some countries started to urbanize, changing the ways of life for the people of these countries. In an age and culture where there was very little formal education and life expectancy was very short, there was very little purpose in postponing marriage once individuals had attained puberty. Even today in areas where these two facts hold true individuals are married at a much younger age.

Even to this day, in parts of Ethiopia and Nigeria, over 50% of girls are married before the age of 15. In parts of Mali, 39% of girls are married before the age of 15. In South Africa, there are legal provisions made for respecting the marriage laws of traditional marriages whereby a person might be married as young as 12 for females and 14 for males.

Adam Hani Walker writes in his book titled *Hadhrat Abu Bakr As-Siddiq*, “It is worth pausing for a moment and discussing the age of Hadhrat ‘Aisha^{ra} when she married the Holy Prophet (saw) as this has been an issue the opponents of Islam have manipulated in order to attack the pure character of the Holy Prophet (saw). Using the ill-informed research of some Muslims, the opponents of Islam propose that the marriage ceremony between the Holy Prophet (saw) took place when Hadhrat Aisha was five or six years old with the marriage being consummated when she was nine or ten years of age. Such allegations are based on a cocktail of half truths, manipulation and deception of the highest order. Historical research establishes that Hadhrat Aisha was in fact ten years old at the time of her *nikah* which took place two years before Hijrah. Her marriage was not consummated until the third year after Hijrah making her about fifteen years old when the marriage was consummated. To be married at the age of fifteen during the time of the Holy Prophet (saw), and under the hot climate of Arabia, was not at all out of the ordinary. At the age of fifteen it was common for girls of the Arabian peninsular to mature to the age of puberty and begin married life.”³

Sir Zafrulla Khan has addressed the age issue in the following words, “In no single marriage of his was he inspired by any purely personal desire or motive. At the time when his *nikah* was performed with ‘Aisha, she was only ten years of age. She was the daughter of his closest and most devoted friend; had been brought up from her birth in an atmosphere of piety and righteousness; her mind under the Holy Prophet’s care could be molded along lines of utmost beneficence; she could be instructed in an intimate relationship with regard to all that Islam required of a woman and could thus prove most helpful in guiding Muslim women, both by precept and by example, along the ways of righteousness; and she could be expected to survive the Holy Prophet for a long period and to serve as a source of instruction for the whole Muslim community, as indeed it proved to be the case in fact. A great part of the knowledge of the ways and practice of the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was handed down to future generations of Muslims through ‘Aisha.”⁴ It should be noted that the religious marriage ceremony

called *nikah* happened when Hadhrat ‘Aisha was ten years old but the marriage was consummated several years later.

THE HOLY PROPHET’S MARRIAGES

Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan has written a wonderful biography about the Holy Prophet, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets* that can be read at the following link:

http://www.alislam.org/library/books/muhammad_seal_of_the_prophets/

The second half of the last chapter of this book, titled *Excellent Exemplar*, has a robust defense of the marriages of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw} and has several quotes from non-Muslim writers.

Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (1893-1985) was a distinguished scholar in world religions, was a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a missionary branch of Islam. He became Foreign Minister of Pakistan in 1947 and for many years led the Pakistan Delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations. He was President of the Seventeenth Session of the General Assembly. He also served as president of the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Sir William Muir has observed (*Life of Muhammad*, p. 514):

“In domestic life the conduct of Muhammad is exemplary. As a husband his fondness and devotion were entire. As a father he was loving and tender. **In his youth he lived a virtuous life; and at the age of twenty-five he married a widow forty years old, during whose lifetime for five and twenty years he was a faithful husband to her alone.**”

Frithjof Schuon has observed (*Understanding Islam*, pp. 88, 89):

“There was in his life a superhuman grandeur of soul; there were also marriages and through them a deliberate entry into the earthly and social spheres - we do not say into the worldly and profane spheres - and *ipso facto* an integration of collective human life into the spiritual realm in view of the Prophet’s avataric nature. On the plane of piety attention must be drawn to the love of poverty, the fasting and the vigils; some people will no doubt object that marriage, and especially polygamy, are opposed to asceticism, but that is to forget, first, that married life does not remove the rigor of poverty, vigils and fasts, nor render them easy and agreeable, and secondly, that in the case of the Prophet marriage had a spiritualized or tantric character, as has indeed everything in the life of such a being because of the metaphysical transparency phenomena they assume. Looked at from outside, most of the Prophet’s marriages had, moreover, a political aspect - politics having here a sacred significance connected with the establishing on earth of a reflection of the City of God - and, finally, Muhammad gave

enough examples of long abstinences, particularly in his youth, when passion is considered to be most strong, to be exempt from superficial judgments on this account.”

Karen Armstrong writing about the first mosque of Medina:

“This humble building in Medina expressed the ideal of tawhid (monotheism). Muhammad wanted to show that the sexual, the sacred, and the domestic could-and, indeed, must-be integrated. Similarly politics, welfare, and the ordering of social life must be brought into the ambit of holiness. In housing his wives within a stone's throw of the mosque, Muhammad was tacitly proclaiming that there must be no distinction between public and private life, and no discrimination between the sexes. Holiness in Islam was inclusive rather than exclusive. If they wished, Jews and Christians could worship in the mosque, because they too were part of God's family.”⁵

ADDITIONAL QUOTES OF NON-MUSLIM WRITERS ABOUT PROPHET'S MARRIAGES

Sir Thomas Carlyle defending the character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}:

"How he was placed with Khadijah, a rich Widow, as her steward, and traveled in her business, again to the Fairs of Syria; how he managed all, as one can well understand, with fidelity and adroitness; how her gratitude, her regard for him grew: the story of their marriage is altogether a graceful intelligible one, as told us by the Arab authors. He was twenty-five; she forty, though still beautiful. He seems to have lived in a most affectionate, peaceable, wholesome way with this wedded benefactress; loving her truly, and her alone. It goes greatly against the impostor theory, the fact that he lived in this entirely unexceptionable, entirely quiet and commonplace way, till the heat of his years was done."⁶

Karen Armstrong writes:

“Muhammad's harem has excited a good deal of prurient and ill-natured speculation in the West, but in Arabia, where polygamy was more common than the monogamous marriage that Muhammad had enjoyed with Khadijah, it would have been commonplace. These marriages were not romantic or sexual love affairs but were undertaken largely for practical ends. Sawdah seems to have been a rather homely woman, who was past her first youth; but she could take care of Muhammad's domestic needs. Muhammad may also have hoped to win over Suhayl, who was still undecided about the revelations. There was no impropriety in Muhammad's betrothal to 'A'isha. Marriages conducted in absentia to seal an alliance were often contracted at this time between adults and minors who were even younger than 'A'isha. **This practice continued in Europe well into the early modern period.** There was no question of consummating the marriage until 'A'isha reached puberty, when she would have been

married off like any other girl. Muhammad's marriages usually had a political aim. He was starting to establish an entirely different kind of clan, based on ideology rather than kinship, but the blood tie was still a sacred value and helped to cement this experimental community."⁷

Karen Armstrong writing about how the prophet Muhammad^{saw} created rights and equality for women:

"Muhammad lived cheek by jowl with his family and companions and saw no opposition between his public and private life.' It was possible for his wives to hear every word that was spoken in the mosque from their apartments. The Emigrants had immediately noticed that the women of Medina were different, less rigorously controlled than in Mecca, and soon found that their own wives were picking up the free and easy ways of the Medinese women: 'Umar was furious when his wife started to answer him back instead of meekly accepting his reproaches, and when he rebuked her she simply replied that the Prophet allowed his wives to argue with him. ... Muhammad's deliberate conflation of private and public was a blow to male supremacy, which can only exist if this distinction is maintained."⁸

¹ "puberty." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2008. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 24 Dec. 2008 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/482269/puberty>>.

² "adolescence." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2008. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 24 Dec. 2008 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/6216/adolescence>>.

³ <http://alislam.org/topics/khilafat/Hadhrat-Abu-Bakr-20080304MN.pdf>

⁴ Muhammad Zafrulla Khan. Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets. Chapter 4 on steadfastness. Page 61. http://www.alislam.org/library/books/muhammad_seal_of_the_prophets/chapter_04.html

⁵ Karen Armstrong. Muhammad: A Prophet for our times. Harper Collins, 2006. Pages 116.

⁶ Sir Thomas Carlyle; page 288.

⁷ Karen Armstrong. Muhammad: A Prophet for our times. Harper Collins, 2006. Pages 104-105.

⁸ Karen Armstrong. Muhammad: A Prophet for our times. Harper Collins, 2006. Pages 139-140.