



## An Examination of the Evolution of Orientalists' Opinions About Lady Fāṭima(s)

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Article type:**  
Research Article

**Article History:**  
Received 10 October 2023  
Revised 16 November 2023  
Accepted 25 November 2023  
Published Online 10 January 2024

**Keywords:**  
*Fāṭima(s),  
orientalists,  
qur'ānic verses,  
Islamic narrations.*

### ABSTRACT

The life of Lady Fāṭima(s) is one of the topics taken into account by some orientalists. Some orientalists such as Laura Veccia Vaglieri in the Encyclopedia of Islam and Jane Dammen McAuliffe in the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān have directly written articles about her. Some others such as Alyssa Gabbay (in her chapter in the book *Female Religious Authority in Shī'ī Islam*, edited by Mirjam Künkler and Devin Stewart) have adopted a special view to the Shī'a books and have addressed this sublime character. Some other orientalists such as Fatima Mernissi in the book *The Veil and the Male Elite* have provided some points about this important figure as part of their discussions about women in Islam. Despite their reference to various sources, orientalists have made some mistakes due to their reference to Sunnī sources and incomplete exploration of Shī'a exegetic, narrative, and historical works; confusion of denominational discussions; non-recognition of sound and rare narrations; and lack of specialty in intra-religious discussions. However, the noteworthy point in the orientalists' works is that the exploration of the evolution of their ideas from past to present reveals that wherever they have had sufficient access to Shī'a resources and have made a complete study free from negative presuppositions and prejudices, they have been able to present more details of the existential aspects of this sublime figure. This issue is clear in their recent works, especially in the book chapter by Alyssa Gabbay. The article at hand, which is written using a descriptive-analytical method, aims at explaining and analyzing the foregoing orientalists' discussions.

**Cite this article:** Rezaii Haftador, H.; Shahidi, R. & Raji, M. (2024). An Examination of the Evolution of Orientalists' Opinions About Lady Fāṭima(s). *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies (JCIS)*, 6 (1), 51-62. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jcis.2023.366504.1348>



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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jcis.2023.366504.1348>

## 1. Introduction

Encyclopedias are among the main sources used by orientalists to study Lady Fāṭima, with the Encyclopedia of Islam and the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān being two outstanding examples in this regard. Authors such as Henri Lammens, Laura Veccia Vaglieri, and Verena Klemm edited the Encyclopedia of Islam in 1913, 1965, and 2007, including the entry «Fatima». Relying on his own book (Fatima et les filles de Mahomet), Lammens put forth a historical description of the character of Lady Fāṭima(s). His words were based on rare narrations and involved attacks to the character of this noble Lady, such that the orientalists of later eras criticized and rejected his works. He tried to depict the daughter of the Prophet(s) as an absolutely negative character. According to his faulty description, Lady Fāṭima was void of outer beauty and high intelligence, an unimportant figure who was not even respected by his father and was mistreated by his husband. From Lammens' viewpoint, Fāṭima(s) was always sick and weeping, and passed away due to tuberculosis.

After him, Louis Massignon answered doubts cast by Lammens to some extent. Massignon's pupil, Henry Corbin, gave a more accurate image of the various aspects of this divine character due to his study of Shī'a works, his familiarity with intra-religious concepts, and his acquaintance with and scientific learning from masters such as 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Then, Laura Veccia Vaglieri took charge of editing the entry «Fatima» in the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam and set out to investigate the works of Lammens and Massignon. Examining the narrations from Sunnī as well as a few early Shī'a and Ismā'ilī books, she divided her explication of the character of Lady Fāṭima(s) into historical and legendary parts. Synchronous with the publication of this book, the writing of the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān was started with Jane Dammen McAuliffe as the editor in chief, and was published in 2006. Thus, due to the importance of these two entries, we explain and analyze them. Then, we inspect other sources such as Mernissi's book due to its effect on the works of other orientalists. In the end, we explicate some orientalist articles that have explored the issue more through Shī'a works. This way, we will explore the positive and negative points as well as the evolution of the orientalists' viewpoint to Lady Fāṭima(s).

### 1.1. Background

An examination of the journals and databases revealed that some works have been written about orientalists and Lady Fāṭima(s), including:

- «Taṣwīri qur'ānīyi Fāṭima(s) dar Da'iratulma'arifi Islām wa Da'iratulma'arifi Qur'ān», an article penned down by Zahrā Sādāt Hāshimī in the journal Muṭālī'āti Ahl-Bayt Shināsi.
- «Naqdi didgāhi Charles Virolleaud darbāriyi Ḥaḍrati Fāṭima Zahrā(s)», an article written by Sa'īd Jazārī Ma'mū'ī in the journal Pazhūhishhāyi Islāmī Khāwarshināsān.
- «Sīmāyi Ḥaḍrat Zahrā(s) az nigāhi mustashriqān wa mutaffakkirāni Islāmī (Imām Khumaynī, Āyatullāh Muṭahharī, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī)», an article by Marḍīyya Ṣaḥrā'ī and Sayyid Bāqir Ḥusaynī, presented at Chahārumīn Kungīriyi Bayn al-Milaliyi Farhang wa Andīshiyi Islāmī.
- «Fāṭima Zahrā(s) dar nigāhi sharqshināsān (ba tikiyi bar pazhūhishhāyi Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, and Annemarie Schimmel)», an article by Amīr Pūrrastigār, Rasūl Muḥammadī, and Fāṭima Nufilī, presented at Hamāyishi Millīyi Qur'ān wa 'Itrat az Manẓari Islāmshināsāni Irān wa Jahān.
- Naqd wa barrisiyi Shakhshīyyati Ḥaḍrati Zahrā(s) az nigāhi mustashriqān bā rüykarde qur'ānī, a thesis by Muḥammad 'Askariī, conducted under supervision of Muḥammad Jawād Iskandarlu at Jāmi'i al-Muṣṭafā al-'Ālamīyya.
- Taṣwīri Ḥaḍrati Muḥammad(s) wa Ḥaḍrati Zahrā(s) dar Dā'irat al-Ma'arifi Islām (translation and editing), supervised by Maḥmūd Taqīzādi Dāwarī.

These authors have only explained and analyzed the orientalists' works about Lady Fāṭima(s). However, in this article, we want to compare and analyze the works of orientalists to both criticize their works and explain the evolution of their ideas about Lady Fāṭima(s) from the past to the present.

## **2. The life and qur'ānic status of Lady Fāṭima(s) from the viewpoint of Vaglieri**

Laura Veccia Vaglieri is an Italian scholar who has written the relatively long article «Fatima» in the Encyclopedia of Islam. Part of this entry is dedicated to the depiction of Lady Fāṭima(s), which is divided into two parts.

### **2.1. Lady Fāṭima's (s) life**

Vaglieri has divided Lady Fāṭima's(s) life into historical and legendary (metahistorical). The amazing point here is that she has mostly put the viewpoints of Sunnī scholars in the historical part and the limited Shī'a opinions in the legendary part of her article, which implies that the Shī'a works are legendary and far from reality.

#### **2.1.1. Historical part**

Titles she presented in the first part of her article are about the birth and childhood of Lady Fāṭima(s), her immigration to Medina, marriage and poverty in married life, fighting with 'Alī('a), the introduction of Fāṭima(s) as one of the referents of Aṣḥāb Kasā', giving birth to her children, description of her during the ailment and demise of the Prophet(s), her asking for her heritage, and her ailment and demise. (Vaglieri, 1991, vol. 2: 843-845)

Vaglieri has taken her content mostly from Sunnī books, and has used only a few early Shī'a sources. In case of disagreement, she has examined both sources. For example, with regard to the event in which Imām 'Alī's('a) pledge of allegiance and Lady Fāṭima's(s) defense of him, Vaglieri writes that although the Shī'as might have exaggerated some points, it is undoubted that 'Umar has shown a harsh behavior toward Fāṭima(s).

The depiction of the true character of Lady Fāṭima(s) among the presentation of contradictory points – especially against the opinions of Henri Lammens – and the introduction of her as a hardworking, patient, and helpful character who stood up against Abū Bakr for her husband's right and proved the inauthenticity and fakeness of his rule is one of the points missed by many orientalists. However, one of the positive points of Vaglieri's article is that she has referred to the point in the preceding paragraph.

She addressed the similarity between Lady Fāṭima(s) and Lady Mary as well as the similarity between the titles «Mother of God» among Christians and «Umm Abīhā» among Shī'as. This issue shows that Vaglieri has tried to prove that Lady Fāṭima(s) is a character imitated from Lady Mary(s) character.

#### **2.1.2. Legendary (metahistorical) part**

In the second part of her article (the legendary section), Vaglieri refers to these points:

- How Lady Fāṭima's(s) mother got pregnant and gave birth to her
- How was she asked for marriage
- Her dowry
- The heavenly foods
- Her being a Ḥūrīyya
- Her miracles
- Fāṭima as a heavenly lady
- The heavenly apple
- Light and Fāṭima
- Her names
- The qur'ānic references to her
- Fāṭima in commemoration chants

In this part, Vaglieri makes references to a few Shī'a sources and writes that Khadīja got pregnant by eating a heavenly apple, and four heavenly ladies helped her give birth to Fāṭima. In one month, Fāṭima grew to the size of a one-year-old child; her light at the time of her birth covered the east and west of the world, so she was called Zahrā.

Vaglieri also writes that after Fāṭima was born, she uttered the two Testimonies and confessed to Imāmat of her future husband.

Referring to the marriage of Lady Fāṭima(s), Vaglieri maintains that after the rich Arabs proposed to Fāṭima, Gabriel appeared and said ‘God has appointed ‘Alī as Fāṭima’s spouse and has missioned the angels to decorate the Heaven thoroughly. Her dowry in the Skies is half of the earth, heaven, and hell, and her dowry on the earth is 500 dirhams.’

In order to prove the similarity of Lady Fāṭima(s) and Lady Mary(s), Vaglieri writes that angels brought her heavenly food in the same way they did for Mary.

To complete her sources, Vaglieri uses Ismā’īlī texts and writes that the examination of the legendary character of Fāṭima in the Ismā’īlī sources is more difficult than Shī’a sources as the former group tends to use esoteric interpretation. She believes that there is a relationship between the legendary and historical character of Fāṭima in Shī’a sources, but the depiction of Fāṭima in the Ismā’īlī beliefs is surrounded by ambiguity. (Ibid: 845-850)

## 2.2. The qur’ānic status of Lady Fāṭima(s)

In another part of her article, Vaglieri explicates the qur’ānic status of Lady Fāṭima(s), and points out the following issues.

A) Lady Fāṭima(s), her spouse, and her children accompanying the Prophet(s) in the event of Mubāhala<sup>1</sup>

She believes that this event has a great reflection among the Shī’as. Moreover, she has taken her content in this regard from the book *Mubāhala* by Massignon.

B) Specifying the referent of the Tsaṭhīr verse<sup>2</sup> to the Five People of the Cloak

She writes that as there exist plural masculine pronouns in this verse, unlike the other verses of this chapter, and also based on the Mubāhala verse (Qur’ān 3:61) and the traditions related to the foregoing verse which state that the noble Prophet(s) recited the Tsaṭhīr verse when he was saying the morning prayer in front of Lady Fāṭima’s(s) house, this verse is only about the Five People of the Cloak.

C) The Shī’a’s belief about the connection of many qur’ānic verses to Lady Fāṭima(s)

Vaglieri holds that the Shī’as believe whenever the Qur’ān talks about women, there is a covert hint to Lady Fāṭima(s).

For instance, she refers to the verse «He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together» (Qur’ān 55:19) and writes that «the two bodies of flowing water» refer to ‘Alī and Fāṭima, where ‘Alī is the sea of knowledge and Fāṭima is the sea of prophethood, and the Prophet of Allāh stands between the two so as to prevent ‘Alī from putting himself to sufferings about worldly life. She writes that the verse refers to the compromise between Lady Fāṭima(s) and ‘Alī (a).

Several other verses such as the Qur’ān 3:54, 61, 188, 191, 193, 195; and 92:3 are the other verses that are attributed to Lady Fāṭima(s) in the Shī’a narration collections and pointed out by Vaglieri.

## 2.3. Evaluation

Vaglieri has a correct understanding of Ahl al-Bayt as depicted in the Qur’ān 33:33, and bases her opinion on robust reasons. She introduces the belief in Mubāhala as a Shī’a belief, while this belief is common and accepted among all Muslims, and many notable Sunnī scholars have presented the cause of revelation of the Mubāhala verse in their sources. (Hākim Nayshābūrī, 2002, vol. 3: 155; Ibn Ḥanbal, 2008, vol. 1: 185; Muslim, 1991, vol. 7: 102; Tirmidhī, 1998, vol. 5: 596)

Moreover, her reference work in this regard has been Massignon’s book *Mubāhala*, which is not a first-hand source, especially when one takes into account the point that Massignon is famous for his inclination to Sūfism and esoteric interstation. Narrating from such a figure reduces the authenticity of her work.

In one part of her interpretations, Vaglieri says that she has taken these virtues about Lady Fāṭima(s) from the Shī’a sources, while she has used a narration from a non-Shī’a source that is against the Shī’a scholars’ belief when discussing the Qur’ān 55:19. The main source of this narration

1. The event of Mubāhala is reflected in the verse «If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: ‘Come! let us gather together,- our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allāh on those who lie!’» (Qur’ān 3:61)

2. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allāh and His Messenger. And Allāh only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless (Qur’ān 33:33)

is in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī (Bukhārī, 1989, vol. 4: 83). This narration is narrated from one transmitter named Miswar b. Makhrama, who has been a follower of 'Abdullāh b. Zubayr who is deemed as an enemy to Ahl al-Bayt. Miswar is a friend of Khārījites (Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr, 1994, vol. 3: 1399). Some believe that he was a proponent of Mu'āwīyya, such that Dhahabī says, «I did not hear Miswar talk about Mu'āwīyya unless he sent salutation to him». (Dhahabī, 1995, vol. 4: 414)

Moreover, the words he has narrated from the Prophet(s) are not acceptable as he was a young child during his lifetime (Mu'addab, 2017: 137). Among the Shī'a sources, Shaykh Ṣadūq refers to this narration in *Amālī* and writes that Imām Ṣādiq has rejected it (Ṣadūq, 1996: 165). Although some Shī'a scholars do not criticize him, Āyatullāh Khu'ī condemns him (Khu'ī, 1989, vol. 18: 161). The result of all this discussion is that this story is a fabricated tale by the Umayyads to prove that if the Caliphs have bothered Lady Fāṭima(s), Imām 'Alī('a) have bothered her, too.

On the other hand, in many other Sunnī books, there exists the correct interpretation that agrees with the Shī'a exegeses about the Qur'ān 55:19-22. It expresses that those two bodies of water refer to 'Alī('a) and Lady Fāṭima(s), the barrier is the Prophet(s), and the pearl and coral are Ḥasan('a) and Ḥusayn('a). This interpretation exists in some Sunnī sources such as *Maqṭal Khārazmī* (Khārazmī, 2002: 112), *Al-Durr al-Manthūr* (Suyūṭī, 1983, vol. 6: 70), and *Rawḥ al-Ma'ānī* (Ālūsī, 1994, vol. 27: 93), but the author has not referred to any of them. Thus, her ignorance of this content demonstrates that Vaglieri has not seriously explored the Shī'a and Sunnī sources and that she has a stronger tendency toward Sunnī works. She deems that it is Shī'a's belief that the Qur'ān mentioned the virtues of Lady Fāṭima(s), while based on the Sunnī exegetic and narrative sources, nearly 135 verses in 49 chapters are in a way about Lady Fāṭima(s). Moreover, many Sunnī scholars such as Ṭaṭṭāwī, Tha'labī, Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, Ḥākim Ḥaskānī, Bayḍāwī, and Khāzan (Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, 1999, vol. 8: 395; Bayḍāwī, 1997, vol. 2: 553; Ḥākim Ḥaskānī, 2001, vol. 2: 300; Khāzan, 1994, vol. 4: 378; Qurṭubī, 1985, vol. 19: 13; Ṭaṭṭāwī, 2004, vol. 24: 325; Tha'labī, 2001, vol. 10: 98) believe and some outstanding Sunnī figures such as Fakhr Rāzī (Fakhr Rāzī, 1992, vol. 32: 132) confess that Lady Fāṭima(s) is the cause of revelation of the chapters 76 and 108 in the Qur'ān. Thus, not exploring various sources – especially Shī'a books – and not enumerating the verses about Lady Fāṭima's(s) virtues are other shortcomings of Vaglieri's work.

On the other hand, the mentioning of many virtues in the «legendary» part of the article immediately reflects this belief that she does not believe those virtues. Moreover, it is evident that she tries to suggest that the story of Lady Fāṭima(s) is imitated from the story of Mary(s).

In fact, it can be said that Vaglieri cannot accept and believe the status and role of Lady Fāṭima(s) in the Shī'a thought system. Understanding this status requires a deep belief in these teachings as well as a worldview that she does not have. (Hāshimī, 2015: 88)

Since the consideration and comparison of the various authors' opinions is one of the features of a scientific study, the lack of such a feature can determine the low intellectual and scientific status of Vaglieri's article. She has not been able to correctly review the contradictory opinions and use her independent scientific reasoning. Although she has a critical view, she has studied a limited number of sources, and her prior grasp of the history and character of Arabs in the Early Day of Islam has created prejudices in her judgments that are at times incorrect. Moreover, the presentation of information with no or rare chains of transmission or invalid and faulty content has reduced the value of her article (ibid). It is amazing that in her article, the items of Lady Fāṭima's(s) dowry are listed one by one with their prices and her clothes at her demise time and her coffin are described in detail, but nothing is mentioned about her knowledge, her sermons, and the conditions of her death. (Pārsā, 2009: 34)

### 3. The qur'ānic status of Lady Fāṭima(s) from the viewpoint of McAuliffe

In her article titled «Fatima» in the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, due to the theme of this encyclopedia, has only paid attention to the qur'ānic status of Lady Fāṭima. She asserts that Fāṭima's(s) name does not appear in the Qur'ān, but some exegetic narrations have interpreted some verses of the Qur'ān that are related to her, her husband, and her children. McAuliffe has mentioned the following verses as the ones related to Lady Fāṭima(s).

### 3.1. Taḥīr and Mubāhala verses

Referring to Taḥīr (Qur'ān 33:33) and Mubāhala (Qur'ān 3:61) verses, McAuliffe writes that the Prophet(s) took his family and daughter with him as witnesses in order to prove his claim of prophethood.

Similar to Vaglieri, McAuliffe mentions Lady Fāṭima(s) as one of the referent of the term Ahl al-Bayt and the event of Ḥadīth Kasā', but has not made any distinction between Sunnī and Shī'a viewpoints in this regard. (McAuliffe, 2002, vol. 2: 192-193)

### 3.2. The verse on the superiority of Mary (s) to all women of the world

McAuliffe refers to the verse «Behold! the angels said: 'O Mary! Allāh hath chosen thee and purified thee- chosen thee above the women of all nations'» (Qur'ān 3:42). Without mentioning the related exegetic narrations, she concludes that the first two verses in the previous paragraph address Lady Fāṭima(s) and this verse refers to the status of Lady Mary and Lady Fāṭima(s) and the comparison of these two figures. She asserts that the basis for this relationship is some traditions in which the Prophet(s) introduces Mary, Asiya, Khadīja, and Lady Fāṭima(s) as the most superior women of all ages. Like Vaglieri, McAuliffe tries to prove the similarity between Mary(s) and Lady Fāṭima(s). She writes that in the Shī'a texts, the relationship between Mary and Fāṭima(s) has been detailed and both have been introduced as suffering women.

Ignoring the political character of Lady Fāṭima(s) and her brave endeavors, McAuliffe only refers to her mourning for her father's demise. Moreover, in a strange utterance, McAuliffe writes that Mary and Fāṭima both witnessed in advance the cruelty afflicted upon their sons.

### 3.3. Evaluation

McAuliffe refers to only a limited number of the many verses that refer to Lady Fāṭima(s). Nonetheless, although the virtues of Lady Fāṭima(s) had not been completely mentioned by Vaglieri, it was expected that McAuliffe would mention all related verses in the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, but she did not. This shortcoming is a sign that she has not explored the exegetic narrations and books.

McAuliffe, too, has limited the belief in the absolute superiority of Lady Fāṭima(s) to all women to the Shī'as and has not mentioned any of the evidences the Shī'a have presented for this viewpoint. However, it should be noted that this viewpoint is not limited to the Shī'a exegetes and many Sunnī scholars believe in it, too. It is mentioned in some Shī'a and Sunnī narrations, «Lady Fāṭima(s) is the chief of Islamic nation women, the believer women, and all women in the Resurrection Day». (Bukhārī, 1989, vol. 4: 248; Nayshābūrī, 2002, vol. 3: 156)

Moreover, it is mentioned in Sunnī narrations, «When the Resurrection day begins, A herald from Celestial Throne calls, 'O audience! Move aside and look down so that Fāṭima(s) passes Ṣirāṭ.' Accompanied by 70 thousand Ḥūr al-'Ayn maids, she passes through swiftly like lightning». (Ibn Ḥajar Haythamī, 1982: 190; Ibn Jawzī, 2005: 279; Ibn Maghāzilī, 1991: 356; Muttaqī Hindī, 1998, vol. 3: 91; Qundūzī, 2001, vol. 2: 136; Shablanjī, 2011: 51; Ṭabarī, 1974: 48)

It is interesting that this tradition has been narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī from 'Ā'isha. Expressing the similarities between Mary and Lady Fāṭima(s) and examining the Shī'a's viewpoint for all its remarkable points and characteristics, McAuliffe introduces these two characters as suffering women who have tasted the agony of their sons' demise, while none of them were alive at their sons' death time. One of the unforgivable shortcomings of this text is its one-dimensional depiction of Lady Fāṭima(s) as a passive woman in absolute suffering, as it makes no reference to her tactfulness and sociopolitical activism. Thus, removing acts of bravery and merely expressing the sufferings is at best an awkward and at worst a biased move. Therefore, the depiction of the character of Lady Fāṭima(s) by McAuliffe is incomplete and, in some cases, wrong, such that it is in need of revising.

## 4. The comparison of Lady Fāṭima(s) and 'Ā'isha

Denise A. Spellberg, in her article titled «'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr» in the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, refers to the character of Lady Fāṭima(s). She emphasizes two points about Lady Fāṭima(s), as follows.

#### **4.1. The positive and absolute image of Lady Fāṭima(s) in Muslims' minds**

Comparing the images of 'Ā'isha and Lady Fāṭima(s), Spellberg writes that despite the Sunnī praise of 'Ā'isha, the history of Islam did not take her into account as the perfect woman. However, Mary and Pharaoh's wife – who are the only perfect women in the Islamic tradition – along with Khadīja b. Khuwaylid and Lady Fāṭima(s) came to be known as female models with a constantly positive image common among Muslims.

#### **4.2. The ideal and unique character of Lady Fāṭima(s) in the Shī'a texts and the Sunnī reactions to it**

Spellberg believes that Fāṭima(s) who found an ideal character in the Shī'a texts moved the Sunnīs to defend 'Ā'isha as a character whose value had decreased in comparison with Fāṭima(s). She holds that although it has been claimed that it is impossible for Shī'a women to be equal to Lady Fāṭima(s), it is not clear if the life of 'Ā'isha can bring a more practical legacy to the Sunnī women. (Spellberg, 2001, vol.1: 55-58; Stowasser, 2003, vol.3: 80-81)

### **5. The Prophet's kindness toward Lady Fāṭima(s) and her status among the Shī'as from the viewpoint of Mernissi**

In the book *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Mernissi has pointed out two issues about Lady Fāṭima(s).

#### **5.1. The huge affection and love of the Prophet(s) toward Lady Fāṭima(s)**

Mernissi writes that when Fāṭima(s), the daughter of the Prophet(s) and the spouse of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib('a) entered Medina, the Prophet could find a place near the Mosque for her. He wanted Fāṭima to live in her vicinity because he loved Fāṭima a lot.

With regard to the reasons for the Prophet's love for his daughter, Mernissi presents many reasons, including the facts that she had married 'Alī, his cousin and a member of Banī Hāshim clan, and was the mother of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn who were his descendants.

#### **5.2. The Shī'a's special respect and attention to Lady Fāṭima(s)**

Mernissi writes in this regard that the Shī'as deem Fāṭima as the most superior woman of Islam and the best role model for women. The Prophet's(s) great love for Fāṭima sometimes caused problems in the relationship between 'Ā'isha and Fāṭima, as the former deemed the latter as a rival. 'Ā'isha did not have any children and the Prophet(s) deemed Ḥasan and Ḥusayn like his own children. (Mernissi, 2001: 185)

#### **5.3. Evaluation**

Mernissi in her book repeatedly exaggerates about the legendary love of the Prophet(s) to his wives and ardently talks about the wisdom, tactfulness, and presence of his wives, but surprisingly has not addressed the knowledge and infallibility of Lady Fāṭima(s). Ignoring the spiritual and divine status of Lady Fāṭima(s), she has limited the reason of the love of the Prophet(s) to his daughter to worldly and commonplace matters. Moreover, Mernissi disregards the high status of Lady Fāṭima(s) in the eyes of all Muslims and has limited having special regard for her merely to the Shī'as.

### **6. Criticizing the reasons for the isolation of Lady Fāṭima(s) from the viewpoint of Inlose**

In her article titled «Was Imam 'Alī a Misogynist: The Portrayal of Woman in Nahj al-Balaghah and Kitab Sulaym ibn Qays», Amina Inlose addresses the presence of Lady Fāṭima(s) in society and criticizes the reasons for her isolation. She refers to the presence of Lady Fāṭima(s) in Mubāhala and Kasā' events. She writes that despite the common image of Fāṭima(s) as a woman who has not seen and has not been seen by men, there are some narrations about the presence of Lady Fāṭima(s) in situations where men were present and there are some other narrations about her social relationships with men. These imply that some men have seen her or at least have heard her voice. Numerous narrations discuss the point that she, together with Imām 'Alī('a), visited the Companions to remind them of their allegiance to 'Alī('a). (Inlose, 2015: 325-365)

## 7. The examination of various aspects of the ancient and contemporary Shī'a perceptions about the character of Lady Fāṭima(s) from the viewpoint of Gabbay

In her lengthy article in the book *Female Religious Authority in Shī'i Islam: Past and Present*, Alyssa Gabbay has removed many shortcomings that existed in the studies before hers. The issues she has addressed in her study can be summarized in the following directions.

### 7.1. The active social presence of Lady Fāṭima(s)

Gabbay takes the social view to Lady Fāṭima(s) (an issue she calls «the new Fāṭima») to be the result of later thinkers' approach and thoughts and the passive Fāṭima as originating from the thoughts of early Shī'a scholars rather than a genuine, deep-rooted thought. From her viewpoint, Lady Fāṭima(s), as the first religious authority in Islam, a little while after her father's demise, left her house with complete ḥijāb in the company of some women, friends, and family members. While her clothes were trailing on the ground, she approached Abū Bakr who was sitting among some people. She cried in sadness and caused the people to weep. Then she made a passionate sermon in which she criticized the Muslim society and its leaders in some directions. She said that the Devil deceived them, and they acted against the teachings of the Prophet(s) about the caliphate of 'Alī('a), and by depriving her of Fadak – which was her inheritance – they trespassed the rules, while inheritance from prophets had been endorsed in the Qur'ān, as it said that the Prophets left properties for their children as heritage.

Quoting Denise Soufi, she writes that there are at least two depictions of Fāṭima in the classical Shī'a tradition. The first is the image of a model of the pious Muslim woman who is famous for her patient suffering in the face of poverty, silent obedience to her husband, and deep grief of her father's demise (part of her character as depicted by the previous orientalists). The second image is about the role of an activist and martyr for the cause of the Shī'as to claim the caliphate and fight for leadership after the demise of the Prophet (an aspect ignored by many orientalists).

Reporting on Saqīfa – the assembly in which Abū Bakr was appointed as caliph – she narrates that Lady Fāṭima(s) tried to stop 'Umar. She points out that in a controversial narration, this Lady bravely faced a man named Qunfudh (the servant of 'Umar). Qunfudh hit the Lady with a whip and pushed her. This led to the abortion of her fetus called Muḥsin and ultimately led to the demise of Lady Fāṭima(s).

Gabbay asserts that these narrations show that a woman decisively stood for her beliefs and even got martyred for them. (Gabbay, 2021: 83)

She says that the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Shī'as and activists have tried to reduce the factors limiting the authority of women, including the legislation arena, and they have simultaneously shown more tendency to attribute more power to Fāṭima.

Then, relying on the words of some authors such as Pierce in the book *Remembering Fāṭimah*, she writes that Pierce names some novel means of legitimization of women's authority in the contemporary Shī'a discourse by some researchers who have mentioned the valid model of Fāṭima as an evidence for women's right to hold positions. These researchers include 'Alī Sharī'atī, Munīr Gurjī, Aḥmad Adharī Qumī, Jamīla Kadīwar, and Jawādī Āmulī. (Ibid: 87-102)

### 7.2. The equal status of Lady Fāṭima(s) and male members of Ahl al-Bayt

Gabbay quotes early Shī'a scholars such as Ibn Bābawayh and 'Allāma Majlisī about the status of Lady Fāṭima(s). She asserts that notable Shī'a scholars have taken the daughter of the Prophet as the role model of religious conduct and knowledge, and have deemed her a similar – if not exactly equal – status to Imāms of Shī'a.

She believes that in recent studies, too, Fāṭima(s) appears as a religious authority and a woman who could explain the principles of Islam, a perfect model of behavior for men and women. (Ibid: 79-101)

### 7.3. Continuation of the lineage of the Prophet through children of Lady Fāṭima(s)

Gabbay holds that in the classical Shī'a sources, the status of Lady Fāṭima(s) is inseparably tied to her relationship with her father. She writes that scholars such as Ibn Bābawayh and Majlisī confirm and support the concept of bilateral descent. The viewpoint that the lineage of a man can continue through the children of her daughter and she can inherit her properties is more significant among the Shī'a scholars than the Sunnī ones.

She believes that such a stance – at least in terms of theoretical bases - has had a more positive effect on the legal status of women in Shī'a societies than Sunnī ones and has paved the way for contemporary women to play the role of religious authorities.

Then, Gabbay starts a lengthy discussion on the way the bloodline of the Prophet(s) continued through Lady Fāṭima's(s) children from the viewpoint of the Sunnī scholars and its comparison with the Shī'a outlook.

She writes that one of the common beliefs in patriarchal societies is that a daughter cannot really show the traits of her father and also cannot inherit from him, because any property that is given to her as inheritance will slip out of the original family.

She believes that few Sunnī societies have bound themselves to this paternal model. At any rate, daughters could inherit from their fathers and at times succeeded their fathers in positions of power.

Gabbay believes that the Shī'a theoretical foundations, modeled after Fāṭima(s), put more emphasis on this viewpoint that a daughter can keep her father's bloodline, show his traits, and inherit his properties. Mainly because of the status of Fāṭima(s) as the mother of Ḥasan('a) and Ḥusayn('a), the Shī'a accepts and promotes the bilateral descent with all its implications for inheritance and successorship.

Despite these descriptions of the status of women in the eyes of Shī'a scholars, Gabbay rather pessimistically believes that the contemporary Shī'a communities – notwithstanding their view to the status of women – do not observe the rights of women. She believes that firstly, it would be wrong to say that Shī'a communities (due to their recognition of bilateral descent) have provided much more opportunities for women's equality compared to Sunnī communities. For example, despite the evident praise Majlisī had for Fāṭima, he and other Safavid scholars foresaw limited roles for women. Majlisī suggested that women belong to the inside part of the houses (ḥaram) and the best wife is the one who gives birth to many children, is chaste, is dear with relatives and modest with her husband, makes up herself only for her husband, and obeys only him.

Gabby believes that Abū Bakr got importance and authority through his daughter's marriage with the Prophet(s). Thus, in the same way that the Shī'as emphasize that the Prophet of Islam(s) loved Fāṭima and 'Alī more than anyone else, the Sunnīs assert that Abū Bakr and 'Ā'isha were the most beloved people for the Prophet. As Spellberg points out, the relational connections of the political-Islamic structure were enhanced through certain female-based familial relationships.

Gabbay says that Iran showcases the strong tradition of women's religious authority in the Middle East.

She believes that the classical Shī'a scholars probably did not intend such a purpose, and their main reason for the inclusion of women in the bloodline and inheritance lines was probably because they wanted to prove this belief that Fāṭima's(s) husband, sons, and grandchildren were capable of playing significant political and religious roles in the caliphate, though this led to some unwanted consequences such as the high social roles for women. Unlike previous orientalists, Gabbay has extensively discussed the nature of Fadak and the way it had been granted to Lady Fāṭima(s) as well as its usurpation by Abū Bakr, the defense made by Lady Fāṭima(s), and her sermon. She believes that female members of Ahl al-Bayt, including some of the Prophet's(s) wives such as Umm Salama, have played significant roles in legitimizing the authority of Imāms. (Ibid: 79)

#### **7.4. Various dimensions of the spiritual character of Lady Fāṭima(s)**

Deeply analyzing the spiritual character of Lady Fāṭima(s), Gabbay gives an accurate depiction of her that is in accord with Shī'a beliefs. She writes that Fāṭima, the mother of all Shī'a Imāms except for 'Alī('a), shared extraordinary traits with them. She is traditionally depicted as the owner and transmitter of the Muḥammadan light and is even at times seen as its origin (a concept that is reflected in one of her most common titles, Fāṭima al-Zahrā (the shining Fāṭima)).

She also refers to the infallibility of Lady Fāṭima(s) and says that Fāṭima – similar to Imāms – was pure and free from sins, both in physical and spiritual realms. Like Imāms, she moves beyond this world and will have an important role in Resurrection Day.

With regard to her offering of intercession on Resurrection Day, Gabbay writes that Lady Fāṭima(s) will appear like a princess accompanied with angels and Ḥūrīyyas and will intercede with god on behalf of people doomed to be punished in Hell.

She holds that among the Shī'as, Fāṭima is an authoritative figure as the «top princess», but this authoritativeness is not disclosed up to the Resurrection Day.

Quoting Denise Soufi, Gabbay expresses the reason for this concealment. She writes that Fāṭima's gender imposed these limitations on her character. According to Muslims' viewpoint, in the early centuries of Islam, women were not allowed to show authority; thus, Fāṭima could not show her power.

She then refers to divine knowledge Lady Fāṭima(s) had and writes that Fāṭima(s) enjoyed the mystic knowledge of the Prophet(s), but unlike Imāms, she rarely manifested her knowledge of Islamic sharī'a, as in the early centuries of Islam it was deemed as exclusive to men. (Ibid: 79-104)

### **7.5. Evaluation**

Based on what we said, in Gabbay's study, many important points about the character of Lady Fāṭima(s) have been detailed based on Shī'a sources. These include her divine knowledge, infallibility, intercession, veil-wearing, political activism, the way her house was attacked and her child was aborted, her defending of 'Alī and his usurped right, and her sermon in front of men and women while she had a complete veil. This study explains to a great extent the various aspects of her character ignored by orientalist sources. Thus, her study can reject the image of a suffering, ill, passive, and upset Fāṭima(s) depicted in many orientalist works and can prove the active social presence of women during the Early Days of Islam. In this positive image, her life can be taken as a criterion for the social behaviors and political participation of women in Islam.

Gabbay's article entails three important points.

**A)** Attention to the political activism of Lady Fāṭima(s) and simultaneously pointing to her hijāb. This point is highly important in that it expresses that Lady Fāṭima(s) was not limited and isolated due to her hijāb; rather, she presented in social arenas in case social interests ruled it.

**B)** Attention to the point that in spite of the existence of a character such as Lady Fāṭima(s) who is regarded highly by the Shī'a's and the more sublime viewpoint of the Shī'as to women in comparison to the Sunnīs, Gabbay believes that women have not still attained the status depicted in the texts they believe in. She believes that genuine Islamic sources never want women as limited and isolated. If there exists a tendency for their limitation, it originates from the thoughts of previous Shī'a scholars and exegetes such as Majlisī who introduced the concealed women as the appropriate one.

Undoubtedly, Gabbay's view to the classical Shī'a sources is correct, but as we can witness, with the examination of the works of notable Shī'a figures from past to present we can figure out that the incorrect view to women and their isolation has been taken from the Sunnī texts and has been the result of social conditions. However, the view to women is highly accurate in the works of exegetes such as 'Allāma Faḍlullāh and Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī as well as scholars of women studies such as Mihrīzī, etc. More specifically, the view to the active presence of women by Imām Khumaynī, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Ayatullāh Khāmini'ī, the Supreme Leader of Iran, is highly progressive. However, we might confess that the presence of women in various arenas of society is still in need of more review and defense.

**C)** In the Islamic society today, the transmission of bloodline or Sīyādat from one's daughter to his grandchildren is viewed negatively, and most Muslims believe that the mother cannot transmit the bloodline. In general, Imāmīyya scholars agree on the transmission of Sīyādat and the state of being a «Hāshimī» to everyone who is related to Hāshim through paternal connection with the Prophet(s). However, they disagree about those who have this connection through their mothers, and this is the point that has not been correctly raised by Gabbay. The majority of jurists do not deem maternally related people as Banī Hāshim and Sādāt, while Sayyid Murtaḍā is the first jurist who has taken them among Banī Hāshim and has deemed them capable of receiving Khums. Some key Imāmīyya jurists such as Muḥaqqiq Ardabīlī, Fayḍ Kāshānī, and Shaykh Yūsuf Baḥrānī have accepted Sayyid Murtaḍā's theory. To prove this theory, they have relied on some qur'ānic verses, especially one that takes Jesus('a) as a descendent of Ibrahim('a). In addition to qur'ānic verses, numerous verses refer to Imām Ḥasan('a) and Imām Ḥusayn('a) as the children of the Prophet of Allāh(s). (Allāhyārī, 2016: 12-15; Naqībī, 2015: 89)

## **8. Conclusion**

Analyzing religious issues and Islamic figures by orientalists has been done at times in a prejudiced manner and at other times in a reliable way without any negative presupposition. Although Lammens writes about Lady Fāṭima(s), this heavenly figure, in a completely prejudiced manner, or Mernissi treats her based on complete Sunnī biases, it seems that due to the endeavors of Massignon and Corbin – who have had an undeniable role in the transmission of Shī'a legacy and Islamic mysticism to the Western world – the prejudices of the foregoing researchers have been negated to some extent and are expressed with less assurance nowadays. Although analyzing the two-dimensional character of Lady Fāṭima(s) is difficult for non-Muslim writers, it can be seen in the evolution of orientalist opinions that whenever they have explored the Shī'a works more, they have been able to come to a better understanding of this sublime character, stay away from distortions of Islamic sects, and turn the depiction of Lady Fāṭima(s) from a passive, suffering, and sick figure to a knowledgeable, infallible, and loved character who defended Imāmat and got martyred for the sake of rightfulness path. Therefore, among the previous works, Gabbay's article that has relied on the early and later Shī'a sources is more mature than its predecessors. Since superficiality, insufficient care to accessing definitive sources, and adoption of negative presuppositions are evident in the opinions of many orientalists, those who seek truth in the West unwantedly come across imprecise works that lead them to a wrong understanding of Islam and Shī'a. Therefore, it is upon Shī'a Muslims to robustly present their scientific and reliable works internationally so as to prevent non-Muslims from taking a wrong path.

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