



May You Learn from Their Model: The Exemplary Father-Daughter Relationship of Mohammad and Fatima in South Asian Shi'ism

Karen Ruffle

University of Toronto

Abstract

The special father-daughter relationship shared by Mohammad and Fatima (Fātema) is a source of inspiration and emulation for the Shi'a, who seek to cultivate idealized religious and ethical selves based upon their model. While Fatima and Mohammad are exceptional people who have been chosen by God to deliver and enact His message of creation, monotheism (*tawhid*), and the resurrection and Day of Judgment, they are also truly human beings, whose emotional and material needs resonate with everyday Shi'a. This essay focuses on three ways in which Mohammad and Fatima's father-daughter relationship teaches the Shi'a of South Asia Islamic religious values, idealized socio-ethical norms, and proper filial relationships. First, Fatima's earthly wedding to 'Ali and accounts of the minimal dowry that Mohammad provided for his daughter is frequently cast in a reformist light by South Asian Shi'a, who consider the adaptation of Hindu wedding practices and rituals to be contrary to the Sunna of the Prophet. Second, Fatima's extreme poverty is a popular subject in Indo-Persian hagiographies, in which Fatima is narratively engaged to epitomize the socio-ethical ideals of charity (*sadaqa*), patience (*sabr*), and faith (*imān*). Third, Fatima's impassioned speech claiming her right to inherit the orchards at Fadak is rooted in her status as Mohammad's daughter and, more importantly, as a Muslim woman.

Keywords

Fatima al-Zahrā, Prophet Muhammad, Fadak, Hyderabad, dowry, father-daughter relationship

When the Prophet Mohammad married Khadija in 595, he entered into a partnership based upon mutual respect, devotion, and love. In the course of the following decades, they expanded their family, although none of their sons lived beyond early childhood. Mohammad and Khadija had three daughters: Omm Kolṣum (Umm Kulthum), Roqayya, and the youngest, Fatima (Fātema), born around 615, approximately five years after the Prophet received his first revelation. During these early years of his prophecy, the Qoraysh of Mecca subjected Mohammad and his small community of Muslims to public ridicule and persecution. The Qoraysh taunted Mohammad for not producing any sons, only daughters. In the hyper-masculine and patriarchal worldview of the

pre-Islamic Arabs, the lack of sons was shameful and a sign of weak leadership. How can a man lead without sons to succeed him and to be warriors preserving the honor of clan and tribe?

In the radical transformation of the Arab tribal ethos and worldview that was brought about in Mohammad's prophetic message of Islam, the dependence upon and privileging of sons as the source of family honor was called into question. According to Shi'i tradition, Mohammad's third daughter Fatima is chosen by God to serve as the idealized model of daughterhood that affirms the Islamic imperative to cherish one's daughters. Shi'i theological and hagiographical texts describe in great detail Fatima's heavenly conception and miraculous birth, and Shi'i exegetes interpret Sura 108 (*al-Kawthar*) as God's explanation to the Prophet Mohammad why his last child was born a girl:

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
To thee We have granted the abundance.
Therefore to thy Lord turn in prayer and sacrifice.
For he who hateth thee, he will be cut off (from future hope).

Fatima is the abundance (*al-Kawthar*) that has been given to Mohammad as a divine gift. *Al-Kawthar* is a fountain (and river) in Paradise from whence all the waters of the heavens flow—it is indeed, a source of extraordinary abundance. The revelation of *al-Kawthar* goes beyond merely describing the source of God's merciful abundance. This sura, moreover, implicitly refers to the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide, which was explicitly prohibited in Koranic legislation (81:8-9). Daughters are no longer to be considered a source of shame and patriarchal dishonor, but rather as a source of pride and an object of filial love. Daughters are a source of abundance, bearing future generations, and contributing to the welfare and weal of a close family unit. Fatima's identification as the heavenly and earthly source of God's abundance signals the dual nature of the special father-daughter relationship that she shares with Mohammad (Husayn, 26-28; Amini, 35-36). As *al-Kawthar*, Fatima affirms Mohammad's role as the Messenger of God (*rasul Allah*), and she serves as the living model of her father's lived tradition (Sunna), and she is a source of imitation for Muslim women and men.

The father-daughter relationship shared by Mohammad and Fatima is a source of inspiration and emulation for Muslims, especially the Shi'a, who seek to cultivate idealized religious and ethical selves based upon the model of the Family of the Prophet (*Ahl-e bayt*). While Fatima and Mohammad are exceptional people who have been chosen by God to deliver and enact His message of creation, monotheism (*tawhid*), the resurrection, and Day of Judgment, this father-daughter pair are also truly human beings, whose emotional and

material needs resonate with everyday Shi'a. In South Asia, and in South India in particular, marriage and family structures social and religious life. In South India, parents and grandparents dote upon their children, and their nurture and development is the focus of the community. Mohammad and Fatima's exemplary father-daughter relationship is clearly replicated by many of the Shi'a of Hyderabad. Many men hold their daughters in very high esteem, and they have taken great care to provide them with an education, to encourage them in professions, and to be their emotional support after their daughters are married. The incessant repetition of hagiographical narratives describing Mohammad and Fatima's father-daughter relationship is thoroughly internalized and integrated into the ethos and everyday family practices of South Asian Shi'a.

Shi'i hagiographical and Sunni historical traditions dedicate considerable attention to the special father-daughter relationship between the Prophet Mohammad and his daughter Fatima, yet much less attention is dedicated to the esoteric meaning of Fatima's *konya*, honorific title, *omm abiha*, "the mother of her father." This relationship is typically explained away as meaning that Fatima was exceptionally nurturing toward her father. Certainly, we can find ample evidence recounting the ways in which Fatima and the Prophet Mohammad cared for one another. This closeness is attested in the hadith in which the Prophet publicly affirms that Fatima is his most beloved: "Fatima is part of me, the light of my eye, and the fruit of my heart" (Ebn Bābawayh, 437).

Shi'i hadith and hagiographical traditions reflect another aspect of this filial relationship in its inverted expression of Fatima as *omm abiha*, which is the basis of a transcendent, eschatological role that the Prophet's daughter possesses based upon her emanation of the *nur-e Mohammadi*, divine Muhammadan light, through which the lineages of prophets and Imams emanate. In a popular Shi'i hadith, a different aspect of this father-daughter relationship is intimated, which indicates Fatima's transcendent and eschatological role that is predicated upon her direct relationship to God that has existed from pre-eternity until the Day of Judgment: "Fatima is a part of me. What hurts her hurts me, and what pleases her pleases me. God gets angry when Fatima is angry and is pleased when she is pleased." Fatima's epithet (*laqab*) al-Mansura (one who is victorious through God) is reflected in this hadith in which God is pleased when she is pleased and displeased when she is angry. When Fatima is conceived from the heavenly fruit, Gabriel explains to Mohammad that his daughter's name in Heaven is Mansura, and on earth, Fatima (Majlesi, 12). Fatima has ample reason for seeking vengeance on the Day of Judgment, for she has known since the time of the "miniature world" (*ālam-e zarr*), pre-creation, that her son Imam Hosayn would be martyred at the battle of Karbalā' in 680.

In this essay, I focus on three “this-worldly” aspects of Mohammad and Fatima’s father-daughter relationship, which teach the Shi’a proper Islamic religious values, idealized socio-ethical norms, and proper filial relationships. First, Fatima’s earthly wedding to ‘Ali and accounts of the minimal dowry that Mohammad provided for his daughter are frequently cast in a reformist light by some South Asian Shi’a, who consider the adaptation of Hindu wedding practices and rituals to be contrary to the Sunna of the Prophet. These reformist Shi’a argue that the Indic practice of offering an exorbitant dowry devalues daughters, transforming them into a site of patriarchal exchange, ultimately making daughters the cause of undue financial hardship on families. Mohammad’s simple provision for his daughter’s wedding is held up as an expression of true fatherly love, which transcends the monetary exchange of goods. Second, Fatima’s extreme poverty is a popular subject in Indo-Persian hagiographical narratives. These stories serve as a trope in which Mohammad’s prophetic message and lived example are transferred to Fatima, in whose exemplary model these lessons achieve their idealized embodiment, teaching Muslims the socio-ethical ideals of charity (*sadaqa*), patience (*sabr*), and faith (*imān*). Third, Fatima’s impassioned speech claiming her right to inherit the orchards at Fadak is rooted in her status as Mohammad’s daughter and, more importantly, as a Muslim woman. Koranic legislation grants daughters the right to inherit, and as Mohammad’s daughter, Fatima invokes Islamic law (*shari’a*) to stake her claim and to publicly pronounce her status as the daughter of prophecy. Fatima takes on an activist role, and she embodies her status as the preserver of her father’s Sunna and the law of Islam, which provides a degree of validation for Shi’i communities in South Asia to assert their political rights while existing as a minority community. Mohammad and Fatima’s relationship serves not only as an idealized model for father-daughter filial roles and responsibilities, but it also carries an important political message that endows women with inherently positive value and elevates them beyond the fundamentally patriarchal domestic sphere—where women occupy a subordinate position—into the realm of the public, political, and religious.

Priceless Love: Lessons Learned from the Wedding Mohammad Provided Fatima

Fatima al-Zahrā’s hagiographers typically portray her as a pious woman, whose life was one of hardship and poverty. Much like the stories of other prophets, years of persecution had reduced Mohammad and his family to poverty. When Fatima married ‘Ali, the feast (*walima*) to celebrate their union was a relatively

austere meal of dried fruits and other simple foods—a simple meal, indeed. Typically, in the weeks following the wedding ceremony, the bride's family hosts a feast (*walima*) to celebrate their daughter's marriage. In South Asia, some Muslim families host a series of elaborate and expensive feasts that take place over four consecutive Fridays. Such *walima* practices are public displays of hospitality and respectability, although some families criticize those who host such extravagant feasts. They consider multiple *walimas* and the giving of dowry to the groom's family to be innovation (*bed'a*) through the adaptation of Hindu ritual, which has caused Muslims to lose sight of the exemplary Islamic model of Fatima's simple wedding.

While conducting archival research at the Salar Jung Museum Library in 2005, one of the manuscript preservationists told me about the Ja'fari Library located around the corner on the premises of the Alava-e Sartauq *'ashurkhāna*. I was instructed to ask for Shaja'at, who the preservationist promised would be of great assistance in my research. During the following weeks, I spent many afternoons at the Ja'fari Library talking with Shaja'at about my research on Shi'i ritual, and one day Shaja'at mentioned that Zahra Academy, the women's wing of Dāneshgāh-e Ja'fariya, would be hosting its annual seminar and commencement ceremony on 31 July 2005. When I arrived at the hall where the event was taking place, I was astonished to see several hundred Hyderabad Shi'i women modestly attired in the black veil. Was I in Hyderabad or Qom? The women's clothing, so different from the majority of Hyderabad Shi'i women, who typically wear *saris* or *shalwār-qamiz*, hinted at the religio-political perspective that is espoused in the Dāneshgāh-e Ja'fariya and Zahra Academy.

Four women spoke on the theme of Fatima al-Zahra and her meaning in Shi'ism and in Indian society. In their speeches, the South Asian emphasis on family and filial devotion was stressed, but much of the post-revolutionary Iranian religio-political ideology that seeks to hegemonize Shi'i practice and belief was also clearly articulated. Each of the speeches set Fatima up as a paradigm of a specific idealized ethico-religious behavior. The first speaker, Sayyida Maryam Naqvi, a lawyer and popular *zākerā* (*majles* orator), delivered a speech, "What are the teachings of Hazrat Fatima?" The oratorical skills and extensive religious knowledge that Naqvi has perfected as a *zākerā* were manifest in her speech.

Describing Fatima's epithets (*alqāb*), Naqvi explained to her audience that each is imbued with layers of meaning. Fatima's *laqab* al-Zahra (the Radiant) refers to the miraculous illumination of the city of Medina each time she prayed. Encoded in this epithet are Fatima's piety and regularity and prayer, virtues that all Shi'i women should actively cultivate. Naqvi emphasized that

Fatima al-Zahra is the most exalted woman in human history. Certainly there are other exemplary women who are paradigms of religious and moral perfection—Maryam, Khadija, Sarah, and Āsiya—Fatima, however, is the consummation of the virtues that each of these women possesses separately. Naqvi concluded her speech with the question: “What can we learn from Fatima?” She encouraged women to strive to care for their children, pay attention to their husbands, cultivate piety, and work hard. According to Naqvi, in each of these everyday activities, Fatima expressed her devotion to God and did her duty. In a sense, Fatima’s fulfillment of her dharma is paradigmatic for all Shi’i women.

Maryam Naqvi’s mother came to the podium following her daughter, focusing her speech on Fatima’s idealized model of womanly modesty, which was couched in a distinctly more theological and moralizing framework. In the context of Fatima’s embodiment of modesty, Mrs. Naqvi asked her audience if they understood the difference between the *serāt al-mostaqim* (the straight path) and *shaytān* (the path of misguidance). Mrs. Naqvi identified a number of activities that lead one down the path of misguidance: talking too much on mobile phones, watching television, listening to music, dancing, drinking, and smoking—all activities that she warned the young women in the audience to avoid. Affirming the modesty of the women in the audience, she proclaimed that “frivolous fashion” (wearing clothing other than proper *hejāb*, that is, the *chādor*) will lead a woman down the path of misguidance. The speaker moralized, “The straight path is only devotion, only God, only prayer, only making salutations to the family of the Prophet Mohammad.”

The elder Mrs. Naqvi’s speech is evocative of an occasion when Fatima’s husband ‘Ali asked the Prophet what the best behavior for a woman to cultivate was. The Prophet thought for a while and remained silent. Upon returning home, Fatima proclaimed that she knew the answer to ‘Ali’s question. It is for the common good (*maslaha*) that, “a woman not look at another man, and neither should she let another man look upon her” (Majlesi, 65). ‘Ali returned to the Prophet and told him that he had learned the answer to his question. The Prophet asked ‘Ali who had provided this answer to him, and he said that it was Fatima. Mohammad was very pleased and he declared, “Fatima is a part of my body” (Amini, 123).

The discourses delivered by the Naqvi women are deeply intertextual and predicated upon a set of presuppositions that assume their audience knows the many hagiographical and historical accounts of Fatima’s exemplary life. The women in the audience listening to these discourses automatically fill in the ellipses in the narrative. The elder Mrs. Naqvi’s speech presupposes that these women will actively or perhaps unconsciously think of such stories as

Fatima instructing 'Ali in what is the best sort of behavior for a woman to cultivate. Such discourses compel the Shi'a to inculcate a "set of practices [and values] by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action" (Foucault, 35). Here, in Michel Foucault's articulation of a "technology of the self," the Shi'a are able to develop, through the incessant repetition of such moralizing and didactic stories about Fatima and her father, a permanent set of actions based upon the construction of a shared sensibility and ethical order, which form a moral community that is established through the events of the mourning assembly (Ruffle, 131).

For the Shi'a of Hyderabad, the cultivation of Fatima's idealized model transcends moralizing discourse and is put into the action of everyday life. Following the graduation ceremony, I spoke with a number of women. To provide a bit of context, in 2005 I was conducting field research in Hyderabad on the role of gender in devotional literature and ritual, focusing on the 7th of Moharram wedding of Imam Hosayn's daughter Fatima Kobrā to her cousin Qāsem at the Battle of Karbalā'. Speaking with the women presenters, I described my research. Sayyida Maryam Naqvi's mother asked me why I should study this wedding, as it never happened.¹ Kaneez Fatima, a social worker in the Old City, repeatedly impressed upon me that the elder Mrs. Naqvi and her daughter were very learned, and they represented *the* correct perspective on the matter, and there is much that I could (and should) learn from them.

I was told that one of Mrs. Naqvi's daughters was to be married the next month, and that it would perfectly and authentically follow the Sunna of the Prophet Mohammad. The women explained that the Prophet had provided Fatima with a simple wedding. With pride in their voices and their faces beaming, the women emphasized that this wedding would not be tainted with any Indian (that is, Hindu) wedding rituals, such as *mehndi* (henna ceremony at the groom's home), *sāchaq* (henna ceremony at the bride's home), or *manjha* (turmeric grinding ceremony). The only rites that would be performed were the *'aqd-e nekāh* (the signing of the marriage contract) and *rokhshati* (the departure of the bride from her father's home).

Throughout South Asia, there is a political and moralizing agenda to promote the simple wedding that the Prophet provided for his daughter. In South Asia, there is profound social pressure to provide a significant dowry (*dahej*, *jāhez*) to the groom's family, which is practiced in both Sunni and Shi'i

¹ In 2006, one women's *majles* that I attended on 7 Muharram, Naqvi was the *zākerā*, and in her discourse on Qasem's martyrdom, she made negligible reference to the battlefield wedding. Her lone reference to the event was couched in a subtle critique of those who place too much emphasis on an event that cannot be historically verified.

communities. The social necessity of providing a large dowry in cash and material goods, offering gifts to countless family members during the many pre-wedding rituals, as well as the significant cost of hosting a lavish wedding reception in which many meat dishes and other delicacies are served to upwards of 1,000 people, places a daunting financial burden on families. Upon the birth of a daughter, many families begin saving for her inevitable marriage and the tremendous expense it will cost. In an effort to reduce this burden, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the government has imposed restrictions on wedding expenditures in order to prevent families from falling into such debt, but notions of honor and respectability on the part of the bride's family mean that such austerity measures are openly ignored and flouted by rich and poor alike.

The Naqvis, a family very well respected in Hyderabad's Old City, publicly reject these Indic accretions to the fundamental simplicity and dignity of the truly *shar'i* Muslim wedding ceremony as *bed'a* (innovation) and contrary to the Sunna of the Prophet and Fatima. According to the historical narrative, 'Ali asked the Prophet what he will stipulate for the bride-price (*mahr*) to be paid for the right to marry Fatima. The Prophet asked 'Ali what—despite his extreme poverty—he could sell in order to provide Fatima with her *mahr*. 'Ali told Mohammad that he had a shield (or according to some traditions, a breast-plate), a horse, and a sword, among other livestock and personal items. Mohammad told 'Ali to sell his shield. With the money generated from the sale, Mohammad instructed 'Ali to buy a number of household items to stock his marital home: an Egyptian cotton mattress stuffed with wool, a leather floor-mat, a leather cushion filled with date palm leaves, an '*abā*' (cloak) from Khaybar, a water-flask, some earthen cups, several earthen water-pots, an earthen vessel (*lotā*), and a woolen veil (Majlesi, 169).

The Prophet demanded such practical items for 'Ali to purchase for Fatima's new home, to establish as his Sunna that ostentatious gift-giving leads one away from the straight path (*serāt al-mostaqim*), and to demonstrate that Fatima's wedding was not merely a patriarchal transfer of goods and property from father to husband. Sā'em Chishti, a Pakistani Sufi religious scholar and prolific writer of Urdu and Punjabi hagiographies of Fatima and other members of the *Ahl-e bayt*, offers a trenchant critique of the display of honor and wealth in the South Asian practice of dowry. In *al-Batul*, Chishti invokes the Prophet's love for his daughter, and chides the fathers of his community for not following Mohammad's Sunna:

If the Imam of the prophets had wanted, he could have moved mountains of gold for his daughter's wedding. For your benefit, however, he chose the easiest route that you must follow in your own daughters' weddings. Remember my daughter's [Fatima's] wedding, and you will not come to weep over your alienation, nor will

poverty trouble you'. The possibility of disgrace will be ended, however you will still fear that you might not be protected from ridicule. For God's sake, do not [seek] to raise your status. In all of your affairs, keep in your sight the salvation of the generosity of the Messenger's family. Having shunned Mustafā's Sunna, you will reap a heap of troubles.

When did Islam deem it permissible (*jā'ez*) for you to go into debt in marrying off your daughters? The moment your daughter goes out your door, you will have [already] sold yourself. Who will speak well of this? It is true that you love your daughter, but such a love that the noble Messenger (*rasul-e karim*) had for his daughter cannot be contested.

Muslims say, immerse yourself thoroughly in the religion (*din*). Observe the custom of the Arab followers of Muhammad. As long as you follow the light of the sovereign of Medina's command, you will not deviate into darkness. Then your daughters' love for you will increase. Then they will consider this as their home forever. (Chishti, 114-15)

Chishti's discourse is profoundly moralizing and is rooted in the simplicity of Fatima's wedding to 'Ali—a clear sign of Mohammad's enduring love and concern for his daughter's welfare. Especially powerful is Chishti's rhetorical question, "When did Islam make it permissible for you to go into debt in marrying off your daughters?" Although the bestowing of large dowries may seem to prove a father's love for his daughter, Chishti sees this merely as a crassly public and patriarchal display of a bride's value in the matrimonial exchange. Chishti warns Shi'i fathers that this alienates one's daughters and prevents her from ever feeling that the natal home is truly hers. Although Fatima moved into 'Ali's home, she was never far from her father, whose house remained as much hers as always. Suffer poverty with grace and fortitude, in the manner of Mohammad and Fatima, but one should never bring about financial misfortune through extravagant weddings.

The Nobleness of Poverty: Serving as a Model for Her Father's Community

The meagerness of Fatima's *mahr* offers insights into the poverty in which Mohammad's daughter spent her married life. The biographical and hagiographical tradition is replete with accounts of Fatima's poverty. Although poor and deeply pious, many of the narratives indicate that Fatima was not ascetic by nature. It is important to make the distinction between asceticism and poverty, and we can see in both the Persian and Urdu hagiographical-devotional literary traditions that Mohammad's daughter Fatima is popularly portrayed

as a selfless, giving woman despite the grinding poverty of her life. Her biography is a chronicle of poverty and hardship in which she and her family often went hungry and she supplemented their income by grinding corn until she had blisters on her hands and fell asleep at the grinding wheel (*chakki*).

Fatima did not always willingly accept her poverty, and in many stories, she asks her father to help ease her difficulty. Fatima and her family often went hungry, and the women of the Qoraysh mocked her for wearing ragged clothing, which caused considerable emotional pain. As the following story illustrates, a life of poverty and want was not Fatima's choice, and she often resented the hardships she endured. Many of the hagiographies set Fatima's impoverished suffering into the context of narratives that are simultaneously miraculous and didactic. These stories nearly always involve Fatima petitioning her father for some bauble, assistance to alleviate her domestic work, or food to feed her family. Mohammad always instructs Fatima to pray to God, and if He wills, her suffering will be alleviated. Such stories highlight Fatima's faith and exalted position with God, as her wish is always granted. It is Mohammad, however, who repeatedly teaches his daughter the value of patience and forbearance in this life, for she will reap the eternal reward of Paradise. These hagiographical narratives establish Fatima as the living model of her father's Sunna and prophecy.

Throughout South Asia the *Bibi Fātima ki kabāni*, a collection of didactic miracle stories composed in Urdu and other languages such as Punjabi about Fatima, is especially popular and effective in teaching everyday Shi'a how to cultivate an idealized Muslim selfhood. In the story of the Jewish wedding (popular as the Qorayshi wedding in Iranian *ta'ziā*), Mohammad's counsel to his daughter to have faith and to remember her humility has a miraculous and edifying effect:

In the city of Medina there lived a Jew whose daughter was getting married. All of the Jews decided together that if they invited the daughter of the Prophet of the Muslims, then (God forbid) the Prophet would be humiliated, because Janab-i Sayyidah would come wearing old and torn clothing. (Schubel, 41)

The Jew seeks the permission of the Prophet, who claims that he is no longer sovereign over his daughter, and that he must seek permission of Fatima's husband 'Ali. Both men defer permission, saying that Fatima is free to make her own decision whether or not to attend the wedding. The Jew goes to Fatima's house and, in accordance with the Islamic etiquette of *hejāb* requiring unrelated (*nāmabram*) men to speak to women from behind a curtain or closed door (24:27-28), he invites her to the wedding. Fatima seeks to defer the

invitation, saying that she needs to obtain permission from her husband. The Jew informs Fatima that permission has been granted. Placed in this awkward situation, Fatima finally assents to attend the wedding.

At that moment, the Prophet (the Seal of the Station) came in and saw that his daughter was perplexed. He asked her why she was so melancholy. She replied, 'Oh dear Father, a Jew has come desiring my participation in his daughter's wedding. What do you command?'

The Prophet replied, 'Daughter, do as you wish.'

Janab-i Sayyidah replied, 'Dear Father, my participation in this wedding would not be befitting of your dignity. When I go to the wedding, all kinds of laughter will fly about because their women will be wearing costly clothes and the finest jewels, and I have only this old and tattered cloth which I have patched here and there.'

Having heard this, the pure Prophet said, 'Oh my dear daughter, if it is God's will, then you should go out even in this condition.' (Schubel, 41)

With a heavy heart, Fatima prepares herself for the wedding. Because Fatima is His beloved, God miraculously intervenes and sends down a rank of *huris* to dress Fatima in a heavenly robe and jewels. As Fatima's palanquin makes its way through Medina to the Jew's house, a heavenly fragrance fills the air.

When Janab-i Sayyidah arrived at the house of the Jew amidst all of this pomp and dignity, his entire house became illuminated by her light. . . . All of the Jewish women who were there fell unconscious from envy after having seen the glory and dignity of Janab-i Sayyidah. After a little while all of these women regained consciousness. But the bride did not regain consciousness. The women saw the bride and were astonished because she had died. Accordingly, in a short while the house of the wedding became a place of mourning. Janab-i Sayyidah was also perplexed. But, having given comfort and consolation to each of them, she said, 'Pray to God. Everything is within his power. To him the raising of the dead to life is no great matter.' (Schubel, 42)

The women do not believe that the bride can be brought back to life. They claim that they have never seen God do such a thing and that surely it is impossible. The Jewish women's lack of faith serves as the transition to the hagiographical climax of the narrative:

Then Fatimah called for a pot of water and performed ablutions, and offered two *rak'ats* of supplicatory prayers, and raised her hands to make a *du'a*. And she said, 'Oh my God, I am the daughter of the Prophet.'

Then (in the form of poetry) she continued: 'You have given to Fatimah the name of "the Truthful." For the sake of the Prophet, do not now betray my name.'

She then continued, 'Oh, my God, People will say that the Sayyidah came and caused the death of the bride and turned this wedding house into a house of mourning.'

Not a moment had passed before Fatima's *du'a* was accepted and the bride rose up reciting the *kalimah*.... (Schubel, 42)

Through Fatima's prayer and faith in God, who holds her in high esteem, the bride is brought back to life. Not only is the bride revived, she regains consciousness by reciting the *kalema*, making her a convert to Islam. The 500 women and men attending the wedding are overwhelmed by this miraculous display of God's power enacted through Fatima, and they all convert to Islam.

The story's opening scene in which Fatima despaired at having to attend this wedding, knowing that the only reason why she was invited was to be the object of ridicule and to bring shame upon her father Mohammad, shows her love for her father. Knowing Fatima's worry, Mohammad tells his daughter to have faith in God. Her faith restored, God provides amply for Fatima, although such beneficence and compassion (*rahmat*) bring trouble to these Jews who are devoid of faith. Their lack of faith (*imān*), which causes the bride to pass away, compels Fatima to invoke her father's name and to call upon God for His assistance. Fatima's invocation of her father Mohammad is especially powerful, for it is he who constantly encourages his daughter to have faith despite her poverty and suffering. At moments such as this, which are laden with theological and symbolic significance, Fatima is the embodiment of her father's prophetic mission, and she is the proof (*hujja*) of God's existence.

In her hagiography of Fatima, Ghadeer Midhat, a Hyderabad Shi'a who devotes her time and money to writing about the *Ahl-e bayt*, extols the virtue of spiritual wealth. Like Mrs. Naqvi and her daughter Maryam, Midhat's life history of Fatima is packed with moralizing discourses that her Shi'i readers are supposed to integrate into their everyday lives. In the lesson titled, "Material Wealth Is Less Important than Spiritual Wealth," Midhat writes,

Spiritual wealth can be accumulated by doing good deeds. Good faith, good actions, charity, *sadaqa*, *khums* and *zakāt* etc. give you abundant wealth in the next world. When a person accumulates the wealth of this world and does not pay attention towards the spiritual wealth, he is at a big loss, because, when he dies he leaves his wealth in this world and goes to the next world. (Midhat, 121)

The Indo-Persian hagiographical tradition places great emphasis on Fatima's poverty. According to the historical sources, Fatima and 'Ali were compelled to work extra jobs in order to supplement their meager incomes (Ruffle 2010, 389-90). One story that can be found in most Indo-Persian hagiographical

texts, and is invoked in a South Asian pre-wedding ritual known as the *manjha* (turmeric grinding ceremony), is of Fatima's ceaselessly grinding corn at her grinding stone (*chakki*).

After Fatima and 'Ali were married, their life together was materially impoverished. 'Ali worked at various jobs, and Fatima toiled at the endless domestic labor of keeping a house and raising four small children. One day, Fatima complains to 'Ali that she has ground so much corn that she has formed painful blisters on her hands, and her husband counters that he, too, has developed pains in his chest from carrying heavy pots of water. They both reflect upon their individual pain, and 'Ali tells Fatima that she should approach her father and ask him to provide a servant to ease their labor.

With much trepidation, Fatima goes to her father's home with the intention of asking him for assistance. Instead, Fatima returns home without broaching the subject of a servant to Mohammad, and she explains to 'Ali that she was ashamed to make such a request of her father. Dissatisfied with Fatima's response, 'Ali and his wife return to Mohammad's home to ask for a servant to ease their burden. The Prophet hears their request and refuses to grant it, for there are other Muslims in their community who have even less and suffer even greater hunger than Fatima and 'Ali. Disappointed and resigned to their unceasing labor, Fatima and 'Ali return home.

Later in the evening, the Prophet approaches the door of Fatima's and 'Ali's humble home and asks permission to enter. Mohammad wants to explain why he refused his beloved daughter's request for his assistance in easing her burden. He asks Fatima and 'Ali if he can tell them of something infinitely better than a servant who can assist them with their daily work. One day the Angel Gabriel paid a visit to Mohammad and instructed him to say *sobhān Allāh* (glory be to God) ten times, *alhamdo lellāh* (praise be to God) ten times, and *Allāho akbar* (God is greatest) ten times. Mohammad advises Fatima and 'Ali to repeat these sets of ten praising statements 33 times, and God will protect and provide for them (Majlesi, 108-09).

In this hagiographical account of Fatima and 'Ali's petition to the Prophet Mohammad to provide them with a servant to ease their domestic burdens, poverty, want, and divine reward are powerful themes. As the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, Fatima is expected to set an example for the Muslim community. Mohammad denied Fatima a servant, lest other Muslims suffer from her desires. Such hagiographical narratives as Fatima grinding corn until she falls asleep or blisters forming upon her hands teach the Shi'a valuable lessons about that which God has "measured out" (Koran 54:49).

This story of Fatima at the grinding stone finds its way to Bijapur, the capital of the Shi'i 'Ādelshāhi dynasty, where it inspired a genre of Sufi (and

later Shi'i) poetry known as *chakki-nāma*. A pastoral genre of poetry, *chakki-nāma* is sung by village women as they make *jowar* (millet) into flour at the grinding stone. Inspired by the Sufi *chakki-nāmas* of the Chishti saint Khwāja Bandanawāz Gisudarāz (d. 1422) of Gulbarga, these grinding songs have been adapted by the Shi'a of Hyderabad for special pre-wedding rituals that commemorate 'Ali and Fatima's marriage (Jahan, 375). Many songs that are sung during the *chakki* ceremony invoke Fatima and 'Ali's marriage, offering encouragement to the new couple as they embark upon a new life together. The lesson of these songs is that Fatima and 'Ali endure their poverty with steadfastness and faith, and they offer compelling inspiration to the young couple, who will surely encounter their own share of challenges and difficulties. The *chakki* ritual replicates this hagiographical narrative, recasting it in vernacular terms. In Hyderabad *chakki* songs, Fatima is an idealized Muslim who puts the needs of the community of Muslims (*omma*) before her own desires. The *chakki* ritual teaches the bride and groom to put the needs of their family and faith before their own desires—just as Muhammad taught Fatima to do.

Inheriting Her Father's Legacy: Fatima, Fadak, and Mohammad's Sunna

Unlike the ascetic who has renounced the affairs of the world, both the historical and hagiographical sources about Fatima al-Zahra document her active participation in domestic and public life. One particular event is recounted in all of the histories both Shi'i and Sunni: the dispute over the land Fatima received from her father at Fadak. Fatima's speech (*khotba*) is recounted in the Sunni hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim, as well as in Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal's *Mosnad*, and it is the subject of countless books in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Fatima's opposition to Abu Bakr's and 'Omar's refusal to grant her ownership of the orchards at Fadak reveals the political dimension of her partnership in her father's Sunna.

After the death of the Prophet in 632, Fatima approached the first caliph Abu Bakr and asked him to turn over to her whatever possessions her father had left behind. Abu Bakr refused to do so, claiming that he had heard Mohammad declare that he had no heirs. Fatima claimed that her father had given the orchard at Fadak to her as a *heba* (gift of property or other material goods that is given during one's lifetime). The Prophet had himself received the land at Fadak as a *heba* from a Jew after the battle of Khaybar in 627, which he in turn gave to his daughter as *heba*. In the context of the extreme poverty in which Fatima lived, the orchards at Fadak provided much needed food for her family. In addition to providing for her family from the bounty

of Fadak's orchards, Fatima also fed the poor in the Muslim community from its harvest (Gorgi and Ebtekar, 3). Such generosity reflects the Prophet's lived tradition (Sunna), as well as the ethical imperative set forth in the Koran to care for those less fortunate.

Abu Bakr refused to return Fadak to Fatima, which drove her to speak out publicly against this personal affront and travesty of justice committed against herself and her father. Already, Fatima was concerned with the future of her father's religion after his death, and the denial of her claim to Fadak reinforced her fears about the dissolution of Mohammad's message. Fatima thus embarked upon a campaign of political activism. In some accounts, Fatima is portrayed by her biographers as being politically savvy and proactively engaged in preserving her father's message, whereas 'Ali "had chosen to refrain from any power struggle and believed that during the course of time people would realize the truth" (ibid.). Seeing the patriarchal political elite in action, Fatima had little such faith.

Abu Bakr argued that the progeny of prophets do not inherit and Fatima, therefore, had no legal claim to the gardens of Fadak. According to the Koran, a woman has the legal right to inherit from her parents: "From what is left by parents and those nearest related, there is a share for men, and a share for women" (4:7), and Fatima claimed her right based upon this Koranic legislation. In a strident speech that invokes the Koran and her father's speech, Fatima demands her right, and speaks as a true authority on Islamic law (*shari'a*):

[Speaking to Abu Bakr] Oh, son of Abu Qohāfa! Is it in the Book of God that you inherit from your father and I do not inherit from my father? Surely you have come up with an unheard of thing! Do you intentionally abandon the Book of God and cast it behind your back? Do you not read where It says: And Solaymān was Dā'ud's heir... (Koran 27:16)

and where It says about Zakariya:

... So give me an heir as from thyself; one that will inherit from me and from the posterity of Ya'qub... (Koran 19:5-6)

and He says:

And render to the kindred their due rights... (Koran 17:26)

and He says:

God directs you as regards your children's [inheritance]; to the male a portion equal to that of two females (Koran 4:11)

and He says:

...If he leaves any goods, that he make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage; that is due from the God-fearing. (Koran 2:180)

You claim that I have no share and that I do not inherit from my father! Did God specify a verse for you from which he excluded my father? Or do you say that people of two faiths do not inherit from each other? Are not my father and I of one faith? Or are you more knowledgeable in the specifics and generalities of the Koran than my father and cousin? (Gorgi, 3-4)

[Speaking to the Ansār] Oh you people of intellect, you strong supporters of the nation, you who have embraced Islam! What is this shortcoming in defending my right? What is this indifference toward the injustice being done to me? Did not the Messenger of Allah (S), my father, use to say: 'Man is preserved through his children. How quickly you have acted against him and how soon you have plotted against us! You have the capability to help me in my attempt and power to influence my plea and goal. (Gorgi, 3-4)

Fatima brought her case to court for arbitration, and although she was ultimately unsuccessful, her knowledge of her legal rights and desire for justice indicate that she was a woman involved in the affairs of society.

Fadak registers deeply in the consciousness of South Asian Shi'a, especially since land ownership is a significant source of security and wealth. In 2005, I had a series of conversations with Dr. M.M. Taqui Khan, a retired chemist for the Government of India and Osmania University, who is also a popular and well-respected *majles* orator (*zāker*) in Hyderabad. During one of our meetings, Dr. Khan gave me a copy of his self-published translation and commentary on Fatima's Fadak *khotba*. Dr. Khan explained that his book *Khutbat-un-Nissa: The Contribution of the Ladies of Ahlbait to Islam* is not only an act of devotion to Fatima al-Zahra, but more significantly, he sees this as a feminist act of consciousness raising to teach the Shi'a of Hyderabad about the strength of the women of the *Ahl-e bayt*. On many occasions we spoke of the fact that he is the father of six highly accomplished daughters, which provokes a deep sense of loyalty, commitment and devotion to the women of the *Ahl-e bayt*.

May You Learn from Their Model

The exemplary father-daughter relationship shared by Mohammad and Fatima is an important theme in the rich Indo-Persian Shi'i hagiographical textual and ritual-devotional tradition. Stories about Fatima are often told in relation to her father, which many scholars interpret to mean that such narratives—didactic,

miraculous, or devotional—reduce Fatima to the point that she is present only through the kin relationships she has with her father, husband, and sons. The narratives that I have analyzed in this essay describing Fatima’s poverty, the noble simplicity of her wedding to ‘Ali, and her political fight with Abu Bakr over her right to inherit the orchards of Fadak, powerfully demonstrate the vitality and strength of her relationship with Mohammad. Fatima is the well-spring of abundance (*al-kawthar*) that nourishes her father’s prophetic mission, and her status as the “best of women” (*khayr al-nesā*) attests to her role in embodying the socio-ethical and religious ideals of Islam and Mohammad’s Sunna.

Fatima’s authority is rooted in many sources, the most notable of which is that she is the most beloved daughter of Prophet Mohammad. As the living model of the Prophet’s Sunna and the embodiment of the ethical and moral ideals of Islam, Fatima serves as a guide to the Muslim community. Mohammad and Fatima’s father-daughter relationship is the primordial, idealized model that Shi’i men endeavor to cultivate with their own daughters. The poverty and political indignations suffered by Fatima teach Shi’i men and women to have faith and patience:

The trials and hardships of being tied to human existence are charged with meaning for the community as a whole in the context that only those who are near God are tested by him with hardship, and their piety, which translates into their sole reliance on his providence, will result in provisions made by him, through angelic intervention or otherwise when the situation is unbearable. Such an image of Fatimah cannot but provide mental strength and inner fortitude to all believers, whether they be men or women. (Kassam-Hann, 90)

Fatima’s relationship with Mohammad compels fathers to enter into the inner emotional world of this exemplary father-daughter pair, and to be unstinting in the nurture, love, and support of their own daughters. These narratives encourage fathers to be proud when their wives give birth to daughters, to refuse to submit to the social pressure to provide significant dowries, which alienates one’s daughters and causes hardship, and to make full provision for daughters to inherit from her father’s property. So close are father and daughter that, “Fatima is a part of me and she is my heart and the soul between my two sides”—proof of the abundance (*al-kawthar*) that daughters provide in family, religion, and society (Shiblanji, 52).

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