

The Role of IMAM KHOMEINI(ra) And the Islamic Revolution on the Integration of the Muslim World

By: Syeda Rubab

Ruhollah Musavi was born on the 24th September 1902/20th Jamadi al Akhir – the same date as the birth anniversary of Bibi Fatimah s.a. in Khomein, in a small village in what was then known as Persia. He would later take the name Khomeini. Khomeini was a descendent of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. and his ancestors were from the lineage of Imam Musa al Kazim, the seventh Imam. Khomeini was born into a family of scholars. His grandfather Syed Ahmad, whilst on a pilgrimage from India to Imam Ali a.s. shrine in Najaf met and accepted an invitation from Yusaf Khan to settle in Khomein, Iran.ⁱ It was here that both Khomeini's father, Syed Mostafa Hindi and his aunt Syeda Sahiba were born. Syed Mostafa Hindi as was customary of the time received religious education first in Iran and then advanced studies in what was then known as the Atabat, the shrine cities of Iraq - Najaf and Samarra. On his return to Khomein, Ruhollah was born, the third son of Syed Mostafa – the first being Syed Mortaza (later known as Ayatollah Pasandideh) and the second Syed Nureddin.

Shortly after Khomeini's birth, his father was murdered and his mother, Hajar was left to raise the children with her sister-in-law Sahiba. It was through his mother's relentless determination for justice that she ensured her husband's killer was later to be executed. Consequently his mother and aunt were to have a lasting impact on a young Khomeini. At the age of probably about 6 years old Khomeini started to attend a local maktab (religious school) and by the age of seven he had become a *hafiz*.ⁱ "According to his brother, Khomeini was always an attentive and intelligent student"ⁱ and he was taught by learned family members including Shaykh Jafar, his mother's cousin, Mirza Reza Najafi his brother-in-law and his older brother Mortaza amongst others.

In 1918, at the age of 16 Khomeini first lost his aunt and then his mother in the epidemic outbreak of cholera. No doubt, this must have been devastating for the young scholar and he was now the responsibility of his older brother Mortaza. In 1920, the decision was made for Khomeini to move to Sultanabad, now known as Arak. It was in Arak that Ayatollah Abdul Karim Haeri, a learned,

pious and renowned scholar of the time was teaching and it is highly likely that this fact may have influenced Khomeini to want to further his studies under his supervision. Khomeini's stay in Arak was short lived; by 1923 Ayatollah Haeri by invitation of the scholars of Qom, moved to this holy city and many of his students followed, including Khomeini. Hamid Algar in his introductory pages in *Forty Hadiths* by Imam Khomeini writes that Qom in those years had been overshadowed as a centre of learning by the shrine cities of Iraq but with the arrival of Ayatollah Haeri the city began to transform once again with the revivals of the *madrassas* (religious learning schools) and the process of the city becoming Iran's spiritual capital once again had begun.ⁱ Qom also has the shrine of Bibi Masoomah, daughter of the seventh Imam. It was therefore also a city frequented by pilgrimages from around the world. Indeed, it is a prerequisite for many scholars in search of knowledge to spend time in Qom in advancement of spiritual and religious educational aspirations till today.

Khomeini stayed in the Dar al Shafa School. Khomeini was to study the traditional subjects such as jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic law (sharia) in addition to poetry, philosophy, mysticism and Gnosticism – but these were done privately. Khomeini was greatly influenced by Mirza Mohammed-Ali Shahabadi and when Shahabadi left Qom, Khomeini himself taught Gnosis and ethics.

He excelled in all subjects and stood out amongst his contemporaries. "Khomeini, according to those who remember him at the madrasah, acquired a reputation as a serious, hardworking student."^v Khomeini was taught Fiqh by Haeri himself and was one of his top students. By 1930 Khomeini himself was teaching at the madressa. In 1937, Ayatollah Haeri died and was later succeeded by Ayatollah Mohammad Borujerdi. Both of these had actively encouraged the students to not get involved in politics. Iran was going through much social, economic and political turmoil and though there was growing dissatisfaction amongst the scholars they had been instructed to refrain from politics. Khomeini adhered to their instructions and indeed it was not until after Ayatollah Borujerdi passed in away in 1961 that Khomeini began to openly criticise Mohammed Raza Shah and his regime. However it was Khomeini's speech on the 3rd June 1963, significantly on the day of Ashura, in which he compared Raza

Shah to Yazid that led to his arrest and sparked a chain of events that would see him exiled to Turkey, Iraq and then France – the rest they say is History.

Khomeini whilst studying and teaching in the seminaries was able to write many books with his first being *Kashf al-Asrar* and then *Resalah Towzih al Masael*, *Tahrir al Vasileh*, (Commentary of the Vehicle, 1965) *Velayat e Faqih*, *Hokumat e Eslami* (The Regency of the Theologian, Islamic Government, 1970) amongst numerous other books.

However, I do not want to dwell on Khomeini's politic aspirations but rather look at what Khomeini desired for the people of Islam. Khomeini himself had embarked on a spiritual journey in pursuit of reaching the ultimate goal of mankind. In his book *Forty Hadiths*, Khomeini selects forty hadiths from the Household of the Prophet s.a.w. and gives each an explanation so the reader can relate to and learn from this. The book was written more than fifty years ago and is as relevant today as it was when it was first written. When writing this book Khomeini was not a *marja e taqlid* (source of imitation) yet he advises the reader using quotations from the Holy Quran and sayings of the Ahlul Bayt a.s. He was as much concerned with the worldly state of the Muslims (following the revolution and the establishment of an Islamic State) as spiritual. He warns man against the pleasures of this world not only in his writings but leading by example.

It is clearly evident from books written, testimonies from family members, contemporaries and those who really knew Khomeini that he himself was not interested in worldly gains, ambitions or desires. "Even in the prime of his youth he was deeply involved in his studies and it would have been out of character for him to pursue worldly pleasures." ^v *i*

Khomeini acted exactly according to all the instructions that he gave from the start, and in actuality, *was* an embodiment of those very instructions. He himself was the book '*Forty Hadith*' that he had written in his youth. Suppose he spoke about *riya*(performing any action for the purpose of other than the pleasure of Allah) and reproached it, he himself would stay away from it with intensity. ^v

"He inclined towards the earth and followed his lust" (7:176)

Khomeini writes “it is evident that all spiritual, moral and behavioural evils arise from the love of the world and negligence of God Almighty and the Hereafter.”^v

Deeply pious, Khomeini in his youth had already reached a spiritual maturity that often eludes the masses. Imam Sadiq (a.s) said “The attachment to the world is the basis of all sins”ⁱ It is safe to state that Khomeini had successfully detached himself from the trappings of this worldly existence yet managed to effectively live in it in as a marja-e- taqlid, friend, scholar, father, brother and husband. Only when he himself was able to perfect these qualities, he selected forty of them and wrote “I chose to write them in Persian, so that the Persian knowing people may also be benefited from them.”^x This statement implying that these hadiths had already made an impact on Khomeini.

As already mentioned earlier Khomeini was orphaned before his first birthday and he was bought up by his mother but it was his aunt Sahiba that took charge of his upbringing. No doubt the passing away of these women impacted on Khomeini greatly but they had a lasting effect on Khomeini as is evident in his attitude towards women. He states “Women are free to choose their activities, their destiny and also their manner of dress, providing it complies with the rules”.^x 1st November 1978ⁱ

He placed much emphasis on the rights of women in particular to mothers and their responsibilities “Respected Ladies! ...You are responsible for the upbringing of the children; you have the duty of nurturing virtuous children in your care to hand over to society. A mother’s lap is the best school for a child.”^x I would recommend every person reads ‘The position of women from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini, published by the Institution for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s works, 2001 – available online. In reading this you can fully ascertain the great position Islam bestows upon women and Khomeini’s view of Bibi Fatima s.a, who he holds in the greatest esteem and on women. It would be an injustice to not mention how the Imam treated his own wife and daughters. I was sent this extract by a friend and it really gives an insight into Khomeini’s great personality;

Imam's wife would say, "I was never woken up by Imam praying Salat ul Layl because he would never switch on the room light. When he would go to do

wudhoo, he would place a sponge in the sink under the tap so that the sound of the falling water would not wake me."

Agha always offered me the better place in the room. He would not start eating until I came to the dinner table. He would also tell the children:

'Wait until Khanom comes.' He was not even willing that I should work in the house. He would always tell me: 'Don't sweep.' If I wanted to wash the children's clothes at the pond, he would come and say: "Get up, you shouldn't be washing." On the whole, I have to say that Imam did not consider sweeping, washing dishes and even washing my children's clothes as part of my responsibilities. If out of necessity I sometimes did these, he would get upset considering them as a type of unjust dealing towards me.

Even when I entered the room, he would never say: 'Close the door behind you,' but waited till I sat down and then would himself get up and shut the door.

His daughter Siddika says: My father had an extraordinary respect for my mother. In the period of 60 years of living together, he did not even reach for food (on the dinner table) before his wife, nor did he have even the smallest expectation from her. I can even say that in the period of 60 years of living together, at no time did he even ask for a glass of water, but would always get it himself. He behaved this way not only with his wife but also with all of us who were his daughters. If he ever wanted water we would all enthusiastically run to get it, but he never wanted us to bring and give him a glass of water in his hand.

During the difficult last days of his life, each time he would open his eyes, if he was capable of speaking, he would ask: 'How is Khanom?' We would reply: 'She is good. Shall we tell her to come to you?' He would answer: 'No, her back is hurting. Let her rest.'

Ayatollah Khomeini was the only person to be given the title Imam, after the 12 infallibles. This is a great honour indeed and it is proof of the high status Khomeini achieved in his life, one that no other has been able to do so to this date. It is evident that Khomeini appealed to the masses and to all walks of life including men, women, children, students, intellectuals, artisans etc. He lived his life as a traveller, knowing full well this life was transient and ultimately this was one of his messages to the people and one which we should take heed to.

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- ⁱ Forty Hadiths, An Exposition of Ethical and Mystical Traditions, Imam Khomeini, 2003 Hamid Algar p2,
ⁱ Ibid, p3 ⁱ
- ⁱ Khomeini, Introductory Essay on Leadership, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p26
- ⁱ Forty Hadiths, An Exposition of Ethical and Mystical Traditions, Imam Khomeini, 2003 Hamid Algar p4
- ^v Khomeini, Introductory Essay on Leadership, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p47
- ^v Khomeini, Life of the Ayatollah, Baqer Moin, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999, p30
- ^v Al Islam.org, Rays of the Sun: 83 Stories from the Life of Imam Khomeini (ra), Section 1
- ^v Forty Hadiths, An Exposition of Ethical and Mystical Traditions, Imam Khomeini, 2003, p257
- ⁱ Bihar al-Anwar^xvol. 3, p7
- ^x Forty Hadiths, An Exposition of Ethical and Mystical Traditions, Imam Khomeini, 2003,p33
- ^x The position of women from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini, The institution for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's works, 2001, p53
- ^x Ibid. p68 ⁱ ⁱ