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A portrait of Amina al-Sadr, a woman wearing a black hijab, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The portrait is centered in the upper half of the cover.

بنت الهدى

AMINA AL-SADR

"BINT AL-HUDA"

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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The issue of the Muslim woman and her role in life and society, and what the limits of this role are, has been one of the hot issues over which goals and slogans of political currents have been fighting.

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These currents have used their media frontal as means to submit the "ideas of liberation", that is, from their own viewpoint, and the need to activate woman's role in all fields of life, originate from foreign made convictions that woman was robbed by Islam and Islamic teachings of many of her personal liberties and creativity.¹

Exchanged arguments and charges between the secular and atheist currents on the one hand, and the Islamic current on the other, formed part of a doctrinal culture during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th Century², prompting Islamist writers, including theologians, to write books to rebut these charges which were directed at the woman's relationship with the Islamic creed which raised her status and social value.

In such political atmospheres, male pens confronted the Islamic propagation work in all its types and means, and Iraq, as was the case with other Islamic area countries, was seldom lucky to have feminist pens that would write and innovate in this regard. The matter becomes understandable if we discern the early beginnings for the appearance of feminist press which rose and flourished on the Egyptian field first at the turn

of the 20th Century with direct support from the British occupation and under its auspices³. From the year 1892, when Lebanese Hind Nouvelle published the *Fatāt* (young lady) magazine as the first Arab woman-owned magazine in Egypt, and the year 1913 when there were no less than fifteen feminist magazines. Numerical superiority in this new press field was the lot of non-Muslim

¹ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman: Concerns and Challenges*, Dar AlHadi for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, first edition, 1428 A.H./2007 A.D., Beirut, p. 10.

² Nizar Haidar Atiyyah, *a/m* (above mentioned), p. 254.

³ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, p. 15.

women. This phenomenon was the most that attracted attention with regard to the beginnings of feminist writing at the time.¹ Of course, the subjects of those publications were as far from the teachings of Islam as they could be.

The same situation existed with regard to the first feminist publications in Iraq which tried to follow in the footsteps of their Arab peers: We could not trace feminist pens and books about the social values and Islamic virtues, notwithstanding the fact that the press world reflected an honest image of a society that started leaning towards disintegration and the abandonment of its Islamic constants in the pretext of fighting backwardness and in order to set out towards modernization and contemporization.

In the 1930s of the 20th Century, radio warbled as an effective weapon for disseminating those ideas with the popular song of "O one wearing the cloak! Do take off your cloak!" so the veil battle and taking it off would shift from the pages of newspapers to people's ears and minds, and literature adopted the path towards existentialism and the existentialists. The educated elite, writers and poets started composing their poetry and literature and writing articles that contained neither modesty or pristine values. Here is their stark role model, Poet Hussain Mardan (1927 - 1972), publishing his first collection

of poems in 1949 under the label "Naked Poems", dedicating them to himself. Among its contents is this text:

*I suckled lewdness from my mother's breast,
And I was reared in the darkness of vice,
So I learned everything,
but I Remain ignorant of the meaning of virtue!*²

¹ Names surfaced for female editors such as Mary Ajami (Entrepreneur of *Bride Magazine*), Julia Tu`hmah, a Damascene (*New Woman*), Iskandara (Alexandra) Avrino (*Anis Al-Jillees*), in addition to the rest of names: Rose el-Yousuf, May Ziyada, Olivia `Areeda and others. For more, see: Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, a/m, p. 16.

² A/m, p. 24.

In the tumult of those years, which were rife with ideas and counter ideas, the pioneer of the feminist Islamic media in Iraq was born in the most fragrant and deeply rooted house, and I do not think that she knew that she would one day become a media pioneer. Actually, most references, books and researches which wrote about her sailed with her in fields of Islamic pioneering, in *jihad* and in martyrdom, in pioneering the Islamic, social, intellectual and educational feminist endeavor, but they did not do justice to her distinctive leadership of the feminist Islamic media. This woman is the martyred Āmina al-Sadr, Bint al-Huda.

Our media pioneer belongs to a huge and unparalleled family legacy: It is the chain of the Sadr family which is regarded as one of the most staunch scholarly families that produced many renown men whose fame covered the horizons and whose reputation spread in the Arab and Islamic world.¹ Her honorable lineage goes back to Prophet Muhammed. This family is famous for its numerous scholars of theology who proved their genius in the fields of religion, jurisprudence, *jihad* and politics.²

¹ Salah al-Kharsan, *Imam Sayyid Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr*, p. 16.

² The list includes Sayyid Hassan al-Sadr, one of the great scholars of al-Kazimiyya. He had an opinion on the *jihad* movement which was almost distinguished him among the rest of Imami scholars. He died in Baghdad - Karkh on Thursday, June 12, 1935. He is maternal uncle of Sayyid Haidar, father of Sayyid Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr, as well as Sayyid Muhammed al-Sadr who took over for several cycles serving as Speaker of the Senate [during Iraq's monarchy], and he used to perform the functions of head of the Prosecution Authority for the king and his crown prince during their absence outside Iraq. He formed the cabinet of ministers on January 29, 1948. This was the first time in the history of the Iraqi ministries that a religious scholar assumed the presidency of the government. He also was the one who protected the royal family after the events of May of 1941. This is the origin of a popular Iraqi martial song saying "The Sayyid's house is secure". Sayyid Muhammed al-Sadr died on April 3, 1956. See: Salah al-Kharsan, *Imam Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr*, p. 34.

From an honorable descent to an honorable and holy birthplace [alKazimiyya city], the martyred *`ilwiyya* lady, Āmina Haidar al-Sadr, incorporated the purity of both fountains. She was born on Muharram 19, 1356 A.H./April 1 [according to the Gregorian calendar, the equivalent of the 19th of March according to the Julian calendar] of 1937¹ in the shade of the minarets of al-Kazimiyya and both its golden minarets. She was given the name "Āmina" [Aamina] in honor of the mother of the Holy Prophet, Muhammed². Sayyid Haidar al-Sadr, her father, was one of the senior scholars of Islam in Iraq, and he died when his only daughter was two years old.³

As for her mother, she belongs to a prestigious family of knowledge and scholarship, one well known in religious circles, and she is sister of the religious authority Ayatollah Shaikh Muhammed Ridha Āl Yasin. Her eldest brother, Sayyid Isma`eel al-Sadr (right picture), took her in his guardianship, looked after her and raised her since she was a child. As for her brother, the senior religious authority, martyr Muhammed-

Baqir al-Sadr, he was the twin of her soul⁴, and he is the one who drew the path of Islamic salvation for

¹ Some references make the mistake of placing the Hijri date of her birth in 1356. For more information, refer to Muhammed al-Hassoun - Umm Ali Mashkur, "A`lam al-Nisaa al-Mu'minat", *The Information Media of Believing Women*, Dar al-Usra for Printing and Publishing, Iran, second edition: 1431, p. 89 ; Rasheed al-Qassam, *Shaheedat al-`Aqeeda wal Mabda'*, *Batalat al-`Asr* (martyr of faith and principle, Bint al-Huda, champion of the era), Al-Nibras - Laith for Publication, first edition, 1424 A.H./2007 A.D., p. 12.

² Ahmed al-`Amili, *a/m*, Volume One, p. 81.

³ Rasheed al-Qassam, *a/m*, p. 12. Some sources indicate that she was orphaned when she was one year old, and in a testimony by her mother, the latter states that her daughter was a suckling infant when her father passed away. See: Ahmed al-`Amili, p. 106].

⁴ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, p. 255. (Bint al-Huda had jihadi positions with her brother, martyr Sayyid al-Sadr, with whom she was strongly connected, so much so that she said, "My life is from my brother's life, and it will end with his life's end, if Allah so wills." See: Ahmed al-`Amili, *a/m*, Vol. 1, p. 81].

her and its broad outlines when she was a little girl then as a grownup youth. His role has been the greatest in building her distinctive personality, coining her thoughts and encouraging her to delve into the world of writing, authorship and woman work in all its educational, social and movement dimensions.¹

As is the case with historical biographies of great men, a researcher will be in awe of this creative human monument who was not founded by a school or a university. Martyr Bint al-Huda studied at home the sciences of grammar, logic, jurisprudence and the principles of the faith side by side the conventional sciences taught at public schools. Thus, she combined modern study and the study of Islamic types of knowledge², all under the ample care of her mother, brother and maternal uncles. She, thus, did not receive any education or culturing from anyone other than both her brothers till she grew up,

matured and became the one to open learning and education circles for the daughters of the faithful.

Lady Bint al-Huda testified to her brothers' care, especially that of her martyred brother, Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr, who did not stop for one day looking after her, teaching and nurturing her up to the last day of her life. She says the following in his praise: "I am glad for the special circumstances that were available for me and enabled me to aspire to build a generation of believing educators who can serve Islam in the best possible way.

¹ Fatima al- Iraqi, *Diary of a Female Prisoner* (Red Pages from a Forgotten History), Vol. One, Documentary Center for Female Martyrs of the Islamic Movement in Iraq, House of Jurisprudence, Fadel Press, first edition, Holy Qum, 2003, p. 51.

² Muhammed al-Hassoun, *a/m*, p. 90. (Some notifications have stated that her mother sent her, when they were in Kazimiyya, when she was six, to the mulla (a woman who teaches girls of her age the Holy Qur'an). On the first day when Āmina (Bint al-Huda) entered the house of that *mulla*, she noticed the oven lit and the fire flames were rising, making a noise that scared her. She, therefore, returned to her mother obtrusive of learning in any house other than that of her parents, and so it was.) See: Ahmed al` Amili, *a/m*, p. 106.

Thanks to Allah Almighty and to the closeness of my brother from whom I get the guidance regarding how to work, the sound and suitable visions on the one hand, and the in-depth culture and sound understanding of Islam, on the other. I referred to him regarding anything which I found to be difficult, and I got from him the best that can be attained, especially in juristic and ideological matters, and this is a great blessing for which I must thank Allah."¹

Martyr Āmina al-Sadr was a preserving container for all genius, brilliance and effort which her brother exerted to attain and nurture. This is the source of amazement of anyone who knew her and who sensed her leadership, starting from those who founded her preliminary formulating, including writer Dr.

Bint al-Shaati who met her in al-Najaf and asked her, "From which college did you graduate?" With a promising smile, the martyr answered, "I am the graduate of our house's school." Dr. Bint al-Shaati was shocked at this stunning surprise which she did not expect to hear, finding herself standing before an Islamic thinker who never went to school.²

Despite the significant role which her martyred brother, Sayyid Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr, played in building and polishing her personality, coining her ideas and encouraging her to write, author and shoulder media and feminist work, one cannot overlook the reality of her brilliant character and distinctive features with which she was known since her childhood such as: fiery intelligence, quick memorizing and the ability to convince and attract. Any woman who saw her and listened to her speech and logic would admire her and become one of her fans.³ She is the sister of the struggling martyr,

1 Muhammed al-Hassoun, *a/m*, p. 76.

2 Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 66.

3 Muhammed al-Hassoun, *a/m*, p. 90. (One of the believing sisters living in London who was one of those who attended lectures by martyr Bint alHuda in Karrada says, "I used to wear jeans and a tight shirt. I never thought for one day that there was someone who could convince me of wearing the *hijab* and of changing my lifestyle. But after listening to lectures by martyr Bint al-Huda in Karrada, I was convinced about wearing *hijab* and truly committing myself to Islam." See: Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 74.

Sayyid al-Sadr, but she at the same time is Bint al-Huda, the personality that is full of distinction, ambition and fusion into Islam's nectar and beauty. Had she not been so, she would not have benefitted from martyr al-Sadr at all. How many sisters have religious authorities and great men had by whom history passed, yet they did not reach the leadership and sacrifice which martyr Bint alHuda reached?¹

Her passion for books started early, so the martyred Bint al-Huda became an avid reader of religious books and modern

works which broadened her knowledge of many matters. This opened before her distant scopes in the forefront of which is studying the society and diagnosing the ills of the Muslim woman in Iraq and the Islamic world, how incoming ideologies and Western culture invaded the circles of the Muslim society, trying to influence the way women in particular thought. Narrating her memories of childhood, she says, "When I was little, our financial condition was very poor, yet I had a daily allowance of ten fils. I used to save this modest amount of money every day then go to the market to buy a book about Islam. I had a friend who used to do the same, i.e. saving her daily allowance, but she would buy another book. We, therefore, would read each other's book once either of us is through reading hers."²

¹ *A/m*, p. 70.

² Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, *a/m*, p. 256.

Thus was martyr Āmina daughter of Sayyid Haidar al-Sadr, who is better known by her pen name "Bint al-Huda," daughter of guidance, able to give herself a high level of education in the Islamic Culture and expand the scope of her education through exerting more effort, research and self-education. This act is not unusual for a girl who grew up in a religious house and a conservative environments, first in Kazimiyya, her birthplace, then in Najaf. She opened her eyes to find her brother and role model, Martyr Muhammed-Baqir¹ son of Sayyid Haidar al-Sadr, pursuing the same approach.² He used to keep himself informed of the Islamic books published in the 1940s as well as of a number of newspapers and magazines, but he did not have sufficient funds to buy new unused books. He, therefore, used to go to public libraries. With his sister Āmina, he used to collect whatever little money they would acquire to buy a used book. After they both had read it, absorbing its contents, they would sell it in order to buy another book, and so on.

On one occasion, he entered a public library in Najaf and asked for a book about philosophy, one comprehended only by those who are deeply acquainted with philosophy. Those

present wondered about him. One of them asked him a tough question in philosophy, promising that he would give him the book he wanted free of charge if he could answer it correctly. It was then that al-Sadr provided a detailed answer that stunned the audience, leaving them baffled and at a loss.³

¹ Some people erroneously think that the first name of martyr al-Sadr is “Muhammed” and that that of his father is “Baqir”. This is wrong. His name is compound, i.e. a combination of both “Muhammed” and “Baqir”. There are numerous compound names in Arabic: Abd-Allah or Abdullah, Muhammed-Ali, Muhammed-Hussain, Muhammed-Mahdi, MuhammedSadiq..., Abdul-Khaliq, Abdul-Zahra, Abdul-Rida..., etc. The name of alSadr’s father is Haidar. – Tr.

² Islamic Da`wa Party, *Imam Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr: the religious authority, thinker and leader*, one of the publications of the media center, Dar al-`Uloom Press, Baghdad, Iraq, a/m, 1426 A.H./2005 A.D., p. 29.

³ Hassan al-Saeed, *Martyr Imam Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr: the symbol and the issue*, a/m, p. 24.

An elementary outcome resulted from this approach since the early days of works written by martyr Bint al-Huda. It pointed to her early readiness to delve into the field of book writing, authorship and the media as a whole. Here she is at eleven excelling in a small cultural magazine the topics of which are versatile and rich in context. She duplicated by hand as many of its articles as she could which she distributed to her relatives and neighbors.¹

This early genius made martyr Bint al-Huda feel comfortable with her outpouring pen to write and write, for this became her only form of entertainment. Rather, she was able to employ her pen in translating whatever she liked of Islamic thoughts, writing and producing an Islamic intellectual output that took control of her full attention. She, therefore, started translating a book by Martyr Mutahhari about the issue or philosophy of *hijab* because she realized its benefit and urgent necessity on the woman's field in Iraq.²

Martyr Bint al-Huda's delving into the world of writing and the media was not to satisfy a personal desire for recognition or fame, or to be occupied by writing for the sake of writing. Rather, she found the media field in need of an Islamic female pen that would address a huge amount of opposing and contending writings which were pushing woman in the direction of aversion towards her values and to be distant from the teachings of her religion. She, therefore, followed this blessed path. So we find her writings bearing a new spirit and a clear mentality combined with lucidity and ease in tackling the problems of her contemporary life.

¹ Ahmed al-`Amili, Vol. 1, *a/m*, p. 106.

² *A/m*, p. 108.

Her writings targeted woman's suffering from the aspects of culture, education and society. She attempted to treat the society's religious and political problems. From here, we can describe Bint al-Huda as a media pioneer in the field of objective writing that aims at educating the Muslim woman where nobody ever preceded her in so doing in this field. In her writings, she dealt with everything that would guarantee the Muslim woman's dignity and fortify her from deviation and loss in a transforming society which did not grant woman her anticipated role.¹

After the July 14, 1958 revolution, atmospheres in Iraq became widespread, sentiments with which the society was never familiar, especially on the level of values and the social fabric. The Muslim woman was in the front row of the victims of that serious transformation. Bint al-Huda, for this reason, undertook on her shoulders the responsibility to confront the wave of Westernization and social disintegration through articles which she wrote for the *Adhwā'* (Lights) magazine (pictured here)² round which she was keen about rallying until it ceased publication in late 1960s.³ Also, she contributed articles for the *Al-Iman* magazine of Najaf which was published by Shaikh Mousa al-Ya`qoobi.⁴

¹ *Imam Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr: the religious authority, thinker and leader, a/m, p. 29.*

² I found the graph on this page for the first issue of the *Adhwā'* magazine on the site of His Eminence Sayyid Muhammed-Hussain Kashifal-Ghitaa logo of whose Library is shown on the next page. - Tr.

³ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman, a/m, p. 256.*

⁴ *Imam Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr: the religious authority, thinker and leader, a/m, p. 29.*

Her writings were responsible for providing the women's base with advanced Islamic ideologies, giving a clear vision of the Muslim woman's role in an Islamic society that is the most exemplary¹ in addition to her objective articles about woman's affairs, her suffering from backwardness, injustice, ignorance and persecution. The *Adhwā'* magazine used to publish her narrative writings, so she became truly the pride of the Islamist writers.²

Journalistic writing was to Bint al-Huda one of the methods of religious propagation and social change which the Islamic movement in general and the religious Marji`iyya³ in particular, to which the martyred lady belonged, anticipated. As soon as she knew that the first issue of the *Adhwā'* magazine was coming out, she took the initiative to write a high quality article in which she urged young Muslim girls to uphold the teachings of the Islamic faith and not be dragged behind the immoralities of the Western civilization.⁴ Let us take a look at this statement of hers: "How badly we nowadays need, as our beloved Message is subjected to various trials and tribulations, to raise the torch of the Islamic call and to invest in the sciences which we learn in order to get to know the path of propagation through wisdom and beautiful exhortation, to always and forever remember that our Prophet of Mercy had admonished us to seek knowledge, making it an obligation on every Muslim male and female.

¹ Haidar Nazar Atiyyah, *a/m, p. 253.*

² Rasheed al-Qassam, *a/m, p.. 15.*

³ The term "marji`iyya" refers to the highest religious authority in the Shi`a School of Muslim Law. - Tr.

⁴ The articles of Martyr Bint al-Huda appeared under borrowed signatures such as Bint al-Huda from which she derived her reputation, and she was known by "Umm al-Walaa (mother of loyalty), as well as by the initials "AH" (Āmina Haidar) and "AHĀ" (Āmina Haidar Āl-Yasin).

The purpose has always been so that the Muslim woman would attain her share of inviting to Islam's principles and eternal system, and so that she would be able to withstand the attacks of interest seekers and repel the skeptics' propaganda. She must not leave herself exposed to the winds to turn her yellow or red, eastern or western, but so she may tread the blessed Straight Path. We must uphold Islam as a religion, a principle and a system, to understand it so we may see in it everything which we anticipate: progress, advancement and prosperity. So, do not be a parasite on intrusive principles and imported ideologies."¹

Employing an attractive literary style and honest statements, she kept attracting the souls of the readers to her line. Bint al-Huda starts by explaining what Islam expects of woman, what it wants her to be, adding, "It wants woman to learn so she may come to know the essence of Islam according to its magnificent reality, not to become familiar with the moral looseness of Western women and the close-mindedness of the Eastern ones. Islam wants her to be a torch of Divine light, while the corrupt society tries to turn her into a puff of fire. Islam wants her to be a fragrant flower, whereas the carnal concept wants her to become like a yellow withered leaf with the wind playing havoc with it. The Almighty created her to be the captain of the ship, but the false civilization has made her for quite some time a toy. He created her to be the school for the generations, but the forces of evil exert themselves to turn her into a dumb machine."²

The pen of Bint al-Huda never stopped addressing the Muslim girl, sharpening her mind through all means of addressing the challenges and resisting the temptations of the

time. We see her writing in another article in the said magazine, *Adhwā'* (lights), about another issue saying,

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* (Lights) Magazine, No. 1, first year, Thul-Hijja 1379 A.H./ June 10, 1960, p. 20.

² *A/m*, p. 21.

"Be an emulated role model, and do not be an emulating puppet. Be a followed leader rather than a follower; resist temptations, hold your grounds as you face everything; I know that the obstacles in front of you are numerous, that your path is not without thorns and pitfalls, but it is a shame to retreat, to go back, for death is better than riding shame, and shame is better than the Fire (of Hell)."¹

As she chooses her words, one can quite clearly observe her spirituality and attachment to the tragedy of Imam al-Hussain and to the poetry and prose composed in its regard as well as speech metaphors. This is also related to her massive effort to disseminate the cultural, intellectual and religious awareness through the Hussaini *majalis* where she used to deliver her lectures.²

Martyr Bint al-Huda finds no qualms about submitting her Islamic thoughts and religious commitments boldly and courageously during a period of time that witnessed the decline of the veil and the growing phenomenon of adornments in the Iraqi society. Here she pinpoints the wound, so she writes the following to describe such a trend saying, "How many are those who have disgracefully walked behind the foreign horn, and in their unawareness and conceit took off their veil and started going backwards, trying to find an excuse for the nightmare of misconceptions which the brutal imperialist dictated to us after desiring to colonize us in everything, even in the most precious and pure of what we have: woman?"³

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* Magazine, No. 7, second year, 1388 A.H./1961, p. 20.

² We will discuss this aspect in detail in this research later.

³ *A/m*

Bint al-Huda demonstrated a great deal of interest in the issue of woman's *hijab*, expressing such an interest by confronting this phenomenon and responding to the opposing ideologies through her writings, articles, poems and stories, or by raising the issue by submitting direct discussions and dialogues in her meetings with women in their homes and at the *majalis*. She guided many women and restored self-confidence to many from among those who followed such a Message-bearing line. Here she writes time and over again, in one issue of the said magazine after another, saying, "Do not let these conjectures discourage you, nor should you lose resolve as you face such ominous tunes. Rather, they must increase your determination, strength and power, so you may prove to them the soundness of your way and the error of their zigzag route to the right and to the left, and so you may explain to them that they are the ones who reverted in their conduct to what is even beyond the ages of *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic days of ignorance) where there were no rules, laws, ethics or principles."¹

She resumes answering all pretexts invoked by those who advocated woman's flaunting as a pretext for woman winning her rights for civilization and progress. Rather, she rebuts their imported ideas that are distant from harmonizing with the reality of the Muslim woman to the extent of revulsion, emphasizing that the Muslim woman can attain science and knowledge, that she can compete with men in scientific, educational and ideological pursuits provided she does not relinquish her Islamic values.²

Often, Bint al-Huda would repeat her appeals in several articles, identifying our real enemies thus: "Is it possible for a nation - any nation - to advance and become civilized through foreign civilizations that do not have any relevance to it so it would thus become advanced?!"

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* Magazine, No. 7, first year, 1380 A.H./1960 A.D.

² *Ibid.*, fifth edition, second year, Rajab 1381 AH/1961, p. 242.

A nation never advances a single step, nor does it prosper for one moment; rather, foreign ideologies and propaganda are the ones that have advanced and prospered at our own cost; we are their real enemies."¹

The writings and articles of this leading media pioneer, Bint al-Huda, did not exclude in their analysis, monitoring and addressing any foreign or domestic entity, nor did they flatter anyone when she addressed the orthodox Islamists and those steeped in strictness, saying: "Why did you impose on women restrictions and limits which descend neither from Allah nor from the Qur'an? Pressure generates a blast, and strictness invites attempts against all matters, even against the Shari`a, which is a must."² Martyr Bint al-Huda herself was not far from the inflexibility of the orthodox and their close-mindedness. A strict blockade was enforced on her due to her articles, stories and poems not being published in her real name despite all the sophistication, creativity and excellence in which she wrote her topics. The *Adhwā'* magazine refused to publish her writings only because she is a woman. It published her articles using her first initials "A.H." (Āmina Haidar). This prompted `allama Sayyid Muhammed Hussain Fadlallah, a member of the magazine's Editorial Committee at the time, to comfort her with a poem in which he explained his regret at the magazine's reluctance to publish her articles in her real name. `Ilwiyya³ Bint al-Huda memorized that poem because she was impressed by it."⁴

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* Magazine, No. 7, the first year of 0.1380 A.H./1960.

² *A/m*, No. 8, second year, Shawwal 1381 A.H./1961 A.D., p. 367.

³ "`Ilwiyya" is title of a woman who descends from the progeny of Imam Ali. For male descendants, more than one title is used, but the most common is "Sayyid". - Tr.

⁴ Rasheed al-Qassam, *a/m*, p. 27. (This ossified position went on until her first literary publications; therefore, the first edition of her book ("Virtue Triumphs") came out bearing the initials (AH) as referring to its author due to the impact of the that fossilized trend. Some people who were not familiar with

the truth thought that it was written by Sheikh Muhammed Amin Zayn ad-Deen]. See: Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 52.

Bint al-Huda wrote in the *Adhwā'* Islamic magazine, then a leading Islamic magazine, which was issued by a group of scholars in alNajaf al-Ashraf. It was regarded as a distinguished media outlet on the pages of which nothing was written but the products of expert pens of those who specialized in the fields of writing, religious and juristic authorship. Her writings for woman were in a transparent and new language to which women in the past woman were not accustomed. Such writings on women were undertaken by clergymen and Islamic writers, and they contained a great deal of affectation and oddity, for a man is not like a woman in his knowledge of woman's conditions, concerns and thoughts. Thus, the writings of Bint al-Huda formed a touch of affection and kindness that harped on woman's concerns and conditions, whether she is a Muslim or a non-Muslim woman, bridging gaps between female elements in the society and the religious authority. It should be right for us to say that Bint al-Huda the leader had started reforming the Islamic address directed at woman, and that what she offered truly formed unprecedented pioneering in the Islamic media where a distance is maintained between strictness and extremism.¹

Those objective articles and writings which *Al-Adhwā'* magazine published were later compiled in a book titled *Kalima wa Da`wa* (a word and a call). It was welcomed by women who were interested in teaching and educating the next generations on sound and creative principles having deep knowledge of the problems and issues facing the Muslim woman in the Islamic society.²

The bulk of what was intended by martyr Bint al-Huda in her press writings was to sound the siren about the dangers that threaten the personality of Muslim women, such as her saying, "This is a result of her poor understanding of Islam and the distance that keeps her away from its spirit and precepts on the one hand, and a result of the nurturing of poisonous imperialist education which invaded our lands on the other.

¹ Nizar Haidar Atiyyah, *a/mm* p. 256.

² Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 52.

Such education publicized for their concepts which oppose Islam and which, in reality, do not aim at anything other than ending woman's originality, feminine spirit and dignity... They are tunes which we heard and which we will continue hearing so long as the foreign microbe runs in the veins of our poor society, as long as we continue upholding our right principle, promoting its straightforward path."¹

The depth of the analysis and its clarity for the reality of the Muslim woman, which is obvious in the articles Bint al-Huda wrote, is nothing out of the ordinary for the first student in the Islamic School of Martyred Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr. One of the followers of this School, which distinguished itself for integration, originality, depth, vitality and renewal, absorbed its lessons, so she was apt to set out from it to build the integrated Islamic personality which is capable of facing the ideological and political challenges and which can present Islam as a divine message, as the only path of salvation in every time and clime.²

It is worth noting that our media pioneer was not entirely dedicated to her pen, articles and press concerns. Rather, she was distracted by concerns and obligations in every direction: the religious, promotional and social inclination for change, teaching Islamic concepts, sustaining the link between the religious authority and its men, scholars and women's class in the society. All these magnanimous concerns, which martyr Bint al-Huda shouldered in one period of her amputated lifespan, had their toll to a great extent on her dedication to media innovation. Had the conditions been favorable for her as a writer, we would have found her to be a media monument and a pioneering Islamic media school which could have produced generations and generations of Islamic writers without the least doubt.

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* Magazine, No. 7, first year, 1380 A.H./1960 A.D.

² Hassan al-Saeed, *Martyr Imam Sadr, a/m*, p. 32.

The personality of martyred Bint al-Huda included in its folds many literary talents, including poetry and the writing of Islamic stories having a purpose, an objective, a goal. Here, she is also its pioneer and the first to shoulder this serious Islamic mission: She tried through her story to unveil her thoughts and principles in which she believed and for which she labored in order to disseminate them through the story structure to the broadest possible segment of her homeland's women.

Thus did she leave behind for the Islamic library an aware legacy and a pioneering Islamic understanding in the role of the story in bringing about change.¹ Among what was published for her have been these titles: *Virtue Wins; Two Women and one Man; the Lost Aunt; I wish I Knew; the Seeker of the Truth, a Struggle from the Reality of Life; Memories on the Hills of Mecca; a Word and a Call; Heroism of the Muslim Woman; Woman and the Talk of Islamic Concepts; Women with the Prophet; A Meeting at the Hospital* (which was the last the martyred lady had written).²

A series of writings has been published of her writings bearing the name "Bint al-Huda". She answers the question of why so herself when she says the following under the title "Who are you?": "A sister Muslim wrote me asking: 'Why, in the Name of Allah, did you not state your real name so we may know who you are?' So, here, Sister, is my answer, perhaps from it you will come to know who I am: First of all, I am personally your sincere sister who never tires of keeping track of your steps out of love and affection for you. I am also a volunteer who has chosen the cause of Islam, carrying its bright torch as much as I can and bear and according to my abilities in the struggle. I also want to make myself an example, a role model, for carrying out experiments in Islam's culture which some ignorant folks may regard as being a failure. I want to prove by myself what the Islamic history tells us about our mothers and sisters in the dawn of Islam who raised, through their education, the greatest of men while upholding Islam and its teachings."

¹ Muhammed al-Haidari, *Imam Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr: Living Closely to Him*, Salmi Press, first edition, Baghdad, 1424 A.H./2003 A.D., p. 81.

² Al-Amini, *a/m*, pp. 97, 108, 264, 313. (She has other manuscripts which the Baath authority confiscated when it stormed the house of Martyr al-Sadr.] See: Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 53.

After the writer, Bint al-Huda, describes various images of Muslim women in the condition in which her female readers can be, and in order to place herself with them in every image and at every age stage, she addresses her saying, "Imagine any of these images which you find to be the closest to your thinking and choose one of them, or choose another, and be like I am." This is so because her initials do not offer her much, whether her name is real or borrowed. What concerns her is to reach her readers' souls, to get her readers to reach her transparent human soul, so she bids that inquirer farewell saying, "Remember me in my spiritual personality so I may be proud of it, and rest assured that my name has nothing to do with what I write or with what you read."¹

The participation of conscience is the most obvious writing attribute of Bint al-Huda. In her stories, she shares the worries of the Muslim woman, the suffering and grief of her helpless people. Thus, she played a major role in the Islamic story which is regarded as the most distinctive characteristic of her writings, a pioneer in her feminine aspect, due to a creative talent, a broad education, a solid style and full knowledge of the issues of her Islamic society and of its problems, in her employment of the committed word with all strictness and strength of the deviated ideologies and intrusive social practices. She succeeded thus in coining the objective Islamic thought in beautiful literary clichés, and her works in the short story testify to it.²

The relationship of martyr Bint al-Huda with the pen and with writing was essential: Through it, an exchange is made of the conditions of life and survival; therefore, we do not see her

deserting it even in the darkest circumstances of her *jihad*, struggle.

¹ Complete story collection (A Book and an Invitation) - Book III, pp. 131-134.

² Rasheed al-Qassam, *a/m*, p. 26.

For example, during the period of her imprisonment, she directed herself towards writing and authorship, putting together a book which she called *Days of the Ordeal*. She composed lines of poetry, poems, and started explaining the Holy Qur'an in a simple way to the believing girls. She reached about half the Baqara Chapter (Ch. 2, the longest chapter of the Holy Qur'an).¹

The relationship between martyr Bint al-Huda on the one hand and the pen and writing on the other was an obligation, a religious propagation duty, a commitment of principles to Allah, the most Exalted One, the most Great, and to Islam. Her delving into this field was, hence, with strength and persistence. Some people, men and women, who had preceded her in walking along this path since the inception of this century had promising starts, but soon they had setbacks, or they stumbled, or they were attracted to the glamorous Western civilization. This is why the short story field, actually the Islamic novel as well, remained without knights until it was forcefully invaded by Lady Bint al-Huda with determination and resolve, following the path of the Holy Qur'an and its unique artistic and narrative style.²

Martyr Bint al-Huda found in the field of writing the Islamic story a wider room for disseminating and spreading the principles of the creed. Actually, she found in it a media podium with a great role unparalleled in bringing awareness to the Muslim girls and in making them closer to their faith and Islamic message. Her stories were a paved path for many believing sisters to get to know and admire her due to what she had written and before they met her in person, as was the case with "Umm Abrar" al-3Haidari.

¹ Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³ Umm Abrar al-Haidari is Lady Ilham Baqir, wife of sayyid Muhammed al-Haidari. She emigrated from Iraq to Syria in 1980 in an informal manner over her Islamic activity, then she settled in Iran in 1982. With the consent and support of martyr Bint al-Huda, she exercised authorship, writing the following: *The Zainab of the Era, Who Leads Me?, Who Guides Me?, Who Helps Me?, Who Answers Me?, Who Saves Me?, How do I Attain Happiness?, and Edicts that Concern You*. She practiced Islamic propagation work in Syria and London and oversaw the magazine *Mir'āt al-Shabāb* (mirror of the youths), Association of Martyr Salwa al-Bahrani, and the Foundation of Martyr Bint al-Huda. She has more than 150 videotaped lessons and 300 audio lessons mostly in education, women's education and Islamic awareness. Regarding the beginnings of her relationship with martyred Bint al-Huda, she says, "I wrote a letter to martyr in which I said, 'I read your books and am very impressed by your thoughts. In order the benefit may include us, I suggest that you come to the Hussainiyya of Al Mubāraka to give lectures because it is a public place and receives all women.'" For more information, see: Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 69 and beyond.

The priority of the goal was clear for martyred Bint al-Huda in any field in which she worked and to which she resorted in order to realize her Islamic conviction. The priority in the field of the Islamic story was not to demonstrate her artistic prowess but Islam's brilliant way in attracting a Muslim individual to its green pastures; therefore, the thoughts and words of her stories were synchronized, so much so that we find no separation between the personality of the writer and what she wrote. From here came her denouncement of writing that existed in the other flank: "Some of our men of letters have unfortunately turned themselves into translators and publishers, nothing more or less. Their ideas are strange to them, distant from their reality and society. They incline towards the call; they respond to the tune; they become intoxicated by the sip. They, therefore, sing the glory of the foes as they remain unaware, inadvertent, lauding the poisonous ideologies while

comprehending nothing of them. They became immersed in the foreign culture which the imperialist introduced into our homeland a long time ago, and it is the one that caused our young generation to swerve right and left, making sure to make their literary productions in all forms and trends on par. As a result of this misunderstanding of the intrusive culture, a hostile imperialist concept is directed at us, we daughters of Islam, in particular, and it has widely spread out."¹

¹ *Al-Adhwā'* Magazine, No. 9, first year, Rabi` II 1380/October 1960.

Perhaps the recourse of martyr Bint al-Huda to the fiction method was not to satisfy a hobby or establish a road towards professionalism; rather, it was for a noble and clear goal which she kept in mind since her first collection of stories: addressing the younger generation in a simple narrative style in order to convey the Islamic teachings to it. She pointed out in the introduction to her story titled "A Conflict from the Reality of Life" to this effect saying, "The embodiment of concepts of the Islamic point of view of life is the genre of these short stories".¹

In the introduction to "Virtue Triumphs," she reemphasizes the same meaning saying, "You will find in each story the positive attitude imposed by the Islamic point of view of life, and the wide gap between the cleanness of this attitude, its purity and loftiness, and the lowliness and degradation represented by the other perspectives of life."²

Bint al-Huda kept the society in which her Muslim sisters lived in mind with all its struggles, realities and facts to deduct from it her stories without resorting to cheap excitement or to delving into the world of taboo as was done by most female pens that wrote in that era and beyond it as they imitated the West and its writers and men of letters in the different types of cross-pollination of ideas between the erotic thoughts (sex, money and religion) in order to attract the reader, the publishing houses and the media.

The artistic doctrine embraced by the writings of Bint al-Huda was loftier and above that, for the life formulated by her narrative works is the finest that transcends the teachings of divine religions and the clean souls with a yearning for goodness.³

¹ Muhammed al-Hassoun, *a/m*, p. 96.

² *Ibid.*

³ Fatima al-Iraqi, *a/m*, p. 68.

Her pristine Islamic culture led her to recognize the value of man's conduct, to an understanding of its divine nature on earth, to a belief in the act of righteousness done by a man or a woman. Thus, her support for the elements of goodness and justice in the innermost of this being, who is perceived as being weak, is a factor in demonstrating that she is strong and powerful when it comes to stories that place her on the path of the Unity of Allah, not on that of atheism.

Perhaps the writings of Bint al-Huda are not more famous than those of Nawal el-Saadawi, Ghāda Sammān or Ahlām Mosteghānemi, but if you put these writings in the balance, how many women and girls who are in the prime of their youth and who have fallen to temptation, becoming lost and swerving from the right path when they read those writings which are immersed in pornography and in prohibition? How many others who found the right guidance when they became familiar with the writings of Bint al-Huda, so she became their guide towards virtue and the following of the true religion?

These stories played a significant role in solving many family problems faced by the Muslim woman in the Muslim world. Bint al-Huda treated with extreme precision and a gentle manner the issue of marriage, for example, and the outcome of the attitude of Muslims nowadays, where the perfect spouse is perceived to be the one who has a huge fortune or a prestigious degree, as well as the image of the ideal wife: She is the one who possess superior albeit false beauty. She depicts her as sitting hours and hours in beauty salons in order to conceal her true face. So, titles emerged such as: Islamic [propagation]

work, the suffering of working women, the ridiculing, distorting, beautifying, the applying of cosmetics and the wearing of the veil. All these were labels for problems which martyr Bint al-Huda addressed in her stories in a convincing contemporary style.¹

¹ Muhammed al-Hassoun, a/m, p. 97.

The martyr presented her constructive ideas through her stories in an easy way, in a language close to the soul; there are neither far-fetched nor complicated words. She expressed big ideas with easy words expressive of many basic Islamic concepts. Thus, she turned the dry material into an easy one through the venue of stories, poems and ideas. She resorted to the style of details in narrating events in order to make their persona closer to the reality experienced by Muslim women.

The martyr always looked forward to the concerns, problems and ambitions of girls who live through the mentality of their age, understanding the flurry of ideas of the girls of the younger generation. She, therefore, would address them and hear their calls. Her intellectual activity helped others achieve salvation and sense the path of redemption. It also helped others succeed in life through the word, the honest advice; after all, does not religion mean offering advice?¹ After all of this, martyr Bint al-Huda did not find for herself humility as a story writer. We find her pointing out to this in the introduction to *Virtue Triumphs* when she says, "I am not a story teller or a writer of story; actually, I have not tried before now to write a story. What I did was nothing more than a constructive attempt to open and pave the road in order to walk in the direction of reviving a silent media apparatus that copes with our march while we are at the beginning of the road."²

¹ Rasheed al-Qassam, p. 31.

² Muhammed al-Hassoun, a/m, p. 96. (Professor Muhammed al-Qaddusi used to say: What a legend this woman some of whose I have read?! We in Egypt have Bint al-Shati, and you have in Iraq Bint al-Huda. We have in Egypt female story writers, poetesses and struggling women of letters. But when I

imagine the resilience of this woman and her standing alongside her brother, as well as her detonating an overwhelming uprising in Iraq, I imagine myself going back to the atmospheres of Kerbala, al-Hussain and Zainab, to Yazid's army, the neighing of horses and the desert sands...] See: Rasheed al-Qassām, a/m, p. 29.

Despite the publication of those stories and the enthusiasm of the girls for acquiring and reading them, for more than a house of publications collected them in short story volumes, we find that martyr Bint al-Huda had been subjected to injustice in her struggle as well as intellectually. She did not enjoy her real opportunity for her books to spread widely, and she did not shed light on her pioneering of the Islamic media and of the Islamic story that parallel their clout and true impact.

Such was the condition with regard to Bint al-Huda, the poetess: Although she was not a professional poetess, nor did she write much, signs of her poetic ability surfaced early on the day she was congratulating her family on the occasion of the birth of Maram, daughter of her brother, Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr, on Rabi` II 27, 1371 A.H./January 25, 1952 A.D. when she recited these rhymed words:

*O Maram, O captivator of the souls,
O star that shines in the morning!
O Maram! You captivate every heart,
A star shining as sunset does start.*

Al-Sdr liked these words, so he kept calling his daughter most of the time “captivator of the hearts.”¹

Martyr Bint al-Huda did not compose poetry as a hobby. Rather, she found a sweeping cultural shortage in this field, that is, Muslim women did not delve into the field of writing objective poetry which lifts the poet to the highest degrees of mercy and the Pleasure of the Almighty. For this reason, she undertook on her shoulder to write poetic pieces through which she expressed what she had in mind: the suffering of the

Muslim woman, her low level of religious education, so she had her in mind as she wrote these lines of poetry:

¹ Ahmed al-`Amili, a/m, p. 321.

Glad tidings to you, O Messenger of Allah! Look at how the light Of righteousness has shone in us bright!

O Messenger of Allah! We are young ladies who have refused to see

The Qur'an deserted on the shelves for many a year.

You obligated woman to learn

To leave the world of ignorance behind

The world that crushed the mind,

So she would know the true religion and does understand

The essence of Islam, of the faith, its precious meaning for man.¹

In response to the designation of the nation's girls who adhere to the Islamic line as "reactionaries," she composed a directive poem in which she said,

My shyness from the most High is not bent,

Nor has it shackles to my hand sent.

No, nor has this veil blocked me

From my goal, from what I want to be.

She expresses herself in the best way when she portrays how a truly Muslim women can be by saying the following in another poem:

With the hands of modesty

Do I safeguard my chastity

Through my abstention do I rise

Above my peers and be wise,

With an idea that it does ignite

With a critical talent that is bright

Have I perfected my every manner:

My shyness towards the most High for ever

Does not stop me from covering,

Wrapping myself and my body veiling.²

¹ To see more of her poetry, refer to: Muhammed al-Hasoun, M/A, p.. 99 and beyond.

² Rasheed al-Qassam, a/m, pp. 55-56.

The field of writing, story, poetry and journalistic articles was her outlet to broader fields which had previously occupied her mind and took the largest share of her thinking and activity. `Ilwiyya Bint al Huda played a significant role in strengthening the relationship and the bond between the religious authority and women. She was a link in the transfer of the concerns and aspirations of women as well as their demands to the religious authority. Sayyid al-Sadr in turn, monitored, enriched and supported these women in order to perpetuate their movement in the society. Thus, Bint al-Huda shouldered the role of clarifying the Islamic legislative issues to women, urging them with regard to the necessity of arming themselves with awareness and learning, to ask about matters relevant to their religion and life.¹ So, Bint al-Huda got down to the reality on the ground in order to make it a laboratory for practice, and it produced amazing results: She was able to set up the foundation for a generation of women who uphold the Divine Message, contrarily to an overwhelming Westernization movement², and her means were: the Hussaini gatherings (*majalis*) and the Zahrā Schools.

As for her role in the Zahrā Schools, she was commissioned by the Islamic Charity Fund Society³ with the task of overseeing the schools in Kazimiyya in 1967, in addition to overseeing another school for girls in Najaf. Bint al-Huda found in this sacred mission a step towards expanding her general Islamic activity.

¹ Islamic Da`wa Party, a/m, p. 33.

² Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, a/m, p. 256.

³ This society was formed in 1958 in Baghdad under the presidency of Sayyid `allama Murtaza al-Askari. Soon it branched out to Basra, Diwaniyya, Hilla and al-Kazimiyya. It distinguished itself for its many charitable activities. In the field of education, it supervised the faculties of the College of

Usool ad-Deen (principles of the faith) in Baghdad and the Schools of Imam al-Jawad for Boys in both their primary and secondary stages, as well as the Zahrā Schools for Girls Zahra in both their primary and secondary stages. For more information, see *Risalat al-Islam* (Message of Islam) magazine, Nos. 5-6, first year, September month of Ramadan 1386 A.H./ December 1966 (Julian), p.. 194.

She took part in the establishment of private schools that follow the official curriculum, but she would add to them two or more classes, such as lessons in the Islamic faith, in a professionally focused and solid way.¹

Martyr Bint al-Huda continued her weekly movement between Najaf and Kazimiyya, continuously moving and diligently working, prompted by one noble goal: her great faith in Islam. The goal behind setting up the Zahrā Schools was not to meet society's need for schools; rather, there were imperative necessities that required their establishment which included: facing the materialistic culture that advocated corruption, deviation and moral decadence, and to endeavor to disseminate the sound Islamic culture and awareness to which woman must aspire. Those schools were the best means that suited that era and met its requirements.²

The leading martyr, Bint al-Huda, did not confine her effort to only supervision and education; rather, she took to spending the rest of her time to meet with the teaching cadres in order to deliver educational lectures after the end of the official school hours.³ The cadre members were mostly graduates of teachers' houses and institutes. She would, moreover, meet in the afternoon with university students in order to talk to them about the responsibility of a Muslim woman, delivering lectures and lessons to them on the Islamic types of knowledge.⁴

¹ Ahmed al-`Amili, Vol. 2, a/m, p. 97.

² It is noteworthy that an inspector wanted once to enter one of the girls' classrooms, so Bint al-Huda said to him, "You should not enter the classroom, and it should suffice you to simply take the information you need from the administration. I

hope that an inspectress will visit our school." The inspector agreed to her request and wrote a report to the Ministry of Education in which he said, "These schools are veil fortresses."

³ Muhammed al-Hassoun, a/m, p. 94.

⁴ See: Ahmed al-`Amili, Vol. 2, a/m, p. 97.

Thus was she able to extend bridges to college girls in order to be able to disseminate among them the veil phenomenon in the corridors of Iraqi universities, after they had been devoid of them completely, if we do not say that those universities served as an important means to removing the veil. Daughters of so many families - even scholarly and religious ones - used to remove their veils as soon as they entered their university campuses.¹

These schools scored a significant success rate in ministry exams among government schools, so much so that they became famous for their scholastic and educational reputation, and more people sought them to the extent that the classes could not accommodate all students. Four schools were listed under the name of the name of the Zahrā Private Schools, three of which were in Baghdad and Kazimiyya and the fourth was located in al-Najaf al-Ashraf near the sacred Shrine [of Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali] in the Mishraq neighborhood. All of them were under the supervision of Bint al-Huda. These schools were torches of light and guidance, factories for Islamic pride and dignity and the object of hope for the believers, the deprived and the poor, a source of trust and credibility among the masses.²

This case could not continue after the arrival to power of the Iraqi Baath Party which clashed with the trend of Islamic awareness led by martyr Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr, brother of Bint al-Huda. The said Party took the initiative to close all Islamic institutions, including the Zahrā Schools. These Schools were at the forefront of targeted Islamic projects for no reason other than their being Islamic.³ In 1972, a law was issued for the nationalization of education, and its primary target was the elimination of the barricades of chastity and light and the castles of the veil in Iraq.

¹ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, a/m, p. 257.

² Fatima al-Iraqi, a/m, p. 54.

³ Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, a/m, p. 257.

Although this ill-famed law covered all private schools, according to its articles, the authority soon revalidated the private Schools of the Christians and Armenians as well as other private schools with the authority's financial and media support, but there was no support for the Zahrā Schools; instead, they were buried alive.¹

Martyr Bint al-Huda resigned from her work after knowing that she would not be able to carry out her missionary role, explaining her position by saying, "The goal behind my stay in the school was only to earn the pleasure of Allah. When this goal was no longer there at the school after being nationalized, what is the benefit of my presence there?"²

Thus, the effort and attention of martyr Bint al-Huda focused on the widest field of Muslim women's work: the Hussaini *majalis* where she had her own distinctive viewpoint of what those *majalis* should be. This notion was due to her serious missionary role, to the stance adopted by her martyred brother, Sayyid Muhammed-Baqir al-Sadr. Al-Sadr endeavored to develop the Hussaini *majalis* through developing the Hussaini pulpit by establishing an oratory institute, adopting speakers and deploying them everywhere in the Muslim community.³ So, he was the scholar who encouraged preachers the most, looked after their conditions and provided them with guidance. He did so due to his belief in the significance of the Hussaini pulpit in the Iraqi reality, so much so that he used to send some of them to areas far from cities, and he used to find out that the preachers' impact in those areas was greater than that of the proselyte or cleric who ascends the pulpit and delivers a sermon.⁴

¹ Ahmed al-`Amili, Vol. 2, p. 99.

² Muhammed al-Hassoun, a/m, p. 95.

³ Muhammed al-Haidari, a/m, p. 56.

⁴ Martyr al-Sadr was in his childhood attached to the platform/pulpit (*minbar*) of Sheikh Kazem Noah in al-Kazimiyya due to what was known of his beautiful voice and dramatic fervor. He was regarded as one of the aware preachers in the Hussaini pulpit. Actually, Sayyid al-Sadr himself used to ascend the Hussaini pulpit on Ashura in al-Kazimiyya when he was young in age. See: Sadiq Jafar al-Rawaziq, a/m, p. 282.

Martyr al-Sadr used to see in the preacher the tongue that expressed the rightly guided Marji`iyya; actually, he is the trusted middleman between the Marji`iyya and the nation. Shaikh Ahmed al-Waeli says the following about Sayyid al-Sadr's interest in the Hussaini platform: "One of the concerns that occupied his mind was the issue of the Hussaini pulpit. He used to call on me to bear a portion of the pulpit's responsibility even if it could be done through a simple work that would later develop," and he had an ambitious plan in this regard.¹ In the beginning, martyr Bint al-Huda used to attend the usual women's *majalis* and participate in them despite their violation of some Islamic principles. She was convinced in this regard that those *majalis* preserve the Islamic and social legacy, so they must be perpetuated and cultivated from any trivial features or impurities in order to show Islam's shiny reality. She had her own special style which she described thus: "We should start with people from where they want in a way which is not inconsistent with seeking the pleasure of Allah so that we can get them to reach where we want them to be."² The Hussaini *majlis* has a lofty value, an importance in the woman's society, in her being attracted to it, so it keeps her quite distant from being busy with other matters that are quite distant from Islam and the principles of Ahl al-Bayt. She advocated that our women must get down to the field of reality in order to become aware of the suffering because of misconceptions, and this can be done at the women's Hussaini *majalis*, in terms of clothes, the latest fashions, the scarcity of the cultural, spiritual, religious and ethical education, whereas the role of the propagator, the *mulla*, starts in explaining the philosophy of commemorating al-Hussain's martyrdom.³

¹ Ibid., p. 285. One of the basics of this project is to integrate the speakers into the scholarly hawza and find a formula that provides for them a guarantee for their future, in addition to establishing a central institution to unify their curricula and trends.

² Fatima al-Iraqi, a/m, p. 55.

³ Rasheed al-Qassam, a/m, p. 36.

Martyr Bint al-Huda started building the infrastructure and the fundamental work for women's public awareness work in Iraq, where the Iraqi field is dominated by two trends: the trend of degradation and watering down which the West advocates, and a traditional conventional Islamic trend that demands women to sit at home, preventing them from speaking with men. In the middle of these two rejected trends, she moved to put up a third trend.¹ She, therefore, demanded Muslim women to rise up and assume their responsibility, to carry out their role of changing the society. She set out prompted by the theory of martyr al-Sadr in which he differed from other religious authorities. This was achieved by the martyred Bint al-Huda through giving women a major rather than a marginal role. So, when she started to move to establish different Hussaini majalis, the beginning was in the Āl Mubarakā Hussainiyya in Karrada. Both trends were fighting her, and there was so much talk and rumors launched to fight her, in addition to the authority fighting her, too. Police rescue cars used to park at homes where martyr Bint al-Huda used to deliver her lectures, yet this could not prevent the attendance of more than 300 women at the house of the Zalzalāh family to listen to her.²

These sophisticated *majalis* formed the first nucleus of massive Islamic work in Iraq among women's circles. The Āl Mubarakā Hussainiyya in Karrada was the first Hussainiyya that opened its doors to women.³ Martyr Bint al-Huda was the leader, educator and

¹ Fatima al-Iraqi, a/m, p. 73.

² The researcher attended the assembly of Lady and former MP Mona Zalzalāh in her home in Karrada in the summer of

2003. The female audience were recalling the historical moments of the *majalis* of martyr Bint al-Huda and setting aside time in the lectures to read some of her articles and valuable instructive writings. Open discussions would then start of views expressed by the attendants.

³ We can imagine the difficulty of the matter from the following incident: Lady Ilham Baqir says that she wrote Sayyid Murtaza al-`Askari saying that she was of the opinion that it was necessary to set aside a fixed place for women to attend congregational prayer services in the Hussainiyya which, at the same time, could be used as a forum to air their concerns, to work and propagate (the cause). She gave the letter to his daughter who was used to attend the commemorative gatherings. "After some time," she goes on, "Sayyid al-Askari sent me a letter of reply also through his daughter in which he stated the following: 'My daughter, this has been my dream for quite some time. I hoped to open a place for women but, my daughter, I am afraid I will then find no men praying behind him.' This statement goes back to 1967." See: Fatima al-Iraqi, a/m, p. 69.

supervisor of this work, and she had initiatives which were not common in Iraq at the time. It was common for the woman to only be "mullaya" (female mulla) who would recite commemorative eulogies of Imam al-Hussain. The one who founded this trend, i.e. the religious awareness through delivering lectures, lessons and direct dialogues, was martyr Bint al-Huda; so this was truly a quantum leap in the massive Islamic work.¹

In *majalis* such as these of her own, martyr Bint al-Huda confronted extraneous practices, including women going a *majlis* looking as if they were going to a wedding party or a fashion show. She explained that al-Hussain did not need the tears of such women; also, Islam cannot be promoted through such practices that are from its essence and values as far as can be.²

Through those sessions was the martyr able to sow the seeds of an aware feminist work that was conscientious, disseminating it in the society. Thus, she shouldered her role in

inviting people to the way of Allah, to struggle in His cause, and to sacrifice for the sake of the creed. It was also through raising the girls of her generation to be courageous, heroic and daring, principles which she perfectly embodied both in the way she lived and in the way she was martyred.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

² Rasheed al-Qassam, a/m, p. 36.

In the beginning, the audience was quite limited, then its circle widened, and the number of attendees kept increasing, raising the concerns of the oppressive authority, so the latter scaled the sessions down by broadcasting falsehoods and canards in order to instill fear in the people's hearts.¹

For these reasons, the martyr's sessions proliferated in 1968, then the meetings became fixed monthly sessions at the Zalalah family house in 1972. Through those sessions, the martyr succeeded in attracting all age groups: There were mothers attending as well as girls; martyr Bint al-Huda was selecting for every situation what it suited, responding quickly and intuitively with weighted words. She was never surprised by any question or inquiry directed at her by the audience which included various segments of the feminist society. Her dialogue was characterized by calm and by being fair to everyone in the *majlis*, acting like a caring mother who did not want to discriminate among her daughters. It was through such sincerity of intention that she created a rising generation of women who upheld their creed. Many university girls were attracted to her *majlis*, and they responded to her Islamic instructions in disciplining themselves and in raising others. Each of them had a role in saving her sisters from deviation which distances her from straightforward Islam.

As time went by, the few aware believing women turned into a large number, spreading in Baghdad, Basra, Nasiriyya and many other Iraqi cities.

¹ Fatima al-Iraqi, a/m, p. 65.

The veil phenomenon became something witnessed rather than hidden, and the martyr was following up with the girls in weekly and monthly sessions, with oral and written directives through her stories, poems and objective articles.¹

The tragic end to this noble humanitarian edifice put an early end and a great loss to the Islamic nation. On Saturday, the twentieth of Jumada I 1400 A.H., which coincided with April 5, 1980, Baathist security forces raided the residence of the religious authority, martyr al-Sadr, her brother and mentor, in order to whisk him away [from al-Kazimiyya] to [downtown] Baghdad just to come back the next day to arrest his fellow jihadist sister, Bint al-Huda. They both were tortured, and they both eventually embraced martyrdom together, just as they had thus lived together. Thus, she was emulating the steps of the heroine of Kerbala, Zainab al-Kubra, in her brave stance side by side her brother, Imam al-Hussain, peace with them both, in the face of Umayyad oppression.²

The leading role played by martyr Bint al-Huda in Islamic media manifested itself through the following:

1 - presenting a role model for women as a proselyte and writer who upheld the Islamic creed and its teachings during a period that was fraught with pens influenced by the ideas of the West and their ideological, cultural and media models which are distant from the reality of the Iraqi society.

2 - Martyr Bint al-Huda worked to present a bright image of Islam in terms of its ability to meet the aspirations of Muslim women and to develop realistic solutions to the various problems of everyday life.

3 - Martyr Bint al-Huda, the pioneering proselyte, worked to create a feminist generation aware of its religious culture and defending its Divinely-revealed message; therefore, her impact did not terminate after her martyrdom.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

² Hassan al-Saeed, *Muslim Woman*, a/m, p. 258 ; Muhammed Reza al-Nu`mani, *Martyr al-Sadr: Years of the Ordeal*, a/m, p. 313 et seq.

4 - She encouraged many believing women to tread this path; actually, she urged many of them to write in what looked like a prophecy about the works they would be writing in the future, which they did.

5 - She colored her media productions in various creative skills: She wrote newspaper articles and prosaic thoughts as well as poems. As regarding the story field, she was truly the pioneer of the Islamic story writing in Iraq.

6 - She had a clear vision and a long term strategic plan. The media innovation was not merely a flurry of creativity, nor was it to satisfy a selfish need; rather, she was a woman who espoused great ideas, who worked towards achieving them and bringing them out to existence up to the end line of martyrdom.

7 - Her educational, ideological and media creativity was part of her character. To her, work was a sacred act of worship, as is the case with the daily obligatory prayers. To her, multi-faceted Islamic work, including its media aspect, was a sacred duty rather than something marginal or secondary.

8 - Her creative work in life was part of her commitment to her Marji`iyya. She actually fused herself into this Marji`iyya (that of Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim¹, left), and this matter was one of the most obvious of her distinctive characteristics and easily visible personal merits.

¹ Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Tabatabai al-Hakim (1889-1970) was the sole *marji` taqlid* (emulation authority) in 1961 after the death of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Hussain Bor-ujerdi. His son, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, who was born in 1953, was the leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI),

the largest political party in Iraq, up to his death due to lung cancer in 2009.

9 - She brought forth a third trend of change in her society which distinguished itself from both trends of atheism and enticement (on the one hand) and the conventional Islamic trend which is stonewalled in its attitude towards the Muslim woman and her role in the society (on the other). She was truly a pioneer in this enlightening revolutionary trend which has carried her name and mark.

Martyr Bint al-Huda was the liaison between the religious authority (Marji`iyya) and its masses. She was committed to the creed, and she persevered to highlight Islam's shiny image up to the last day of her life when she was martyred, and what a loss it was, and what a most heinous crime committed by those cowards who executed her... Surely we belong to Allah, and to Him shall we all return.

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IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE

*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)