

# The Critical Role of Women in Karbala

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Regarding the tragedy of Ashura, one of the questions that arises is why Imam Husayn (a), knowing that he would have become martyr along with his companions, brought his family with him and what the role of the women in Karbala was.

We must add that two fundamental elements have given rise to the story of Ashura: one is martyrdom and self-sacrifice, and the other to spread the message of Imam Husayn (a), spread by those who in this event were innocently abused and tortured, suffering great pain.

The role of the women and the family of Imam Husayn (a) is more relevant with respect to the second element, even if they, as mothers, had a clear role in educating these brave soldiers, who stayed on the side of their Imam (a) to the last.

As sisters and wives, they have played an important role in supporting and encouraging their brothers and husbands by accepting their martyrdom as divine will. For example Ummulbanin, the mother of the noble Abolfazl, which remained in Medina, when the caravan of the family of Imam Husayn (a) returned, immediately asked what happened to her Imam (a), when she was told that her four children became martyrs, said: "May my family be sacrificed for him! "

## **Imam Hussain (a.s) never acted randomly**

Before discussing the role of women in Karbala, it is necessary to make two points: the first is that Imam Husayn (a) did not behave randomly, but his actions were based on precise reasons. In fact, he knew that bringing his family to Karbala would make them the spreader of the message of Ashura.

In addition, the Prophet (s) in a dream told him that it was God's will that his family was taken prisoner.

The second point to make is that women have always played an important role in the history of humanity, even if sometimes in an indirect way. Regarding the role of women in the history of mankind, we can do three subdivisions:

1 – Those who were treated as precious objects to be protected, but they really did not hold any important role, such as women in ancient civilizations.

2 – Those who have influence on the society in which they live, but at the expense of their own value as a woman, like many women in today's society.

3 – Those who, like the Muslim woman, protect their own value, while maintaining their influence on society and this is possible only by implementing the Islamic rules.

## **Exploring the role of women: Eloquence of Zaynab (a)**

The best example of this kind of woman is the noble Fatima Zahra (a) who defended the rights of Imam Ali (a) by giving a speech in the mosque, but from behind a curtain, thereby protecting her value as a woman.

Or as the noble Zaynab (a), whose role in the tragedy of Ashura gains importance from the moment in which his brother and other male members of his family became martyrs. Being similar in eloquence to her father Imam Ali (a), she made discourses in Kufa and Damascus that made the enemies shudder in fear and turn in repentance to the Ahlulbayt (a).

For example, when Ibn Ziyad asked: "How have you seen what Allah has done to your brother and his Ahlulbayt (a)?" she replies:

"I did not see anything but beauty, they were people for whom Allah had written martyrdom and have reached their bliss". She also said: "Soon, God will gather you together: then you will see who will be in trouble."

Once they arrived in Damascus, the daughter of the Prince of Believers (a), no longer able to bear the nonsense of Yazid, said: "... Yazid! Do you think of having narrowed the earth and the heavens, leaving us with no alternatives?! Do you think that by dragging us as slaves from one place to another, we are

humiliated before God and you honoured?! Do you think your victory has increased your nobility with God?"

Then she said: "Yazid! I swear by God that you have done nothing more than tearing yourself into pieces and it will definitely be with these vile actions, shedding the blood of the family of the Messenger of God (s) and violating the respect due to them, that you will present yourself in front of your Prophet Muhammad (s) on the Day of Judgment, when God will gather all and give everyone what he deserves. In fact, God says in the Quran: 'Do not think that those who have become martyrs in the way of God are dead, they are alive and enjoy the blessings of God'.

...Very soon the one who deceived you and other people (Muawiyah) will realize what terrible punishment is up to oppressors and who will be in the worst place and will have the weaker army. Although because of the events I was forced to talk to you, you must know that you have no value for me".

Lady Zaynab with her words humiliated Yazid and his followers in front of the friends and enemies of the Ahlulbayt (a).

## **Islamic model of women**

This is the woman Islam wants: a socially active woman and at the same time the guardian of her own value and her own modesty.

So the presence of the family of Imam Husayn (a) in Karbala was crucial, in fact its members have not only spread the message of Ashura, but they made the enemies helpless in front of them, as the soldiers of Yazid were rebuked by everyone, even by their families, because of the mistreatment of women and children.

In Islam is not just the men who have to participate in social activities, but also the women have to take part in the defence of truth and oppose tyrants; lady Zaynab (a) and the other women of the family of Imam Husayn (a) by spreading the message of Ashura fulfilled their duty. If they had not done so, this message would not have come to us, especially considering the power of Omayyidis in spreading news in their favor.

In fact, Syria and the surrounding areas were under the control of Omayyidis for many years and they were able to obtain complete control even on the religious population, so that, when the Abbasids gained power, some of the emirs of Omayyidis went to the first Abbasid caliph swearing that until then they were convinced that the only remaining relatives of the Prophet (s) were the Omayyidis.

The noble Zaynab (a) and Imam Sajjad (a) with their speeches were able to prevent the Omayyidis with their strong influence from distorting the story of the tragedy of Ashura.

In addition, the cruel and oppressive behaviour of Yazid and his army against the family of Imam Husayn (a) was an essential element in revealing the true face of the tyrant Yazid and the followers of Omayyidis.

Today we Muslims, men and women, have the duty to reveal the true face of the oppressors, wherever they are, and our duty is no less important than that of lady Zaynab (a) and Imam Sajjad (a) in spreading the message of Ashura.

On the afternoon of the eleventh day of Muharram the women of the Ahlulbayt (a) asked the army of Ibn Sa'd to let them go near the bodies of their martyrs.

When Zaynab (a) saw the lifeless body of her brother, she said:

*O Muhammad! May the angels of the heaven bless you,*

*This is Husayn, fallen to the ground and immersed in the blood,*

*Fallen into this desert, his body torn to pieces,*

*They cut his head, and stripped him of his clothes,*

*Your daughters were imprisoned and on the bodies of your children the breeze of Zephyr is blowing.*

At this point both the companions and the enemies began to cry. Then this noble woman lifted the body of her brother towards the sky saying:

*O God! Accept this sacrifice from us!*

Today there are many sisters in Syria, Palestina and other Islamic countries like lady Zaynab (a) that lift towards the sky the bodies of their sons, husbands and brothers and ask God to accept their sacrifice.

May Allah help us to be like lady Zaynab (a).

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