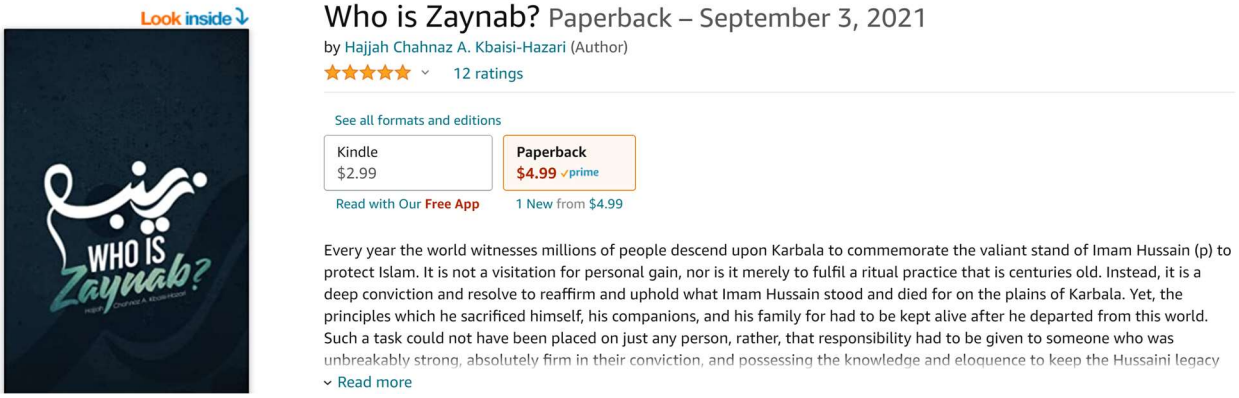
Reviewer: Ali Abbas (ali.abbas.q@gmail.com)



"**Who is Zaynab**" ? is a title from Hajjah Chahnaz A. Kbaisi-Hazari. At the very outset, the fact that it is penned by a Woman, with all the sensibilities that the feminine brings to the fore with respect to the Tragedy of lossing brothers and her sisters, is very important to keep in mind.

One important thing to remember appreciate and recognize, Zaynab (SA) doesnt have a hyphenated identity: her identity has it's own "Essence" and that is, that she is Zaynab (SA). She isnt "the Daughter of Ali" as one Dr Ali Qaimi has set forth in his 700 page work, she is as Shariati resurrected and preserved Fatima (SA) - she wasnt a hyphenated Identity other, "Fatima is Fatima" and "Zaynab is Zeynab"

The book has some very beautiful features

1. It establishes the supremacy of the equity between the two genders, while also positioning it within their respective "roles", and those roles tend to complement each other, for a society to work and function with grace.

2. Aspects of a Societal belonging, what makes one and what brakes one are referenced from the Holy Quran. It it important to keep in mind, that the Quranic verses enjoined, are meant to serve as general principles with specific principles resonated from the beautiful ahl al-Bayt in constructing a Society.

3. Very careful consideration is given to the themes, themes that resonate from the Quran, on Gender Equity, of Genders working together, of placing the responsibility of enjoining goodness and forbidding evil. That theme is the theme of Imam al-Husayn (AS), to reform to revive the ummat Jaddi, all tracing their roots from the Quranic verses

4. The work impeccably adorned with historical references. Historical references can be delineated in many constituents, those (a) that refer to the pre-Islamic Arabia, (b) then the Sirah, that covers the Life of the Prophet Muhammad (S) both in Mecca and Medina (c) that part of history that tarries it-self after the death of the Prophet (S) into the lives of the Caliphate followed into the rule of Muawiya and Yazid. The work is a treat as it adorns itself with historians like Ibn al Athir, at-Tabari

5. Then there this is very specific genre of historical work, known as Maqtal ("the death of"), so there is the Luhuf, the Maqtal of al-Muqarram and Maqtal of al-Khawarizmi. When the engagement begins in Karbala, these three works resonate and find themselves to the nucleas of every activity. Maqtal al-Khawarizmi is the only non ahl al-Bayt source, but there are elements of an oral tradition from the Imam al-Husayn (AS) and his Comparison that are not to be found any-where else. The Maqtal literature is the what, who and how a devotee of Imam al-Husayn (AS) attained martrydom - the details are, we are aware from our oral tradition in sharing the tragedy

6. The Ziyarah literature also forms the basis and praxis of the believers allegiance to and ascent from the banality of a life without purpose into the realm of those who attained martyrdom in Karbala.

Now lets conclude this with the most important aspect of this work

1. Zaynab from the moment of her inception, was "always" aware of what was going on in the family. If it wasnt here acute sense of observation and wisdom, she made her place in the lives of her grand father, the Prophet (S) and her siblings. No Zaynab left behind, even if you try, fail you will

2. The household of the ahl al-Byat, as I garner from the work, always made the entire family informed of what was going on in their lives, how it would impact them, as history would unfold. Those patriarchal notions of Women being the weaker sex and un-able to face the challenges of a family, was a by-gone conclusion with Zaynab (AS)

3. Zaynab and her sense of awareness, to put it like a metaphor is like a hawk whose eyes and sense of heightened space, is well aware and calculating very move as history unfolds. Imam al-Husayn (A)S would constantly remind her of her role, and she was always aware of it at-hand before hand.

4. The level of clear communication assured between al-Husayn and Zaynab, his final role and Zaynabs role in picking up after the tragedy of her brothers loss. Imam al-Husayn (AS) reminded Zaynab of the awesome responsibility of her becoming, over and over, and that reminded was duly attached it-self to the heart of Zaynab. Again certain cultures would rather keep Women

out from the realm of war that brings death and tragedy - but Zaynab embraces it - like a baby embraces her mother

Just watching reading listening to the communication between al-Husayn (AS) and Zaynab (SA) reminded me that our own Communities could also serve to emulate how these two Spirits kept all doors of communication open, even so that the news was dire, of death and destruction, grief and loss. It had to be a Zaynab who would juggle with all aspects of grief and sorrow

Zaynab was trained from the very beginning to weigh into the family affairs, in-fact the family "let her-in" and from there we witnessed the blossoming of a Woman who shouldered and discharged her responsibilities with the strength of a pious Woman. Whether it was the grand father, the Prophet (S) or her father Imam Ali (AS) and her brothers, Abbas, Hasan and Husayn, they grew up while being reminded of the place they held, by virtue of their position as the family, the ahl al-Bayt. With great awareness comes great responsibility

I havent covered much about the journey from Kufa and forward, but I wanted to share this little that I garnered from reading this work.