

Chapter 36: The Events of the Fifth Year of Migration

The most important historical events of the fifth year of migration are the Battle of Ahzab, the story of Bani Qurayzah and the Holy Prophet's marriage with Zaynab daughter of Jahash. According to the historians the first event which took place was the marriage of the Prophet with Zaynab.

The Holy Qur'an has narrated the above-mentioned story in the 4th, 6th and 36th to 40th verses of Surah al-Ahzab and has left no room for fabrication of falsehoods by the orientalist and the novelists. We shall study this event in the light of the most authentic source (viz. the Holy Qur'an) and shall also scrutinize the remarks of the orientalist very minutely.

Who Was Zayd Bin Harith?

Zayd was a person who was captured during his childhood from a caravan by the nomadic Arab plunderers and was sold as a slave in the market of 'Ukaz. He was purchased by Hakim bin Hizam for his paternal aunt, Khadijah, and she made a gift of him to the Prophet after their marriage.

Zayd was enamoured of the pure spiritual mind, sublime sentiments and good morals of the Prophet; so much so that when, after some time, his father came to Makkah and requested the Prophet to set him free, so that he might take him to his mother and other members of his family, Zayd declined to go and preferred remaining with the Prophet. He gave complete authority to the Prophet whether he should stay with him or return to his homeland.

This spiritual attachment and these deep sentiments existed on both the sides. If Zayd was fond of the morals and sentiments of the Prophet, he also loved him in such a way that he selected him as his son and people began calling him Zayd bin Muhammad instead of Zayd bin Harith.

To make this matter formal the Prophet held his hand one day and said to the people of Quraysh: "This is my son and we inherit from each other". This cordial relationship continued to exist till Zayd breathed

his last in the Battle of Mo'ta and the Prophet was so much moved on this account as if he lost his own son. 1

Zayd Marries The Prophet's Cousin (Paternal Aunt's Daughter)

One of the sacred aims of the Prophet was to reduce class distinctions and to bring together all human beings under the banner of humanity and piety and to introduce moral excellence and natural human qualities as the standard of superiority and distinction.

Hence, it was necessary that he should uproot, as early as possible, the old despicable customs of the Arabs (that the daughters of the nobility should not be married to indigent people) and nothing could be better than that he should commence this programme from his own family and should marry his cousin Zaynab, the grand-daughter of Abdul Muttalib, to his former slave, who had since been set free, so that people should know that these imaginary barriers should be removed as early as possible and they should also know that when the Prophet says: "The criterion of superiority is piety and a Muslim woman is equal to a Muslim man" he himself was the first to enforce this law and the first to act upon it.

In order to do away with this wrong custom the Prophet went to Zaynab's house personally and formally asked for her consent to marry Zayd. In the first instance she and her brother were not inclined to accept the proposal, because the ideas of the Days of Ignorance had not yet been completely wiped out from their minds. Hence, notwithstanding the fact that it was an unpleasant task for them to refuse to comply with the Prophet's orders, they excused themselves on the plea of Zayd having been a slave in the past.

Soon afterwards Divine revelation condemned the action of Zaynab and her brother in these words:

The believing men and women must not feel free to do something in their affairs other than that which has been already decided for them by Allah and his Messenger. One who disobeys Allah and His Messenger is in plain error. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:36)

The Prophet immediately recited the verse to them. The pure and perfect faith of Zaynab and her brother Abdullah in the Prophet and his sublime ideals was instrumental in the daughter of Jahash giving her consent without any delay and as a result, a lady of noble birth was married to a freed slave of Muhammad. In this manner, therefore, a part of the invigorative programme of Islam was implemented and a wrong custom was dispensed with in a practical way.

Zayd Separates From His Wife

Eventually, for certain reasons, this marriage culminated in divorce. Some say that the reason for this separation was the mentality of Zayd's wife, as she mentioned the lowness of her husband's descent to his very face and prided herself on account of the greatness of her own family and had thus made his life bitter for him.

However, it is probable that Zayd himself might have been responsible for the divorce, because his biography shows that he led a sequestered life, as he married many women and divorced all of them (except the last one who was still alive when he was killed in a battle) and these successive divorces show that Zayd possessed a spirit of unsociability.

The second testimony about the view that Zayd had a share in this incident is the harsh manner in which the Prophet addressed him. Because, when the Prophet came to know that Zayd had decided to divorce his wife, he was annoyed and said: "Keep your wife and fear Allah's wrath".

In case the fault was entirely his wife's, Zayd's separating from her was not contrary to piety and virtue. Eventually, Zayd separated from Zaynab.

Marriage For Banning Another Wrong Custom

Before we look into the basic cause of this marriage it is necessary to keep in view the role of lineage which is a vital factor for a sound society. Admittedly the relationship like that of father and son has a creative basis and in fact a father is the material source for the birth of a child and the child is the heir of the corporeal qualities and mentality of his parents. On account of this oneness and common blood the father and the child inherit the property of each other and specific laws regarding marriage and divorce become applicable to them.

Hence, a relationship, which has a congenital basis cannot be established verbally (vide 4th and 5th verses of Surah al-Ahzab) and an adopted son of a person cannot become his real son. As such, various orders regarding inheritance, marriage divorce etc., as applicable to a real son, cannot also apply to an adopted son.

For example, although a real son inherits from his father and vice versa and although it is unlawful for a person to marry the divorced wife of his real son it cannot at all be said that an adopted son has also the same rights in these matters as the real son has. Undoubtedly the chain of such a right besides being devoid of a correct basis, is also a sort of buffoonery in respect of an important factor (lineage) of a sound society.

In the circumstances, if adoption is resorted to with the aim of expressing sentiments it is very appreciable and proper, but if it is proposed to associate the adopted child with various social laws, all of which originate from matters relating to birth, this act will be far beyond social limits.

The Arab society considered an adopted son to be as good as a real son. The Prophet, therefore, was called upon to eradicate this wrong practice by marrying Zaynab, who was previously the wife of his adopted son (Zayd) and thus to remove this unwholesome custom in a practical way from amongst the Arabs, because this method is more effective than enunciating a law.

This marriage had no other reason besides this, because in those days none could pick up courage to

take such an action in view of the fact that it was imagined to be a very shameful act to marry the former wife of an adopted son. Almighty Allah, therefore, formally invited the Prophet to perform this task. He says:

When Zayd set her free, We gave her in marriage to you so that the believers would not face difficulties about the wives of their adopted sons when they are divorced. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:37).

We think that this marriage, besides doing away with a wrong custom, also became a great manifestation of equality, because the Prophet married a lady who was previously the wife of his freed slave and in those days such a marriage was also considered to be socially undignified.

This brave step of the Prophet brought forth a torrent of criticism by the hypocrites and the short-sighted persons and they were spreading the news: "Muhammad has married the wife of his adopted son".

In order to crush such thinking the Almighty Allah revealed this verse:

Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the last of the Prophets. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:40).

The Holy Qur'an did not content itself with this only. Allah praised His Prophet, who had displayed great valour and bravery in carrying out His orders vide the 38th and 39th verses of Surah al-Ahzab. The gist of these two verses is this:

Muhammad is like other Prophets who conveyed Allah's messages to the people and he does not fear anyone in carrying out His order.²

This is the philosophy of the marriage of Prophet Muhammad with Zaynab. Now we study minutely the viewpoint of the orientalist on the subject.

The Forged Story About Zaynab Is A Mere Fiction

The marriage of the Prophet with Zaynab is a simple matter which is free from all ambiguities. However, as some orientalist have made this incident a pretext for misleading the simple-minded and ignorant people and have in this way tried to weaken the faith of those who do not have correct information about the character of the Prophet, it appears necessary that we should examine the remarks of this group of the orientalist and make matters clear.

As is well-known, the colonial powers do not utilize their military and economic power only to dominate the countries of the East, but at times they also enter through the door of learning and research and try, by means of carefully worked out schemes, to impose the worst type of colonialism (viz. intellectual colonialism) on these people.

In fact an orientalist is that very expansionist colonialist who acts in a particular manner in the heart of the society and amongst the enlightened people and pursues his colonial ends by stupefying the intellects of the educated class.

It is possible that most of the western writers and lovers of knowledge and learning may not endorse our above remarks and may accuse us of stiffness and fanaticism and may think that national or religious bias has made us express this opinion.

However, the writings of the orientalists and their concealment of facts and partial behaviour in matters relating to the history of Islam is a clear proof of the fact that most of them have not been motivated by thirst of knowledge and search for truth and their writings have been contaminated by a series of anti-religious and anti-national thoughts.³³⁹⁰

The subject under discussion bears testimony to this fact. With the imagination peculiar to the people of the West they have given this marriage, the sole object of which was to abolish a false custom, the colour of 'love' and, fabricated a story, like the novelists and the story-tellers, associated it with the most sacred personality of the human world.

In any case the basis of this fiction are the sentences which have been quoted by Tabari⁴ and by Ibn Athir⁵ and some exegetes to the effect that one day the Prophet chanced to see Zaynab, the wife of Zayd. Zayd felt that the Prophet had fallen in love with Zaynab.

On account of the excessive regard which he had for the Prophet he came before him and proposed to divorce Zaynab, so that there might be no impediment in the way of the Prophet marrying her. The Prophet repeatedly forbade him to divorce his wife, but he eventually divorced her and the Prophet married her.

However, the orientalists, instead of studying authentic history, have not contented themselves even with this fabricated story and have embellished it so much that it has assumed the shape of the stories of the Arabian Nights.

No doubt those persons, who are acquainted with the lofty character of the Prophet have treated the original story and the embellishments thereon to be fabricated and a mere fancy and whim as they are absolutely incompatible with the positive standards of the life of the Prophet of Islam.

Moreover, scholars like Fakhr-i Razi and Alusi have clearly contradicted this story and say that it has been fabricated by the enemies of Islam and circulated amongst the Muslim writers.⁶

How can it be said that this historical fragment was believed in by Tabari and Ibn Athir, when dozens have quoted the reverse of it and consider the Prophet of Islam to be free from every corruption.

However, we should like to mention in these pages the signs and symptoms of the story being a fabricated one and to make the position too clear to need any further explanation and defence. Here are

our testimonies:

1. The above-mentioned story is opposed to the final authority of Islam and the Muslims, because as evidenced by the 38th verse of Surah al-Ahzab the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab was to contradict the false notion of the Arabs that a person was not permitted to marry the former wife of an adopted son and this marriage took place in compliance with the Command of Allah and not as a consequence of love and romance.

In the early days of Islam none contradicted this fact and in case the remarks of the Qur'an had been opposed to reality the Jews, the Christians and the hypocrites would have immediately stood up to criticize them and would have kicked up a row, when, in fact, they could not prove anything adverse, although they were always keen to find fault with the Prophet.

2. Zaynab was the same lady who had, before her marriage with Zayd, offered to marry the Prophet. However, notwithstanding her inclination, the Prophet insisted that she should marry his freed slave, Zayd. If the Prophet had really desired to marry her, there was no impediment in his way to do so. Then why did he not marry her? On the contrary we see that in spite of all the inclination which he observed in Zaynab he not only did not give her a positive reply but persuaded her to marry another person.

When their views are refuted by history there is no ground for embellishments by the colonialist intellectuals. And we consider the life of the Prophet, (who spent his time till the age of fifty years with a lady who was seventeen years older than he) to be too pure and superior to justify any repulsive remarks about him. We, therefore, refrain from quoting here the narrations of the orientalist.

Explanation Of Two Parts Of The Verse

To complete the discussion we reproduce here the verse which has been revealed on this subject including its two parts, which are the cause of hesitation and doubt among some persons who are not well-informed, and also give their explanation. Here is the text of the verse:

Say to the person to whom you and Allah have granted favour: "Keep your wife and have fear of Allah". (Surah al -Ahzab, 33:39)

There is no ambiguity about this part of the verse. But the following two parts need explanation:

1. *"You hide within yourself what Allah wants to make public"*. Now the question is while giving advice to Zayd what was the Prophet hiding which Allah was to bring to light?

It may possibly be imagined that what the Prophet was keeping secret was that although he was prohibiting Zayd from divorcing his wife he wished that he should divorce Zaynab so that he might marry her himself.

Such an eventuality cannot be correct for any reason, because if the Prophet was secretly thinking on these lines why did the Almighty not mention this fact through other verses when He says in this very part that whatever the Prophet was keeping secret would be divulged by Him?

Our great exegetes, therefore, say that what is meant by the thing which he was hiding is the revelation sent to him by Allah. To state explicitly: Allah had revealed to him that Zayd would divorce his wife and he (the Prophet) would marry her so as to contradict the false notion (i.e. it is unlawful for a person to marry the former wife of his adopted son). Hence, when he was advising Zayd he had this revelation in mind but kept it secret from Zayd and others. However, in the verse mentioned above, Allah tells the Prophet that He would make manifest what he has in his mind.

What has been stated above is supported by the fact that at the bottom of the same verse the Holy Qur'an mentions the matter in these words:

When Zayd set her free, We gave her in marriage to you so that the believers would not face difficulties about the wives of their adopted sons when they are divorced.

From the portion of the verse reproduced above it is learnt that what the Prophet was hiding was the very Divine revelation that to nullify a wrong custom he should marry the wife of his adopted son when the latter had divorced her.

2. You are afraid of people while it is Allah whom one should fear.

This portion is the second part which is less ambiguous as compared with the first portion, because to abolish a custom which has been prevalent in the polluted surroundings for some years or more (i.e. marriage with the former wife of an adopted son) is naturally coupled with mental uneasiness which is eliminated from the hearts of the Prophets by their paying attention to the Divine orders.

If the Prophet felt uneasy or was worried, it was because he was thinking that the Arabs, who had dissociated themselves from him, through ignorance and unclean thoughts would say: "The Prophet has resorted to something indecent" although, in fact, it is not indecent.

1. Refer to Usdul Ghabah, al-Isti'ab and al-Isabah under the root-word Zayd.

2. The text of the two verses are: The Prophet cannot be blamed for carrying out the commands of Allah. It was the tradition of Allah with those who lived before. The command of Allah has already been decreed and ordained. Those who preach the message of Allah and are humble before Him should not be afraid of anyone besides Allah. Allah is sufficient in keeping the account. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:38-39)

3. For further information refer to the book, al-Mustashriqun.

4. Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II.

5. Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, page 121.

6. Mafatihul Ghayb Razi, vol. XV, page 212 and Ruhul Ma'ani, chapter 22, pp. 23-24.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/the-message-ayatullah-jafar-subhani/chapter-36-events-fifth-year-migration>