A’isha

The Scholar of Scholars
Outline

• Background
• Life and Education
• Character & Personality
• Significant Events
• Legacy
• Example Question Exercise
Background
Background

• A’isha Bint Abu Bakr was born in Mecca around 607 CE
  – Contention regarding her year of birth

• Father Abu Bakr
  – ‘Indeed if I was to take a friend from my nation, I would take Abu Bakr’ – ibn Abbas

• Mother Umm Rumman
  – ‘Whoever wants to see a woman from a woman of paradise, then look at umm Rumman’

• She died 678 CE at the age of 65.
Life and Education
Life with the Prophet

- A'isha grew up in a household that was immersed in Islam and lived in a very simple life.
- She lived almost 50 years after the Prophet and spent over 10 years in his presence.
- Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) departed from this world while resting his head on the lap of A’isha.
- Never married after the death of Prophet Muhammad.
Education

- Exceptionally intelligent and wise, had the nature and temperament to carry forward the Prophet’s mission

- She became one of the greatest scholars of all times
  - She mastered countless areas of knowledge especially in Islamic law
Education

Qur’an

- *Hafiz* - memorised the entire Qur'an
- She had a strong connection with the Qur'an

Hadith

- If scholars differed on a hadith they would go to A’ishah
- Amongst the top four companions of the Prophet who narrated over 2,000 *ahadith*.
  - Abu Hurayra: 5,324
  - Abdullah ibn ‘Umar: 2,630
  - Anas ibn Malik: 2,286
  - A’ishah bint Abu Bakr: 2,210
Education

• Narrated by Aisha:

( the wife of the Prophet) Hamza bin Amr Al-Aslami asked the Prophet, "Should I fast while traveling?" The Prophet replied,

- "You may fast if you wish, and you may not fast if you wish." (Bukari, Volume 3, Number 164)
Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

- Utilised the Qur'an as a source of law, and gave legal rulings
- Famous medieval writer al Asqalani states ‘one-fourth of the laws of the Shari’ah (Islamic law) are based on the hadith transmitted by A’isha’
- Majority of famous jurist books on law which discuss acts of pray rituals, pilgrimage and fasting are attributed to A’isha
Qur'anic Exegesis (Tafsir)

- Had great knowledge of the context of the Qur'an
- When verses were revealed she would say that they not only memorised the actual verse, but the incident and order as well
- She had her own Qur'an in which she would write her own commentaries
Qur'anic Exegesis (*Tafsir*)

- A great number of *tafisr* works (commentary on the Qur’an) have a large portion of their traditions based on A’isha’s transmissions.
- She was unique in this area due to her closeness to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
Education

Orator

• She was also a brilliant orator.
  
  –al-Ahnaf said, ‘I have heard speeches of Abu Bakr and Omar, Uthman and Ali and the Khalifa (ruler) up to this day, but I have not heard speech more persuasive and more beautiful from the mouth of any person than from the mouth of A’isha.’

• A’isha was poetic, not satisfied to use everyday expressions, but words that conveyed a depth of meaning
Education

- **Theology (Kalām)**
  - Careful and very sensitive to information that contradicted the Qur’an

- **Medicine**
  - Learnt treatment methods from a range of sources and applied them
  - Constant exposure especially on the last days of Prophet Muhammad’s life

- **Literary skills**
  - Master in Arabic language
  - Classical and modern scholars say that A’ishah was the most fluent and eloquent of her time
Education

Poetry

• Her father Abu Bakr was a great poetry reader
  – ‘I did not see a greater scholar than A’isha in the learning of Qur’an, obligatory duties, lawful and unlawful manners, poetry, literature, Arab history and genealogy’
    - Urwah ibn az-Zubayr

• She saw it vital to teach poetry to children

• According to A’isha, poetry came in two forms: good and beautiful poetry, and bad and ugly poetry
Politics

- She was temporarily involved in politics especially when the third caliph Othman was assassinated by some insurgents from Egypt.
- She felt strongly about the need to find and punish the insurgents.
- When the fourth caliph Ali was slow to act, she led a small force to follow and find the insurgents.
- This unfortunately led the first battle amongst Muslims.
- This battle is known as the Battle of Camel as A'isha led the group from the top of a camel.
Character & Personality
Character & Personality

- Personality
  - Bright
  - Quick witted
  - Critical thinker
  - Inquisitive by nature
  - Keen sense of justice
Character & Personality

Worship

• She was diligent in all expressions of faith
  – Prayer, fasting, charity and Hajj

• She learnt her prayers and habits of prayer directly from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

• A'isha would sometimes join the prayers with the Prophet in the middle of the night until sunrise

• In fasting too A'isha followed the example of the Prophet - she spent almost everyday fasting.

• She performed the Hajj almost every year and would try to stay away from the crowds
Character & Personality

Austerity

- She was not poor, having plenty of wealth
- She would give it up the instant she received it to give to the needy and poor
- Content with little
  - One time they had no food for more than one month
  - Never brought new clothes until old one was completely worn out
- Even her time was spent in the way of God
- She was available to answer questions and help those in need
Character & Personality

Generosity

- ‘Save yourself from the hell fire even by giving half a date-fruit in charity’
- One day a lady come to her door asking for food, she gave all her grapes to this lady.
- A lady watching this said, why don’t you keep some for yourself, A'isha replied that even the tiniest of good deeds will be rewarded.
  - Her school in Medina was opened to all orphans and needy kids to learn
Character & Personality

Sensitivity
- Sensitive to the others feelings and needs
  - Sensitive towards her worship
Significant Events
Marriage

• This is one of the most debateable topics to cover in her life

• Debate centres around A'ishah’s age in marriage
  – Some reports indicate she was as young as 6 or 7 when engaged and 10 when was married

• Orientalists have heavily focused on this issue

• While some Muslim scholars argue the age above to be correct, others argue that she was older
Marriage

1. Context
   - At the time it was a common practice to be married young compared to today’s Western culture
   - No one at the time (even Muhammad (pbuh)’s fiercest enemies) criticised their marriage
   - Men also married young

2. Matter of dates
   - Depending on her birth, date of death and other significant events, her age ranges
   - Common practice to state age based on number of years after puberty
   - Thus making her between 14 and 18, even up to 21
Marriage

• Respect
  – Shared utensils
  – Courtesy even in anger

• Extraordinary love & companionship
  – One day he asked his daughter ‘do you love what I love’ Fatima replied ‘yes of course’. The Prophet pointed to A’isha and said ‘then you must love this woman’

• Last days
  – The Prophet died on the lap of his beloved wife A’isha
  – He was buried in the compartment of her room
Slander Incident

- A’isha was involved in many battles
  - Collecting arrows, nursing the wounded and bringing water
- In one expedition she was left behind
- A companion Safwan found her and offered her escort
  - They approached the group together
- Slowly people spread rumors and slandered A’isha
  - These rumors really spread
  - Sick at home, she never heard any of the rumours
Slander

- The situation was very difficult for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
  - A'isha left to her parents home

- He visited A'isha and told her to tell the truth and seek forgiveness if these rumours where true

- A'isha said she will never seek forgiveness for something she has not done
  - “So (the proper recourse for me is) becoming patience. God it is Whose help is sought against (the situation) you have described” (Qur’an 12:18).
Slander

• Revelation was then sent clearing A'isha’s name
  – 3 people have been accused of adultery, Prophet Joseph Mary and A'isha
  – Prophet Yusuf were cleared by other people
  – A'isha was cleared by God Himself

  – “Verily! Those who brought forth the slander (against 'A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet SAW) are a group among you. Consider it not a bad thing for you. Nay, it is good for you. Unto every man among them will be paid that which he had earned of the sin, and as for him among them who had the greater share therein, his will be a great torment” (Qur’an 24:11).
Slander

• This highlights her position and status
  – It was God who defended her
  – Also because of this incident the ruling on adultery was stipulated:

  – “Why then, did not the believers, men and women, when you heard it (the slander) think good of their own people and say: "This (charge) is an obvious lie? Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they (the slanderers) have not produced witnesses! Then with Allah they are the liars” (Qur’an 24:12-13).
Battle of Camel

- Uthman (the third Caliph) was assassinated in Medina
- A'isha was in Pilgrimage when she heard the news
  - A'isha wanted justice straight away
  - Ali had opted to wait until he had full control to punish the murderers

- A'isha and an army decided to head out to Basra to seek justice
- Ali was heading out towards Iraq, when he heard news of the army and changed course
Battle of Camel

- When the two forces met there were talks and Ali promised to punish the assassins
- A'ishah and other leaders were satisfied and they returned to their camps
- Unfortunately, a seditious person Abdullah Ibn Saba and his cohort attacked A’ishah’s side at night and told Ali that A’ishah and her forces attacked first
- In confusion, full battle broke
- A’ishah was not afraid to get into politics and make herself heard
The Sunni-Shia Divide

- This incident of the Battle of the Camel is one of the reasons for the differences in views between Sunnis and Shiites on Aisha
- Aisha’s hadith are not followed by Shia Muslims
- Both Sunni and Shia Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith
- The differences between these two main sub-groups within Islam initially stemmed not from spiritual differences, but political ones
- Over the centuries, these political differences have spawned some varying practices and positions which have come to carry a spiritual significance
Legacy
Legacy

Knowledge

• She was a gift to the *Ummah* (Muslim community)
• After Prophet Muhammad’s death, A’isha played a great role in the spread of Islamic knowledge
• A’isha possessed a remarkable memory and used this gift for memorising the Prophet’s sayings (*hadith*)
• She has greatly assisted with the Islamic education of women, men, and children
• She demonstrates the importance of women’s education
Legacy

• ‘Whenever we, companions of the Prophet Muhammad encountered any difficulty in the matter of any sayings of the Prophet, we referred it to A’ishah and found that she had definite knowledge about it’ (Abu Musa Ash’ari)

• If you compared all the knowledge of A’ishah compared to another companion hers was greater

• Established a school in Medina

• She had knowledge in many areas, Medicine, Qur’an, Hadith, Law, poetry etc
Legacy

• She was visited by leading scholars Umar ibn Khattab, his son Abdullah, Abu Hurayra, Abu Musa al- Ash’ari, Adbullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Zubayr, Zayd ibn Khalid al Juhani, Rabia ibn Amr al Jurayshi, Saib ibn Yazid and Harith ibn Abdullah
• Eighty-eight renowned scholars learnt from Aisha
• In short, she was the **scholar of scholars**
• If it was not for A'isha, we may have been deprived of many aspects of the private life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
Legacy

Women

- Her status has uplifted the status of Muslim women
- The depth and breadth of her knowledge far surpassed that of most individuals after the Prophet, man or woman
- She demonstrated the importance of education in a woman’s life
- She was the representative of women both during and after the life of the Prophet
Legacy

- Her duty became to eradicate the questionable customs and habits that existed prior to Islam.

- Her closeness to the Messenger of God, her knowledge of the Qur'an, and her amiable attitude toward the troubles of women both before and after her marriage, were an advantage to women.
Legacy

• Her life and her scholarly opinions, although over 1400 years old, are not collecting dust in some ancient manuscripts, but are alive and used as a basis and a guide for Muslims throughout the Muslim world, from America to the Middle East, the Indo-Pak subcontinent to Southeast Asia

• ‘A’isha was like a bridge between the time of the Prophet and the future of Islam’ (Resit Haylamaz)
Sample HSC Answer
Exam Questions

• Summarise the impact of the significant person or school of thought
Sample Answer

Summarise the impact of the significant person or school of thought

- Brief introduction into her background
  - Birth context and the environment she grew up in
  - Nature of her household
- Character and personality
  - Especially her memory, brightness, quick wit and thirst for knowledge
  - Arguing that all these helped her to have the impact that she did
Sample Answer

Summarise the impact of the significant person or school of thought

• Legacy in terms of Knowledge
  – Hadith
  – Qur'anic Tafsir
  – Islamic Law
  – Women

• Legacy in terms of Women
  – Her responsibility to change old customs
  – School of Medina and her 50 students
  – Elevated status in the Qur'an, among the male companions
  – Involvement in political issues Battle of Camel
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