

STUDIES OF RELIGION

A'isha Bint Abu Bakr and her contribution to Islam

A'isha Bint AbuBakr was a significant Muslim women in Islam as the daughter of the 1st caliph after Muhammad. As a theologian, scholar and political activist, she is known as the “Mother of Believers” and has made a powerful impact on the development and expression of Islam. A'isha influenced the position of women in Islamic society, challenging Islamic ethics and the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an.

As a woman in Islamic society, Aisha carried a particularly high status as the third and favourite wife of the Prophet Muhammad. It is suggested that she was married to Muhammad, as he hoped to strengthen his ties with her father Abu Bakr, a common basis for marriage in Arabian culture. Subsequently, she bore witness to the foundational period of Islam and was believed to be of 'divine grace' that gave her credence, considering she was a mere woman in Arab society. A'isha observed Muhammad during many of Allah's revelations, proving her loyalty to the sacred teachings of Islam. She was a hafizah, being a woman who could fully recite the Quran, and became well versed in theology, writing poetry and acquiring a sound knowledge of literature, history and medicine.

A'isha ultimately shaped how Islam's beliefs and traditions were formed. She contributed over 2000 sayings of the Prophet, making up the Hadith and establishing how Muslims were to live by Allah's will within the Quran. She was considered an authority on Islamic law, as Prophet himself held Aisha's incredible knowledge in high regard, commanding his followers to “Learn a portion of your religion from this red-coloured lady.” After Muhammad's death, she became a figure in the Islamic community, as she was able to interpret the Quran, thus helping in the development of Islam and its teachings.

She was considered an authority on the teachings of Islam, more than any Islamic man. After the Prophet's death, both male and female Muslims would come to A'isha for verification of the hadith, although she was just 18. They were confident in her judgment, not only because of her understanding and intimacy of the Prophet, but because of her own intellect.

As well as A'isha's spiritual significance, she was also a role model for women within Islam. Considering Eastern and pre-Islamic society was and is still significantly patriarchal, A'isha stands as a symbol for equality, shaping attitudes towards women in the faith. She was an active Muslim, encouraging women to participate in the Hajj and contributing to the Zakat. As a leading figure of both Islam and Muslim women, she also strove to educate, encouraging children to learn and for women to gain greater knowledge past the household. As a result, Medina became a centre of Islamic learning, with Aisha being “one of the foremost scholars of Islam's early age”.

Another significant contribution she made to Islam was her active part in educational and social reforms, aiming to eradicate poverty and hunger under Muhammad's guidance. A'isha took abandoned & orphaned children into her care and educated them, as she was a teacher who had a clear understanding and persuasive manner of speech that influenced many Islamic and non-Islamic people around her.

Furthermore, A'isha was a catalyst for change within Sharia law. After spending time alone with a man who helped accompany her home after she lost her necklace, she was accused of adultery. Her faith was questioned, and subsequently she was harshly slandered. However, as Muhammad had no proof of infidelity, he could not divorce her. She refused punishment for a crime she did not commit and thus the rules of divorce were changed, as shown in Sura 24:18-28.

Another element of A'isha's significance is her expression of political activity. A'isha gained sufficient knowledge of warfare and civil unrest during her close companionship with the Prophet,

leading to her participation in various political battles. For instance, The 'Battle of the Camel' against the Caliph Ali in Basra (656 CE), named after the camel ridden by A'isha, proved her strength and bravery as a female figure in a largely male-dominated political society. To see who would succeed after Muhammad's death, Aisha led Uthman's forces, who were in the running for leadership against Ali for the position, despite Muhammad's death 25 years previously. After her defeat and A'isha's capture, he declined to harm her as her leadership and bravery was highly regarded by both men and women. She was then regarded as an inspiration, as she was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice and surrender to Allah. In a society where the female figure was only utilized as a caretaker, she defied the social norms to be a strong political leader. Evidently, this divide between Islam is still evident today between the Sunni followers of Uthman and Shi'a followers of Ali, proving Aisha's contribution to this schism and thus an ultimate shaping of Islamic faith and Muslim women.

A'isha is a leading example of a Muslim, who was a woman so ahead of her time that both men and women turned to for spiritual guidance and Islamic knowledge. Her contributions and roles in the Islamic community allowed Islam to flourish to the worldwide extent that it has today, forming her into a role model and source of inspiration for Muslims and non-Muslims around the world. Her devotion to Islam and education and her momentous impact on the religion are studied by Islamic and non-Islamic scholars to this day.