

# The Pretensions of Postmodernism and the Hadith of Umm Waraqah

The appropriation of the hadith of Umm Waraqah as proof for the permissibility and validity of a woman's leading salah in Amina Wadud's recent episode in New York throws up some interesting considerations. Responses have varied. There has been the tendency to question the authenticity of the hadith; another approach looks at the applicability of the hadith to the case in question; while a third approach surveys the views and opinions of the scholars of Islam. While none of these approaches lacks individual merit, it should not be lost to the observer that there is another side to the issue; a side that none of us can afford to lose sight of in the present global climate. The present paper seeks to touch upon each of these various approaches, whilst not omitting to set the issue within the framework of contemporary affairs.

## AUTHENTICITY

The hadith of Umm Waraqah has been documented in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Musnad Ahmad*, *al-Hakim's Mustadrak*, and *al-Bayhaqi's Dala'il al-Nubuwwah*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Its chain of narrators in all of these sources lead up to a single strand: al-Walid ibn Abdillah ibn Jumay, narrating from his grandmother and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Khallad, both of whom narrate from Umm Waraqah. Authenticity rests, to a great (though not exclusive) degree upon the narrators. As a rule, a hadith will only be accepted as authentic and as a reliable basis for law when it meets the requirements of acceptance. In the present hadith the focus comes to rest upon three narrators: al-Walid, his grandmother, and Abd al-Rahman ibn Khallad.

### al-Walid ibn 'Abdillah ibn Jumay

Hadith critics have differed on al-Walid ibn Abdillah ibn Jumay. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Yahya ibn Ma'in, al-'Ijli, Abu Zurah and Abu Hatim are on record as having accepted his reliability as a narrator; while Ibn Hibban and al-'Uqayli have made disparaging remarks about his credibility. Al-Bazzar adds that he had certain Shi'i proclivities in him as well.

[2] Ibn Hajar sums up these various pronouncements by saying that he was "**truthful, prone to err, with an accusation of Shi'ism against him.**"

### [3] The grandmother of al-Walid

In al-Hakim's version of the hadith her name is given as Layla bint Malik. There is general concurrence amongst the muhaddithun that she is unknown.

[4] When a narrator is unknown the hadith falls short of the requirements of authenticity. To this may be added the fact that there also exists some confusion with regard to al-Walid ibn 'Abdillah's source. In some versions of the hadith it is his grandmother; in others it is his grandfather; whilst in yet others his grandmother is identified as Umm Waraqah herself.

[5] What we have here is thus a case of jahalah (an unknown narrator) compounded by iditirab (confusion).

### **'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khallad**

In 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khallad we have another example of an unknown entity. His name appears nowhere in hadith literature except in this narration of Walid ibn 'Abdillah ibn Jumay. Ibn al-Qattan states that his condition is unknown, leading Ibn Hajar to conclude that he is majhul al-hal (a less serious case of jahalah that would pass as acceptable to some scholars).

[6] A recent recension of Ibn Hajar avers, however, that this is not a case of jahalat al-hal, but one of jahalat al-'ayn, which is considerably more serious.

### **[7] Missing links**

Over and above the disparaging claims that have been made about the above narrators, there is another issue which has a bearing upon the acceptability of the hadith. Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani points out that the form in which the chain of the hadith appears in the common sources hides another issue that impugns its authenticity. Neither Walid ibn 'Abdillah's grandmother (or grandfather), nor 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khallad have received this hadith from Umm Waraqah directly. Ibn al-Sakan and Ibn Mandah have recorded the hadith via Layla bint Malik (who is Walid's grandmother), from her father, from Umm Waraqah; while Abu Nu'aym records it via Walid, from his grandmother, from her mother, from Umm Waraqah. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khallad too, is on record as having received the hadith, not from Umm Waraqah directly, but through an unknown intermediary.

### **[8] Summary**

Opinions have differed around this hadith. Objectivity and honesty demand that both opinions be stated here. Some have looked upon it as a case of a questionable narrator (Walid ibn 'Abdillah ibn Jumay) narrating from two unknown narrators, and have therefore concluded that the hadith is not reliable. A more lenient opinion asserts that the questionable narrator is reliable to most critics, while the two unknown narrators corroborate one another. They therefore claim that the hadith is hasan li-ghayrihi, indicating an intrinsic weakness augmented by corroboration. The corroboration, however, is a case of internal corroboration (*mutaba'ah*) and not external (*shahid*). In other words, this hadith is not supported by any other independent and separate hadith, but merely by the fact that Walid ibn 'Abdillah happens to narrate it from two persons. Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi has conclusively negated the existence of any other hadith on this issue.

[9] What this lenient position overlooks is the issue of missing links in the chain. Such missing links constitute a major problem. We have no idea whatsoever about the personality, and consequently of the reliability, of the missing persons. An objective appraisal of the state of the hadith cannot fail to take this hidden defect (termed an *'illah* in hadith terminology) in consideration. One of the 5 essential requirements of authenticity is that the hadith should be free from such defects. In the final analysis, the hadith of Umm Waraqah falls short in authenticity, and has to be dismissed as authoritative grounds upon which to formulate law.

### **APPLICABILITY**

Applicability, of course, will only come into play if it is accepted that the hadith is acceptable. Assuming therefore that it is in fact a reliable hadith, the question that should next be asked is whether it does actually indicate what it is claimed to indicate: that it is fully permissible and valid for a woman to lead males in salah. The core of this claim rests upon the part of the hadith which reads: ***"He (i.e the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) ordered her (Umm Waraqah) to lead the***

*people of her house (dar) in prayer.*” There is no express mention of which individuals constituted the members of her household. There is no mention of a husband, father or son. All that exists is the fact that the hadith makes mention of the fact that the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam appointed a male person to be her muadhdhin. This has led some persons into the claim that Umm Waraqah led at least one male in salah. The hadith, however, does not state that. It doesn’t state that the muadhdhin actually made his salah behind Umm Waraqah. To assert that would be an assumption into the text, and not the text itself. Assumptions of this nature should never be done subjectively, but in consideration of objective factors known to us through other texts. The first such factor would be the insistence of the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam upon congregational salah in the masjid. Well known are the ahadith on his extreme annoyance at certain persons performing salah at home, to the point that he threatened to burn down their houses.

[10] Equally well known is the case of the blind man who came seeking permission to perform his salah at home. After initially granting him permission to do so, Rasulullah sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam recalled him and asked him if he could hear the adhan. When he answered in the affirmative, he ordered him to attend the congregational prayer in the masjid.

[11] It has also been stated that in the time of the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam the only male to stay away from the congregational prayer would be an open hypocrite or a severely ill person.

[12] Such a severe attitude against the performance of salah away from the congregation in the masjid, leaves us with very little option but to assume that even the muadhdhin of Umm Waraqah was ordered to make adhan for her, but perform his salah in the masjid with the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam and the rest of the Companions. Any other assumption flies blatantly in face of what is reliably known to us of the attitude of the Prophet sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam and the practice of the community at Madinah. In short, there exists ambiguity in the text of this hadith. As it stands it carries the possibility that the people who prayed behind Umm Waraqah included males; and it carries the other possibility that they were exclusively females. A cardinal rule with regard to dealing with textual ambiguity is that consideration must be given to surrounding evidence. Ignoring the surrounding evidence of attitudes and environment can only be said to be subjective, and therefore, worthy of dismissal. As for the argument that the word dar refers to the entire neighbourhood, it rests upon an even flimsier basis. The literal meaning of the word dar, as opposed to bayt, is that the word dar applies to the entire structure, consisting of walls, rooms and inner courtyard, while bayt refers to the individual rooms within the dar. The extension of the word dar to an entire neighbourhood is figurative (majaz), and opting for a figurative reading without advancing compelling objective reason is once again a subjective ploy. The words dar and bayt are used in the very same hadith in a way that puts paid to any such extension. Umm Waraqah was eventually murdered by two of her slaves. ‘Umar’s discover of the body of Umm Waraqah after her murder is recorded by Ibn al-Sakan as follows:

[13]“In the morning `Umar [r`a] said: I By Allah I did not hear the recital of my aunt Ummu Waraqah. He entered her ‘dar’ and when he did not see anything amiss, he entered her ‘bayt’ and found her wrapped in a qatifah to the side of the the ‘bayt’.”

## **OPPORTUNISM OF POST-MODERNISM**

It appears from the way in which the hadith of Umm Waraqah has been appropriated and brandished in the case of Amina Wadud's Jumu'ah adventure, that she and her ilk actually subscribe to the authority of Hadith and Sunnah. A more careful reading of her writings and the attitude towards Hadith as reflected in them points to something more sinister at work here. Amina Wadud is a feminist. That much is as clear as daylight. In the course of her career as an Islamic feminist, she has encountered three sorts of obstacles: cultural attitudes, Quranic verses, and Prophetic ahadith. The first (cultural attitudes) she has dismissed with more than contempt. When it came to verses from the Quran she was more tentative. For many years her attitude has been one of hermeneutical prevarication teetering on the verge, but never quite flipping over into blatant rejection. On Sunday 6 February of this year, just a few weeks before her Jumu'ah adventure, she finally took the plunge. A fellow postmodernist would-be reformer, Tarek Fatah, described the meeting in Toronto in which she finally came out of the closet in the following words: Midway through her speech titled "The Quran, Women and Interpretive Possibilities," Wadud waded into the minefield by addressing some difficult passages of the Quran. Breaking the ultimate taboo in the Muslim narrative, she stated that despite the fact the Quran explicitly asks for cutting off the hands of thieves, she did not agree with the Quran. She said she understood that this was a very difficult subject to talk about, but she would be dishonest to herself if she did not express her views. She maintained that as a Muslim with Allah close to her heart, in all honesty she could not continue with the hypocrisy of lying about how she felt about some verses of the Quran. The basis of her talk was "How to be God's agent (khalifa) on Earth; to be a moral agent of the Creator." In this context, she presented four ways of looking at Qu'ranic verses which Muslims find difficulty dealing with. She identified the four methods as:

1. The literal readings of the text,
2. The legalistic arguments that constrain how verses are applied,
3. Reinterpretation from alternative perspectives, and
4. Saying "No to the Qur'an" when one disagrees with it.

Pursuing the last point, she declared that she could not intellectually or spiritually accept some things in the Qur'an, for example some of the hudud (punishments) like the cutting of hands or the permission to beat one's wife. She made it clear that she was denying neither the religion nor the revelation. **"It is the Qur'an,"** she said, **"that gives me the means to say no to the Qur'an."** (Emphasis added.)

This is Amina Wadud's attitude, not towards the Hadith, but towards the Word of Allah, the Quran. She feels herself Quranically justified to reject the authority of the Quran itself when it happens to clash with her feminist agenda. If such is her attitude towards the Quran itself, what expectations can we have for her attitude vis-a-vis the Hadith, rejection of which has always been the premier qualifying requirement for all would-be reformers of the modernistic and postmodernistic hue? Hadith is conspicuously absent from her writings, no doubt on account of the tendency that Hadith has to restrict the interpretive freedom of the Quran's exegete, a freedom which is the very life-force of postmodernistic exegesis.

It can be safely concluded that Amina Wadud dispensed with the legal authority of Hadith and Sunnah a long time ago. When we find her today brandishing the hadith of Umm Waraqah as her reason for believing that a woman may lead the prayer, then it is common sense, and not mere suspicion, which compels us to reject it as a glaring untruth. Amina Wadud does not believe in Hadith. For her to argue on the basis of Hadith is no less incongruous than the Christian missionary who attempts to prove Trinity from the Quran. If Amina Wadud was a believer in Hadith, she would

have subjected herself to its authority in all those instances where it overrides her feministic prejudices. She would have accepted hadith where it says that the prayer rows of women should be behind those of men. She would have submitted herself to acceptance of all that the authentic hadith literature contains about women. She would have conceded to every case which her feminism would otherwise condemn as unacceptable, biased, oppressive, chauvinistic and masochistic. But not only has she never submitted herself to any such authority; she has simply ignored most of it, in what cannot be interpreted as anything than scornful rejection. Therefore, when we see her and her ilk gloating over the fact that they have reclaimed a right granted by the Prophet 1500 years ago, then we have to assert our own right to ask: what happened to everything else that the Prophet sallallahu alayhi wasallam said? What is it, in the final analysis, that makes the hadith of Umm Waraqah acceptable when all other ahadith are rejected with contempt, and when even the Quran has finally been flung aside? Is it because the hadith has been graded by some as hasan li-ghayrihi? Is it because the hadith is in Abu Dawud's Sunan which is one of the Six Books? Is it because of a consistent methodological approach towards hadith?

Each of these questions can only be answered in the negative. Amina Wadud's appropriation of the hadith of Umm Waraqah is an entirely opportunistic one. She uses the hadith because it serves her cause, and not because Hadith has any inherent authority. In illustration of this fact, let us consider the following: The hadith goes on to state that two of Umm Waraqah's slaves murdered her, on account of which they were brought to justice and put to death by crucifixion. Would Amina Wadud or any of her enthusiastic supporters support this form of punishment? After all, it forms part of the very same hadith which they are euphorically brandishing in support of their Jumu'ah adventure. On the contrary, the only response which can be expected would be one that reads something like, although the hadith explicitly prescribes death by crucifixion for such murderers, I do not agree with the hadith. Thus the first part of the hadith is fine, while the second part is met with blunt rejection. A woman asked the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam for permission to join the military expeditions as a nurse to the sick. He replied, "Stay in your house; Allah will grant you martyrdom." Does the command to stay at home, and the implicit refusal for her to join military expeditions as a nurse smack of sexist discrimination to Amina Wadud and her followers? If it does, they had better take care how they respond. Before saying things like "we cannot intellectually or spiritually accept such things" they should take note that the woman who asked that permission is our same Umm Waraqah, and the hadith is the very same hadith in Sunan Abi Dawud. But this was the part about which they were not informed. A similar attitude was once upon a time displayed by the Jews in Madinah. To such recalcitrants Allah said: ***"Oh those who believe, enter fully in the covenant of Allah and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan as he is your clear enemy."*** And for the destiny of those who accept what they wish and reject what does not suit them, to them Allah says: ***"Do you believe in some of the book yet reject some other part? The recompense of those who do so is no other than disgrace in this world and on the Day of Judgment they will be returned to the worst of punishments."***

Allah is not unmindful of what they Amina Wadud's appropriation of the hadith of Umm Waraqah is an entirely opportunistic one. She uses the hadith because it serves her cause, and not because Hadith has any inherent authority. In illustration of this fact, let us consider the following: The hadith goes on to state that two of Umm Waraqah's slaves murdered her, on account of which they were brought to justice and put to death by crucifixion. Would Amina Wadud or any of her enthusiastic supporters support this form of punishment? After all, it forms part of the very same hadith which they are euphorically brandishing in support of their Jumu'ah adventure. On the contrary, the only

response which can be expected would be one that reads something like, “**although the hadith explicitly prescribes death by crucifixion for such murderers, I do not agree with the hadith.**” Thus the first part of the hadith is fine, while the second part is met with blunt rejection. do.” The legacy of ‘Aishah has been something very close to Amina Wadud’s heart, something about which she is known to wax lyrical. Had she been a true devotee of Umm al-Muminin Sayyidah ‘Aishah radiyallahu ‘anha, she would have followed her example in prayer. If any woman in Islam had the right to lead the salah it would have been Sayyidah ‘Aishah. But we have nothing, absolutely nothing that indicates to us that she ever arrogated any such rights to herself. If there was any place in which she would lead the salah for males it would have been in the privacy of her own house. But the sources are not only silent in this regard; they provide us with evidence to the contrary. It was the habit of Sayyidah ‘Aishah to have a slave of hers named Dhakwan lead her in the Tarawih salah during Ramadan. This slave was much less learned than she was. He did not even memorise the Quran, and used to lead her in salah whilst reading from the mus-haf. Her own degree of learning was vastly above his. Despite her knowledge and her sublime status as Umm al-Muminin it was to him that she ceded the right to lead salah.

#### [14] **THE BIGGER PICTURE**

The times in which we live have brought us more than one tribulation. Where one the one hand we have those who would invade our lands and slaughter our people in order to force us by their military might into a submission and acceptance their ideas of civilization, we have others who would aid and abet the invader and applaud his oppression. And then we have others who have hitherto been obscured by the shadows, but whose potential as the invader’s agents, witting or unwitting, has not gone unnoticed. In 2003 the National Security Research Division of the Rand Corporation in America released a study by Cheryl Benard, entitled “Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources and Strategies.” After categorizing Muslims into Traditionalists, Modernists and Secularists, this study advances the following strategy: To encourage positive change in the Islamic world towards greater modernity, and compatibility with the contemporary world order, the United States and the West need to consider very carefully which elements, trends and forces within Islam they intend to strengthen; what the goals and values of their various potential allies and proteges really are; and what the broader consequences of their respective agendas are likely to be. A mixed approach composed of the following elements is likely to be the most effective: Support the modernists first Publish and distribute their works at subsidized cost. Encourage them to write for mass audiences and for youth. Introduce their views into the curriculum of Islamic education Make their opinions and judgements on fundamental questions of religious interpretation available to a mass audience in competition with those of the fundamentalists and traditionalists who have Web sites, publishing houses, schools, institutes, and many other vehicles for disseminating their views. Position secularism and modernism as a counterculture option for disaffected youth. Facilitate and encourage an awareness of their pre- and non-Islamic history and culture, in the media and the curricula of relevant countries. Assist in the development of independent civic organizations, to promote civic culture and provide a space for ordinary citizens to educate themselves about the political process and to articulate their views.

[15] The first of these independent civic organizations have started to appear in North America. One of these is a group called the Progressive Muslim Union of North America. One of those invited to form part of its Advisory Board was a person called Farid Zakariya. He holds another distinguished post. He is the founder of a group called “Muslims for Bush.” And this is but the tip of the proverbial

iceberg. What are Muslims to make of Jumu'ah charade of last Friday? Is this simply a case of an honest though deluded feminist making a statement for a cause she passionately believes in? Or is it one of neocon conspiracy, a silent invasion? In light of what we are blatantly told in the Rand Report, denial of the second possibility is imbecility.