

# Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah's Marriage to Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH): An Assessment of Montgomery Watt and Robert Spencer's views

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**Abstract:** *Islam is a natural religion, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) are in accordance with human nature and fulfill ample resources for the fulfillment of human economic and social needs. The marriage of the Holy Prophet with Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah was indispensable to the Muslim Ummah due to the fulfillment of the Prophet's mission, universal propagation of the religion, education and training of the Ummah. However, Orientalists have distorted the facts and reasons for the Prophet's marriage and criticized his character with regard to marriage with Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah. Montgomery Watt and Robert Spencer are inclined to disprove the marriage of the Holy Prophet with Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah while interpreting the verses of Holy Quran in their Quran commentaries and books. There is no point of objection in this marriage which has been acknowledged by some Orientalists such as John Bagot, D.S Margoliouth and Sir William Muir. This article presents a critical review of the both Orientalists objections to the marriage of the Holy Prophet. For this research, modern research methodology has been followed. Instead of paraphrasing and putting in our own words the writings and observations of various scholars, the method of Muslim historiography has been followed by quoting the writer in his own words, giving full reference to his work.*

**Key words:** Watt, Spencer, Marriage, Orientalists, Hazrat Aisha

## Introduction

Many Orientalists object to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah's early marriage to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They opine that at the time when the Prophet of Allah (PBUH) married Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah, she was six years old and she left her father's home after marriage at the age of nine, while

Muhammad (PBUH) was fifty years old. According to the Orientalists, such a difference in the ages of the spouses is inappropriate because such a young girl is incapable of establishing sexual relations.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Orientalists say that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah spent nine years in the company of Hazrat Muhammad and she became a widow at the age of eighteen and spent almost forty six years of her life as a widow. In their opinion, a girl who became a widow at the age of eighteen was deprived of the right to marry anyone. They object that depriving Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah of her right to marry anyone in the future is a great injustice.<sup>2</sup>

No orientalist or western writer raised any objection to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah's early marriage until the beginning of the 20th century. Humphrey Prideaux (1648-1724) tried to explain this marriage in his book at the end of the 17th century when he mentions: "Ayesha was only six years old at that time and Muhammad did not bring her home until she was eight years old."<sup>3</sup> He thinks that in hot countries it is uncommon for women there to become marriageable at this age and be ready to bear children the following year.

This observation has been confirmed by Edward William Lane (1801-1876) who lived in Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Asad also narrated similar incidents during his stay in Arabia at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Washington Irving (1783-1859) and Sir William Muir also mentioned the marriage of Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah, but not as a reprehensible event. Washington Irving accepted the fact that the Prophet's marriage with Ayesha was in accordance with Arabic culture.<sup>6</sup> Another western scholar, John Davenport, has also refuted the narrow-minded objections of the Orientalists to the Holy Prophet. He did not mention the marriage of Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah in an objectionable way.

D.S. Margoliouth (1858-1940) was the first person who mentioned this marriage in an insulting way. His main purpose was not to mention this marriage, but while mentioning the poverty of Prophet Muhammad after the battle of Badr, he wrote: "Perhaps the marriage of a fifty three years old man to a nine year girl, who is picked up from a swing and toys, was hurriedly done so that some money could be obtained immediately."<sup>7</sup>

But after that, it has become an important topic of criticism on Prophet and Islam. Montgomery Watt<sup>8</sup> and Robert Spencer<sup>9</sup> have also considered this marriage a topic of discussion under their own hidden objectives.

Watt has not commented on this marriage in his Quran commentary on the Qur'an. But in one of his other books, he writes that "one or two personal events took place in 623 AD, the most important of which was his marriage to Aisha in April, when the bride was about nine years old. They were married one or two years earlier in Mecca but she was still staying in her father's house."<sup>10</sup>

But Montgomery Watt's point of view can be understood in his following words:

"This would be a very strange relationship between a fifty-three-year-old man and a ten-year-old girl, more like a father and daughter than a husband and wife. So we must remember that in seventh-century Arabia, girls matured very quickly. They had no children, but Aisha was like a happy girl in a polygamous household. Her marriage was clearly a political reason to connect Abu Bakr and Muhammad.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Spencer interprets Hazrat Aisha's marriage in his Qur'an commentary with reference to the incident narrated in tafseer Ibn-e-Kathir:

"Embarrassed by their implications, Islamic apologists in the West often deny the Islamic traditions that specify that Aisha was nine when Muhammad (the man they hold up as the supreme example of human conduct) consummated his marriage with her. They say that Aisha was actually 19 when she married Muhammad – but they do not explain why a young woman in her twenties would still be playing with toys, as in the story of her winged horse."<sup>12</sup>

He further comments in his new Quran Commentary while interpreting the verse 31 of Surah 38 as: "Legends of this kind support the idea, frequently denied today, that Aisha was indeed a child, still playing with toys, when the prophet of Islam married her, a marriage with important implications."<sup>13</sup>

#### **A Critical and Comparative Review of the Objections of Montgomery Watt and Robert Spencer**

Among the two Orientalists, Montgomery Watt has not mentioned this event in his Qur'an Commentary, and in his other books, he has not specifically criticized the age of Hazrat Aisha, but has called it a political reason. But as usual, Robert Spencer has criticized the incident. As far as the objection of the age difference is concerned, it is submitted in this regard that a big age difference is considered inappropriate for the spouses because it is generally a hindrance in happy marital relations.

It is also confirmed by the books of Hinduism that harmony in ages is not necessary for a happy society. Hindu famous book Manusmriti mentions that: "A thirty years old boy and a twelve years girl should marry, or a twenty-four-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl."<sup>14</sup> The marital relationship of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) with Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah was very pleasant and exemplary. Despite the age difference, there is no hint of disharmony and dissatisfaction between them in their nine year partnership.

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah was the most beloved wife of the Prophet of Allah and companions of the Prophet were also aware of this matter. When a complaint was brought to him in this matter, Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Don't disturb me in the matter of Ayesha Siddiqah."<sup>15</sup> There are all the details in the Hadith books about how the Prophet (PBUH) used to please her. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah used to love and respect the Prophet (PBUH) very much.<sup>16</sup>

It is preferable for the spouses to be harmonious from the Islamic point of view, but instead of

its greater importance, the spouses have been urged to pay each other's rights.<sup>17</sup> There are many such examples in the period of the Companions of the Prophet that they used to marry young girls despite the age difference for some reasons. For example, Hazrat Umar Farooq (RA) married Hazrat Umme Kalsoom(RA), the daughter of Hazrat Ali(RA), in 18th Hijri. Hazrat Umm Kalsoom was nine or ten years old and Hazrat Farooq Azam (RA) was more than 55 years. Hazrat Umar (RA) expressed this wish to Hazrat Ali (RA), and he replied, "She is still young. But Hazrat Omar (RA) clarified that his aim is to get the honor of being attributed to the Prophet's family, so Hazrat Ali (RA) became ready and she had two children of Hazrat Umar (RA)."<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the Prophet's marriage with Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) was to further strengthen his relationship with his close friend and companion Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA).<sup>19</sup> It is narrated from Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah that the Prophet (PBUH) married her at the age of six and she left her father home at the age of nine and remained with the Prophet (PBUH) for nine years.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of the Prophet's marriage with Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah is an early issue in the debates on Islam to understand and explain the reality behind it is difficult due to numerous social, regional and specific attitudes and factors, which have changed a lot especially during the last century. It is for the reason that this marriage has become the subject of debate only in the last century.

The age of puberty varies from culture to culture. Many factors such as geographical conditions, cultural aspects of a region and special diet and gender roles play vital roles in it. In 7th century AD, puberty among girls in Arabia was not understood precocious at the age of nine. This has been reported by Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah herself and it is confirmed by other sources. Harb bin Ismail al-Kirmani (893 AH) says that Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah said, "The girl of nine years is a complete youth."<sup>21</sup> Al-Bayhaqi (1066 AH) explains this tradition saying that it means "she menstruates and thus she is a woman."<sup>22</sup> Marriages that take place at the beginning of puberty are regularly recorded in history. Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan married his nine year old daughter Hind to Abdullah bin Amir bin Kuriz.<sup>23</sup> Abu al-Asim al-Dahhak says that his mother was only twelve years older than him. A few men were also sometimes married at a very young age.<sup>24</sup> For example, Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-Aas was only twelve years younger than his father Hazrat Amr.<sup>25</sup>

Several factors indicate that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah was indeed an adult at the time of marriage. The marriage contract was made when Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah was six or seven years old, but the departure was delayed for more than two years, until Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah was nine years old. That is why Imam Tabari wrote that when she married the Prophet, she was very young and had not yet reached the age of seclusion.<sup>26</sup>

The departure was not done because Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah was too young, and the only logical implication is that indeed the departure took place only after puberty and physical changes. Hazrat Aisha says that Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) married her when she was six years old and after about three years

her parents insisted on leaving.<sup>27</sup> Later we reached Medina and she was with Abu Bakar's children. Later Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA) gave Holy Prophet 500 dirham, which he (SAWS) sent to Hazrat Ayesha (RA) and thus her departure took place.<sup>28</sup>

A well known Islamic Scholar, Muhammad Amir Khan Nasir writes that as far as the problem is concerned that marrying a nine-year-old girl is morally wrong, then this problem actually arose due to the change of society, civilization and the difference of culture.

It is quite possible that in one society something is considered morally right, while another society considers it immoral. In the Arab society of Prophethood, the marriage and departure of a nine-year-old girl was not considered strange and especially immoral. There was no negative reaction to this marriage in any way, even though the character of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) and his every act were looked upon not only by polytheists, Jews and Christians, but also by the group of hypocrites among the Muslims themselves. All the groups did not miss any opportunity to morally undermine the personality of the Prophet (PBUH).

In cases where the Shariah has not ordered anything at the level of obligation and duty, it is certainly a requirement of wisdom and expediency to take into account the specific sensitivities of any society and culture. However, this does not mean that it is an absolute law. By doing this, other societies and especially the Muslim society of the Prophet's era, the decisions and actions of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) should also be judged on it. So, just as it is not correct to insist that every early age marriages must be kept legal in every society and in this context, the problems that have come out from practical situations and experience should not be taken into account. The society of the Prophet and the Companions should be started to be judged on the principle and the method of negation should be adopted for everything that feels alien and unfamiliar to today's modern mind due to the difference in culture, civilization and social style.<sup>29</sup>

Another well-known Islamic scholar Allama Muhammad Asad writes that this shows that "Hazrat Ayesha Siddiq (RA) had reached puberty, and Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) was aware of it."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the seclusion of Hazrat Ayesha Siddiq (RA) took place in the house of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA).<sup>31</sup> Mufsir Al-Tabari writes that on Wednesday in the month of Shawwal, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) spent the night with Hazrat Aisha Siddiq (RA) in the house of Hazrat Abu Bakr.<sup>32</sup> The above tradition proves that Hazrat Aisha Siddiq (RA) was an adult at the time of her marriage. Karen Armstrong another Orientalist writes that, when she reached puberty,<sup>33</sup> and then there was a departure.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, there is evidence that Hazrat Aisha's mother took special interest in her physical development, apparently to prepare her for married life. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiq (RA) herself tells that her mother wanted her to be present in the service of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). Therefore, she used to treat my obesity until I ate cucumber mixed with dates and I became fat.

There are different versions of this hadith according to which not only her mother but also other



people were satisfied with her growth.<sup>35</sup> This also proves that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah's mother was preparing her for a free life. There is a rational argument in this matter that no amount of skepticism can replace a mother's conviction, at least regarding a girl's hidden affairs.

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah lived a very happy married life after her marriage. The Prophet always expressed his love and affection towards her. Both of them used to eat and drink together and the Prophet used to place his blessed mouth on a piece of meat and on a dish where Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah used to place her mouth and that too when she was in the state of menstruation.<sup>36</sup> They took water from the same pot and bathed.<sup>37</sup> The Prophet of Allah sometimes used to race with Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the age difference between husband and wife, there was an unusual frankness among them. Once, Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah's voice became louder than usual in front of the Holy Prophet. Hazrat Abu Bakr(RA) expressed his anger on Aisha Siddiqah (RA) for behaving like this and started slapping her. However, the Prophet of Allah (PBUH) came between them and when Hazrat Abu Bakr(RA) left, he said to Aisha Siddiqah, "You see how I saved you from this person."<sup>39</sup>

Islamic scholar Muhammad Ammar Khan Nasir writes that if you look at it from the Hazrat Muhammad's (PBUH) point of view, one of the most important reasons for this decision is that Holy Prophet wants to strengthen his relationship with Hazrat Abu Bakr and in return turned this relationship of friendship into a strong family relationship. It is known that in a tribal society such relationships are of extraordinary social importance and there are an extremely effective means of building and strengthening ties between two families and clans. That is the reason why Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) adopted the method of establishing verbal relations with his closest companions in order to express and make them stronger.<sup>40</sup>

Hazrat Ayesha had great feelings and emotions regarding the relationship with Prophet Muhammad. So in this regard no objection to the violation of human rights, justice and morality is not against the Prophet Muhammad, but against the objectors themselves. They could not value the level of love and emotional commitment of a husband and wife to each other, which is the real thing in a marriage relationship, and in this way want to determine the value of this relationship by their limited and flawed moral standards.<sup>41</sup> Hazrat Aisha (RA) comprehended the hadiths of the Holy Prophet better than most of the Companions. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah used to grant fatwa during the reign of Hazrat Omar (RA), Hazrat Uthman and till the time of her death.<sup>42</sup> Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, a well-known companion of the Prophet (PBUH), testifies that whenever he asked Hazrat Aisha (RA) about a hadith, we definitely got some knowledge about it from her.<sup>43</sup>

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah, the Lord of the worlds, has given a different description of the waiting period of divorced women according to different types of women.<sup>44</sup> If a woman has been divorced after marriage and her husband has not had intercourse with her before leaving, then there is no waiting period for this type of women. The period of menstruating women is defined as three periods<sup>45</sup> and among

those women who do not menstruate, the period of the pregnant woman is the period of pregnancy, and if she has become barren or she is an adolescent and has been divorced, then her waiting period is three months.<sup>46</sup>

In the light of this divine decree, it can be easily understood that even if a woman is an adolescent, she can be divorced by marrying her and the husband can establish marital relations with her. So if a person divorces his wife before establishing cohabitation, then there is no waiting period on her. Everyone knows that divorce can be given only to married women; there is no question of divorcing an unmarried woman.

It has been proved by the decree of God that an adolescent woman can be married and marital relations can be established with her, and if she is divorced, then she is also ordered to perform waiting period. When the justification for marriage and divorce before puberty is present in the Qur'an, how can it be permissible to object to the marriage and divorce of Ayesha Siddiqah as a child?

The acquisition of such weak traditions that do not meet the principles of wisdom has been a characteristic of Orientalists since the first day. In the traditions of the Holy Prophet, Hazrat Ayesha's conversion to faith in the early days of Islam is also found. She was also old enough to distinguish between Islam and disbelief.<sup>47</sup> There is no scope of such type of objections in this marriage.

### **Conclusions**

Contrary to Robert Spencer's opinion, Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah's marriage was not against the custom, law or rationality of her time. Her biography and life style was far superior and higher than that. The importance of Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah's personality in the promotion and publication of Islamic law and the success of Islamic lifestyle is very high. The Prophet ((PBUH)) said to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah, "You were shown to me twice in a dream. I saw that you were wrapped in a silk cloth and it was being said that she was your wife."<sup>48</sup> The two marriages of the Holy Prophet that Spencer focuses on the most, both took place through preserved revelation. Montgomery Watt's description of it as a political goal is also incorrect because he has made a mistake in understanding the spiritual aspect of prophethood.

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- 9 Robert Spencer is an American anti-Islamic writer. He was born in 1962 and has a background in Catholic Christianity. He got his Master Degree from University of Chapal Hill. He is a director of the website Jihad Watch. He has published more than twenty books on Islam, Quran and other topics. His two books have been the New York Times best seller books. He also wrote a Quran commentary, "Blogging the Quran". He has planned to publish his new Quran commentary, "The Critical Quran: The key Islamic commentary and Contemporary Historical Research" in November 2021.
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