THE POSITION OF LADY FATIMA AL-ZAHRA (A) IN THE VERSE OF MUBĀHALAH\textsuperscript{1} FROM A SUNNI PERSPECTIVE

MUHAMMAD YA’QUB BASHVI\textsuperscript{2}  
TRANSLATED BY SEYYEDEH ZAHRA MIRFENDERESKI

\textbf{Abstract:} The verse of \textit{Mubāhalah} indicates the infallibility of the People of the Cloak (\textit{Aṣḥāb-e Ḵisā'}) in their words and deeds. This verse refers to the famous event of al-Mubahalâh which took place in the year 10 A.H. against the Christians of Najran. Both Shi’a and Sunni scholars have narrated this event. Imam Ali (a) was considered as ‘our souls’ (\textit{anfusanā)}, Lady Fatima (a) as ‘our women’ (\textit{nisā’ānā}), and Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a) as ‘our sons’ (\textit{abnā’ānā}). Some Sunni scholars believe that this report is fully authentic. Traditions about \textit{Mubāhalah} have been reported in 51 different ways and quoted from 37 major religious scholars.

\textit{Introduction}

The interpretation of verses on the high status of Lady Fatima are found in both Shi’a and Sunni traditional and exegetical sources. According to Sunni traditional and exegetical sources, more than 135 verses in 49 chapters and two complete chapters (\textit{Dahr} and \textit{Kawthar}) are related to Lady Fatima’s persona. Verses interpreted concerning Lady Fatima (a) in Shi’a sources are not included in these numbers, demonstrating the abundance of verses with reference to her. Among

\textsuperscript{1} 3:61  
\textsuperscript{2} MA in Qur’ān and hadith sciences from Imam Khomeini school
her titles include *Ummi Abīha*3 (or ‘the mother of her father’), the great woman of all women4, *Kawthar*5 (‘abundance’) in the Qur’an, and a piece of the Prophet’s (s) heart.6

Hundreds of related verses and many exegetical traditions in both Shi’a and Sunni sources indicate infallibility, purity, honesty, self-devotion, sincerity, and other spiritual excellences of Lady Fatima (a). However, her character still remains unknown; she is the one whose pleasure is a sign of Allah’s pleasure and whose wrath is a sign of Allah’s wrath. Truly, no pen can bear the burden of writing about the different dimensions of her character. Therefore, from among many verses revealed about Lady Fatima (a), the only verse discussed in this article is the verse of *Mubāhalah* from a Sunni point of view.

**The verse of Mubāhalah**

فَمَنْ حَاجَكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنْ أَعْمَلٍ فَقْلُوا نَذَّرْ أَبَائِناَ وَأَبْنَائِناَ وَأَنْفُسُنَا وَأَنْفُسُكُمْ فَمَا نَبَيَّهُمُ فَنَجَّعَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَلْلَهِ عَلَىٰ الْكَذِّبِينَ

Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, ‘Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our selves and yourselves, then let us pray earnestly and call down Allah’s curse upon the liars.’ (3:61)

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**Literal meaning of Mubahala**

According to Jawhari\(^7\) (d. 393 A.H) in his *Sihah al-Lughah*, the term *Mubahala* means ‘to curse each other’ and *ibtihāl*,\(^8\) means ‘to pray to Allah (swt) earnestly’.\(^9\) Moreover, Ibn Fāris (d. 395 A.H) in his *Mu’jam Maqā‘is al-Lughah* says: “b-h-l”\(^10\) has three meanings: a) to empty and set free, b) to invoke and pray fervently, and c) shortage of water.

The term *Mubahalah* and the verse of Mubahala\(^11\) (3:61) refers to the second meaning, that is, ‘to invoke and pray fervently’, because when two people engage in *Mubahalah*, one curses the other and begs Allah (swt) to punish the addressee.

**Definition and incident of Mubahalah**

*Mubahalah* occurs when one person or group invokes the curse of Allah (swt) on another person or group about a religious issue and they implore Allah to disgrace those who lie about it.

According to both Shi’a and Sunni sources, a group of Christians from Najrān went to the Prophet (s) and talked about Prophet Jesus (a). The next day when the Prophet (s) decided to do *mubahalah*, he chose Imam Ali (a) to represent the Muslims as ‘ourselves’, Lady Fatima (a) as ‘our women’, and Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a) as ‘our sons’ from amongst all Muslims to confirm his prophethood. This act of the Prophet (s) is a proof for the infallibility and honesty of Lady Fatima al-Zahra (a).

\(^7\) Abu Nasr Isma‘il ibn Hammad al-Jawhari, the author of a notable Arabic dictionary

\(^8\) In Arabic, verbal noun of *Mubaharah*


\(^10\) In Arabic, past root of *Mubahalah*

Revelation of the verse of Mubahalah

1. ‘Albā’ ibn Ahmad Alishkarī says, “When the verse of Mubahalah (3:61) was revealed, the Prophet (s) called Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a) and invited the Jews for Mubahalah. As soon as a young man from among them was informed of the Prophet’s (s) suggestion, he told them, “Woe to you! Have you forgotten that your brothers were mutated into monkeys and pigs? Avoid Mubahalah, otherwise you would suffer the same.”

2. Jābir ibn ‘Abdullāh reports that the verse of Mubahalah is about Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a). He believes that the word ‘ourselves’ refers to the noble Prophet (s) and Ali (a), ‘our sons’ refers to Hasan (a) and Husayn (a), and ‘our women’ refers to Lady Fatima (a).

3. Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās reports: “When the verse of Mubahalah was sent down, the noble Prophet (s) summoned Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a), and stated, ‘O Allah! These are my household.’

The three above-mentioned traditions show that the verse of Mubahalah has been revealed concerning the People of the Cloak (Aṣḥāb-e Kiswa’).

In his commentary, Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, Imam Fakhr Rāzī writes, “Once the Prophet (s) left his house toward the place of Mubahalah. As his black hair hung down to his shoulders, he (s) was carrying Husayn (a)
Lady Fatima (a) followed him and Ali (a) was behind her. When they reached their journey’s end, the Prophet (s) told them, ‘After each prayer of mine, say ‘Amen.’”

When the bishop of Najrān saw this great scene, he said, “I see such faces that if they were to ask Allah (swt) to uproot mountains He (swt) would do so. O Christians! Avoid doing Mubahalah with this man, or you will be destroyed and not a single Christian will survive in the world until the day of Resurrection.”

Then the Prophet (s) said: “I [swear] by Allah (swt) to Whom my life belongs, if they did Mubahalah, they would have been destroyed. They would have been mutated into monkeys or pigs. A fire would occur in their land [Najrān] and all its inhabitants, including the birds on the trees, would be consumed. Nothing would prevent destruction and all Christians would die.”

The verse of Mubahalah according to Sunnis

The main part of the story, which is the fact that the Prophet (s) chose Ali (a) as ‘ourselves’, Lady Fatima (a) as ‘our women’, and Hasan and Husayn (a) as ‘our sons’ is accepted by all scholars of exegesis and hadith, as some Sunni exegetes such as Imam Fakhr Rāzī and Niẓām al-Dīn Nayshābūrī have confirmed it as well. Nayshābūrī adds, “‘Ourselves’ refers to Ali (a) and the majority of scholars of exegesis and hadith have accepted it.”

16 Ibid. d. 604 A.H
17 d. 728 A.H
Imam Abū Bakr Jaṣṣāṣ wrote: “All historians and narrators agree that on the day of Mubāhala, the Prophet (s) approached the Christians and invited them for Mubāhala while he (s) held Hasan and Husayn’s (a) hands and Ali (a) and Lady Fatima (a) accompanied him.”

Hākim Nayshābūrī believes that the story of Mubāhala has been narrated by successive transmitters and says, “It has been related in commentaries of Qur’an by successive transmitters such as ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās that the Prophet (s) on the day of Mubāhala held Ali (a) and Hasan (a) and Husayn’s (a) hands and put Lady Fatima (a) behind them. Then he (s) called them ‘ourselves,’ ‘our sons,’ and ‘our women.’”

On the authenticity of the verse, Zamakhsharī wrote, “There is no proof better than this [verse] that indicates the high status of People of the Cloak (Aṣhāb-e Kasā’) who are Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a), and Husayn (a).”

Other Sunni scholars such as ibn Taymīyāh, ibn Kathīr, ibn Yāsīn, Muhammad ibn Sūrah, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī and

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19 d. 370 A.H
21 d. 405 A.H
23 d. 538
Hākim Niyshābūrī\(^{29}\) have acknowledged the authenticity of the above-mentioned hadiths.

The verse of *Mubahala* indicates the greatness and honesty of Lady Fatima (a) and her high status in this world and the next. Ālūsī\(^{30}\) has also acknowledged the prominence of this hadith. He says, “The indication of this verse as to superiority of the family of His messenger (s) is a matter no faithful person doubts and [it is a fact that] hostility against the family of the Prophet (s) undermines one’s faith.”\(^{31}\)

**The unsurpassed greatness of Lady Fatima (a)**

The Prophet (s) took only Lady Fatima (a) as ‘*nisā’anā*’, ‘our women’ for Mubahalah in the presence of some of the wives of the Prophet (s). Nevertheless, he (s) took none of them for Mubahala. He (s) needed to take people with himself that could be his support on his prophetic mission, and Lady Fatima (a) was so. If the Prophet (s) had taken with himself someone who had lied even once in his/her life he (s) could not have cursed liars, because if he had done so he would have cursed the one who was with him as well. This elucidates Lady Fatima’s infallibility: she (a) was a perfect exemplar of honesty which confirms her high status and greatness. Even the bishop of Najrân spoke of Lady Fatima’s (a) greatness to his people by saying, “I see such faces who if they were to ask God to uproot mountains and He would do so. O Christians! Avoid doing *Mubahalah* with this man, or you will be destroyed and even one Christian will no longer survive in this world.”\(^{32}\)

The Prophet (s) took Lady Fatima (a) as a proof of his prophethood for *Mubahalah*. Before going to the meeting, he (s) gathered Ali (a), Lady

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Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a) together and said, “O Allah! These are my family.”33 Indeed, the Prophet (s) introduced his true household to the Muslims. Especially among women, it is Lady Fatima (a) who is meant to be “our women.”34

**Transmitters of traditions of Mubahalah**

The event of Mubahalah has been transmitted in 51 different ways,35 from 37 companions [of the Prophet (s)], followers of the companions, and household of the Prophet (s), including Imam Ali (a),36 Imam Hasan (a),37 Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a),38 Abī Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Bāqir (a),39 Imam abī ‘Abdullah Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (a),40 and Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (a).41

Companions, followers, and prominent people include: Ibn ‘Abbās,42 Jābir ibn ‘Abbās,43 Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ,44 Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān,45

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34 In some commentaries by Sunni scholars, this hadith is continued as follows: Then, Gabriel (a) came and said, ‘O Muḥammad! What if I be a member of your household?’ The Prophet (s) answered, ‘O Gabriel! You are one of us.’ Then, Gabriel (a) went back to skies, boasted and said, ‘Who is like me? I am the chief of angels in the skies and a member of Muḥammad’s (s) household on the earth.’ Rashīd al-Dīn Mīyūδī, *Ibīd*, vol. 2, pp. 151-152.


36 Ahmad ibn Ḥijr Ḥayṭamī, al-Ṣawā`ī`t al-Muḥarraqāt fi al-Rad ‘alā ahl al-Bad’ wa al-Zan`uduqah, Cairo, Maktubah al-Qīhirah, 1965, p. 156.


38 *Ibīd*.


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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ahmad Ṭabarī, Dhakhāʾir al-ʿUqāb, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifah, p. 25.
Arguments for the verse of Mubahalah

1. On the day of Shurā (Consultation), Imam Ali (a) reminded the audience that the verse of Mubahalah has been sent down about him [and the rest of the household of the Prophet (s)].

2. ‘Āmir ibn Sa’īd ibn Abī Waqqās has quoted from his father, “One day, Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān ordered Sa’d to curse Ali (a). Sa’d disobeyed him. Mu‘āwiyah asked him, “Why do you refuse to swear at Ali (a)?” Sa’d answered, “Once the Prophet said that Ali (a) possessed three attributes. So, I would never swear at him. If I had just one of them, I would count it better than having camels with red hair…”

3. When the verse of Mubahalah was sent down, the Prophet (s) summoned Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a) and said, ‘O Allah! These are my family.’

4. Imam Mūsā Kāzim (a) used the verse of Mubahalah as a convincing argument when Hārūn al-Rashīd protested.

Objectors’ view

This section describes some of the objections on the significance of Mubahalah.

1. Ibn Taymīyyah’s view

Ibn Taymīyyah acknowledges that the Prophet (s) took Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a), Hasan (a) and Husayn (a) for Mubahalah and believes that

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74 *Sahih of Muslim*, Vol. 4, p. 1871, no. 2408. (Kitab Fada’i l al-Sahabah, Sakhr serial No. 4420).
77 d. 728 A.H
it is an authentic hadith; however, he says he (s) took them because they were his closest relatives.  

Reply: If the Prophet (s) took them because they were just his close relatives, he (s) should have taken at least three persons of his relatives as ‘our souls’ (anfusanā), since Sunnis believe that Ali was not the only son in law of the Prophet (s). He (s) could have also taken his wives as ‘our women,’ but he (s) took only Lady Fatima (a). In spite of the fact that ‘our women’ is a plural noun and includes at least three people, the noble Prophet (s) took only Lady Fatima (a).

On the other hand, ‘Abbās was a closer relative to the Prophet (s) than Ali (a), because he was the Prophet’s (s) uncle. Nevertheless, he (s) took Ali (a) and not ‘Abbās. Therefore, Ibn Taymīyyah’s view is not correct. The Prophet (s) chose his household because of their high spiritual status, and not because of their relationship.

2. ‘Abduh’s view

Muhammad ‘Abduh says: All hadiths and traditions agree unanimously that the Prophet (s) chose Ali (a), Lady Fatima (a) and their two sons for Mubahalah, and that “our women” meant Lady Fatima (a), and “ourselves” meant Ali (a). These Shi’a traditions were spread among the Muslims; those who did so succeeded in their attempt spread them among the Sunnis as well. However, those who fabricated these hadiths could not reconcile their false traditions on the verse of Mubahalah. They argue that the word “nisā’ana” - ‘our women’ - in the verse is a plural noun in Arabic, and Arabic-speaking people do not use this word for one woman, especially not for a woman who is the daughter of a narrator who has several wives.

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Reply: ‘Abduh has unfairly said that the source of traditions is the Shi‘as, although many Sunni exegetes and narrators of hadiths have reported this tradition in their commentaries and collections of hadiths and have acknowledged it, such as: Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 A.H), Imam Muslim (d. 273 A.H), Muhammad ibn Sūrah (d. 279 A.H), Ṭabarî (d. 310 A.H), Ibn abī Hātam (d. 375 A.H), Abu al-Faraj Isfahānī (d. 356 A.H), Imam Abū Bakr Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370 A.H), Samarqandī (d. 375 A.H), Ḥākim Nayshābūrī (d. 405 A.H), Tha‘labī (d. 427 A.H), Māwardī (d. 450 A.H), Beyhaqī (d. 458 A.H), Wāḥidī (d. 468 A.H), Ḥākim Ḥaskānī (d. 471 A.H), Imam Baghawī (d. 516 A.H), Zamakhsharī (d. 538 A.H), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, Ibn Jawzī (d. 597 A.H), Fakhr Rāzī (d. 604 A.H), Qurtūbī (d. 671 A.H), Muḥīb Ṭabarī (d. 694 A.H), Nusufī (d. 710

90 Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, Al-Musnad, vol. 1, p. 185.
95 Abu al-Faraj Isfahānī, Ibid.
110 Ahmad Ṭabarī, Ibid, p. 25.
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These scholars and many other scholars of exegesis and hadith who have narrated this tradition in more than 51 different ways are among well-known Sunni scholars. No Sunni exegete, transmitter of hadiths, historian, scholar of *rijāl* or criticism of traditions has claimed that this tradition is a fabrication. On the contrary, as it was mentioned before, some Sunni scholars have said that this tradition is accepted by all or majority of exegetes and traditionists and they believe that it has been narrated by successive transmitters.

Furthermore, the following statement of ‘Abduh’s is not true:

> Those who fabricated this story could not reconcile it with the verse of *Mubāhalah*, because when an Arab hears the word of *nisā’ana* - which is a plural noun - does not imagine that the speaker might mean his own daughter, especially when the speaker has several wives.

Zamakhshari (d. 538 A.H), a literature scholar who has also written a commentary (*tafsir*) on Qur’an, has written the following:

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131 The knowledge of transmitters of hadiths and their validity
This event is the most convincing proof of excellence of People of the Cloak (Ashab-e Kisa’) and it is a clear evidence for the prophethood of the Prophet (s).\textsuperscript{132}

How could it be possible that such men of letters [i.e the exegetes] and eloquence have not understood that [with that interpretation of the verse] they would have made a false claim about the glorious Qur’an, despite the fact that the Qur’an has used plural nouns referring to persons, e.g. in (3:45) we read:

\textit{When the angels said, ‘O Mary, Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him}

In this verse, “angels” is a plural noun that refers to one angel, i.e. Gabriel.\textsuperscript{133} Moreover, in the glorious Qur’an, the word of \textit{nisā’anā} has been used for girls as well, e.g. in the verse 2:49, God says regarding Pharaoh says:

\textit{…and slaughtered your sons and spared your women…}

Or in the verse 4:7, we read:

\textit{…and women have a share in the heritage left by parents and near relatives…}

If the word \textit{nisā’} (women) could be used for girls, it makes no difference as to whether the girl is the speaker’s daughter or the addressee’s.

\textbf{3. Rashd Riḍā’s view}

After reporting traditions of \textit{Mubāhalah}, Rashd Riḍā’ writes:


\textsuperscript{133} Maḥmūd Ālūṣī, \textit{Ibid}, vol. 3, p. 141.
Regarding the verse “…come! Let us call our sons and your sons…", Ibn ‘Asākir narrates from Ja’far ibn Muhammad (a) that he quoted his father (a) as saying, “The Prophet (s) took Abū Bakr and his son, ‘Umar and his son, and ‘Uthmān and his son for Mubāhalah and, apparently, he meant a group of Muslims.”\textsuperscript{134}

Response: Ibn ‘Asākir has quoted this tradition from Imam Ṣādiq (a) through Sa’d ibn ‘Anbasah and Haytham ibn ‘Uday.

About Sa’d ibn ‘Anbasah, Abū Ḥātam Rāzī says, “He does not tell the truth.”\textsuperscript{135} ‘Abd al-Rahmān says, “Once Ali ibn al-Husayn (a) stated, “Sa’d ibn ‘Anbasah is a liar; I heard from my father that he does not tell the truth.””\textsuperscript{136} Also Yahyā ibn Mu’in says, “He is a liar.”\textsuperscript{137} Ibn Abī Ḥātam quotes from his father, “It is questionable.”\textsuperscript{138} In famous Sunni books of rijāl, not only is there no compliment about him, but rather he is strongly criticized and it is emphasized that he was a liar and rejected as a hadith narrator. Dhahab (d. 748 A.H),\textsuperscript{139} Ibn Jawzī\textsuperscript{140} and Ahmad ibn Ḥajar ‘Asqalānī (d. 852 A.H)\textsuperscript{141} have acknowledged this issue.

About Haytham ibn ‘Uday, Bukhārī said, “It is not the truth, he has lied”. In addition, Yahyā has said the same about him. Abū Dāwūd said, “He is a liar.” Nisā‘i called him, “A rejected hadith narrator.”\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{134} Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā, \textit{Ibid}, vol. 3, p. 256.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ahmad Dhahabī, \textit{Mīzān al-I’tīdāl}, vol. 4, p. 324.
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Sa’di said, “Haytham ibn ‘Uday is rejected.”143 Yaḥyā ibn Mu’in said, “I asked my father about him, he answered: ‘he is a rejected hadith narrator’.”144 ‘Abbās al-Dawrī said, “Some friends of us quoted from Haytham ibn ‘Uday’s handmaid. ‘There is no night except that my master gets up for praying, and when the morning comes, he lies!’”145 Basti said, “He narrates from trusted people important things…while he conceals some of them.”146 Bukhār (d. 256 A.H) is also quoted as saying that, “I keep silent about [do not quote from] him.”147 Azdī believed that he was a “rejected hadith narrator”.148 Ibn Ḥabbān is quoted as saying that, “It is not allowed to refer to or narrate from him unless there is another way to verify the hadith.”149

Some scholars such as Dāraqtānī,150 Dhahabī151 and ‘Aqīlī152 considered him as an unreliable and rejected hadith narrator. Therefore, the tradition he narrated is not authentic and it is not compatible with true and widely transmitted traditions and hence it should be rejected.

Conclusion

The verse of Mubahalah undeniably indicates the infallibility and honesty of Lady Fatima (a). It is remarkable that according to this verse, Lady Fatima (a) is not one person amongst nisā’anā (our

144 ‘Abd al-Rahmān Rāzī, ibid, vol. 9, p. 85.
149 Ibid.
women), but rather this word refers to Lady Fatima (a) exclusively\textsuperscript{153} as she was the sole person capable of fulfilling the qualifications of the verse.

\textsuperscript{153} It is similar to the verse (16: 120) in which the Glorious Qur’an calls Prophet Ibrāhīm (a) “a nation”, although he (a) was only one person. Similarly, in the verse of Mubāhalah, Lady Fatima (a) is called nisā’ānā (our women) because she (a) is the complete reality of Muslim women.