

She is Me*

Celebrating 15 centuries of female scholarship, women contributions to the community and uplifting of the *ummah*

By Khadijah Dingjan

It is our delight to share the wonderful ways of women in our past, who have shown us, how deep faith can be combined with worldly contributions. To show that our history and our current world is full of women, who raised and continue to raise the standard and the flag of Islam. These women display a joyful faith, deeply rooted in tradition, flexible, full of light, ready to embrace any culture that it runs into.

Think about it... the time of the *sahabahs* is the beginning of a long line of women, who helped to uplift the *ummah*. We certainly know and appreciate the work that men have done for 15 centuries. We learned a lot and are grateful for the wonderful deeds the men have done and we make *dua* for them.

For some reason, at some time in our rich history, somehow we began to erase the women's contribution. Not necessarily by Muslims, as it was probably a colonial initiative. When the colonialists came to the Muslim countries, they believed if they could separate the women (take the women and their contribution out of our history), that maybe we would forget. And if women lose the connection to this rich history in their religion, consequently they can lose their religion. Should women lose their religion then men might lose their religion and the colonialists would succeed.

According to Anse (Shaykhah) Tamara Gray, the contribution to the anxieties amongst Muslim women today is mainly because of the contrast between the anti-superwoman rhetoric in Muslim cultures (where the prevalent attitude is that females only have value in motherhood and wife roles) and on the other hand the superwoman of the Western world (the Western attitude of 'do-it-all-without-any-help').



Source: www.stthomas.edu

But when we look at how the Qur'an defines the roles of women, it is rather vast and comprehensive. The Qur'an holds in it every role a woman could ever have: a single woman, a single mother (Maryam, mother of 'Isa), a happily married woman (Hannah, mother of Maryam), an unhappily married woman (Khaulah bt Tha'labah), a career woman (Queen Bilqis), a barren woman (Asiyah, wife of Fir'aun), and even a tempted women (Zulaikhah).

Shaykh Abdullah Hakim Quick stated that another potential reason why the stories of amazing Muslim women in Muslim civilization are relatively unknown, is that the majority of these stories are only available in Arabic, and are not much translated into other languages. Besides that, when people want to inspire us with the stories of Muslims of the past, they usually translate and narrate the stories of the men, which are adequate already to bring the message or lesson across.

In the Islamic Civilisation, extraordinary women from different backgrounds worked alongside men to advance their communities. Their inspiring stories, charismatic personalities and determination to contribute to the development of their environment make them beacons that guide young women and men today. And this can be clearly seen in the numerous examples of the contributions of contemporary women from which we only can highlight a few in this article. One woman of each of the last 14 centuries is chosen and connected to 14 inspiring (mostly) Malaysian contemporary woman. We tried to connect ladies within the same field or same merits, although that was not always possible.

We presume the stories of the mothers of the Believers already to be well known; e.g. how wonderful Khadijah (r.a.) was, that you are already impressed with Aishah's (r.a.) scholarship and taken back by Umm Salamah's (r.a.) bold courage. Therefore, we start in this article with the *Tabi'een* (successors).

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18 Inspirational

We launch our journey through 15 centuries of female scholarship with Amra bint AbdurRahman, a scholar, jurist and role model of the 1st Hijri century.

1ST CENTURY

Al-Tābi'iy 'Amra binti 'Abdur-Rahmān (d.98 ah)

- She was a notable of the *tabi'een*, she was a **jurist, scholar and 'vast ocean of knowledge'**.
- It was said about her that no one knew more about *Hadith* than she, during her time.
- The closest student of our Mother Aisha (r.a.) and one of the **first steps in the legacy of female scholarship**.
- She was a defender of social justice. Her rulings were considered final; at one point, hearing of an unjust ruling, she sent her messenger with her correction. The ruling was immediately reversed, without question. Because her line of learning (back to the Prophet) was more direct (shorter) than the other jurist.



Source: Rabata.org

In Malaysia of our time, we acknowledge a multi-talented teacher in the lady:

She graduated from the IIUM (BA; Islamic Revealed Knowledge, minor Communications and MA; both in Islamic Studies and Psychology). She teaches both Islamic Studies and Human Sciences subjects at Centre of Foundation Studies, IIUM.

A special woman with **multi discipline talents** is also recognized as Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) International, Certified Impact System® Coach, Certified Time Line Therapy™ Practitioner and Certified Professional Hypnotherapist. These credentials further help her provide alternative psychological therapy and understand the insight needs of human development. She is also a certified speaker of Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS).

Ustazah Isfadhiah has proven to be a well-known public-speaking figure in da'wah locally and at international stage, and appears in various Islamic television and radio shows. Her exposure in three disciplines has, therefore, empowered her in being able to analyse issues from Western and Islamic perspectives.

<http://islamicfunscience.blogspot.my/p/our-consultant.html>

Ustazah Isfadhiah Mohd Dasuki



Source: <http://mumtazahsanusi.blogspot.my>

Then we come to the second century AH, where we meet Nafisa al Tāhira, a great granddaughter of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and caretaker of the *ummah*, who became the Shaykhah of Egypt.



Source: Rabata.org

2ND CENTURY

Sayyida Nafīṣah al-Tāhira (d. 208 AH)

- Born in Madinah, where her father (Al-Hasan al-Anwar) would take her as a young girl to the Prophet's masjid to pray every single obligatory (*fardh*) prayer.
- She memorized the Quran at a young age and was **one of the early mufassirs** (those who explain the Quran) then she continued to study and memorise the sayings of the Prophet (s.a.w.).
- She became a great scholar, **jurist**, and **hadith scholar**.
- After her marriage, she moved to Egypt, she became a teacher to many. It's said that people would line up outside of her door all the way to the end of the street to ask her questions and her advice. Imam Shafi'ee learned from her in al-Fustaat (old Cairo) [Shatibi]
- A descendant of the beloved Prophet, she was well-known and **deeply loved** by the people of Egypt who built a masjid in her name. and named a city after her, "Siti Nafisah"
- She was a very religious devout spiritual woman, went for 30 hajjs. She was known for her long worship vigils, continuous fasting, her commitment to teaching and her **spiritual light**.
- She cared for the people around her. Once she took temporarily care of a young Christian girl who couldn't walk. By a special answered *dua'* that Nafisa had made for this child, Allah made her able to walk again, which made her whole family embrace Islam.

Currently Malaysia is blessed with their own Shaykhah of Tajweed (The Art of Reciting the Quran in the way of the Prophet, s.a.w.). We introduce to you:

Shaykhah Wafaa b. Muhammad Hussain

(Tajweed Made Easy Global Academy; TMEAG)



After graduating from St. Mary's Kuala Lumpur, she travelled to Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to further her Islamic Studies for 10 years to specialise herself in **recitation of the Noble Quran**. She was awarded with two Sanad Certificates and became the 32nd and 33rd generation of Sanad Holders. In 2001, she started teaching Quran recitation in various places.

In 2012, Shaykhah founded Tajweed Made Easy Academy (TMEAG). Incorporating the method, she developed throughout all her tajweed classes, three tajweed books were published; "Tajweed made easy", "Starting from Scratch" and "TME Mind Maps". The following two years, she founded and launched the White Palm, the first sisters-only tahfiz centre in Tetovo and in Skopje, Macedonia.

In September 2015, the TMEAG Learning Centre in Shah Alam, Malaysia was officially launched, not only to learn Tajweed and Qur'an recitation onsite, but also for some Islamic and sisterhood activities.

Since 2015, Shaykhah is invited as a speaker for various conferences in Malaysia. To date, Shaykhah has conducted TME Intensive Courses in Malaysia, India, Singapore, Macedonia, Kosovo, Germany and the Philippines and currently is grooming teachers worldwide.

<http://tmeag.com/about/our-founder/>

SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO PROMISING YOUTH

An Egyptian teenager has discovered an inexpensive way to turn plastic trash into fuel — and it could be worth tens of millions of dollars a year.

Azza Faiad’s ideas attracted the attention of the Egyptian Petroleum Research Institute. The institute gave the teen access to a lab and its researchers in order to help refine her trash to fuel formula. Faiad discovered a cheap and plentiful catalyst called aluminisilicate. This catalyst drastically reduces the cost of converting plastic waste into gases like methane and propane, which can be turned into ethanol. Some scientists are calling this “biofuel” because the organic

chemicals from plastic polymers it extracts, are the same chemicals extracted from vegetation to create ethanol biofuel. The process releases other chemicals that can also be recycled and sold.

Egypt produces a million tons of plastic trash every year, and it is estimated Faiad’s process could convert that much trash into fuel worth \$78 million every year. In fact, she believes it could raise the total return to \$163 million each year from Egypt’s plastic trash. The European Union Contest for Young Scientists has already honoured Faiad with a prize for her work and she is now working on a patent for her trash to fuel process.

<https://thedebrateinitiative.com/2015/08/20/the-muslim-intellectual-revival-muslim-teenager-turns-plastic-trash-into-million-dollar-biofuel/>



Azza Abdel Hamid Faiad

Biofuel Innovator *Teenage Girl Turns Plastic Trash Into Million-Dollar Biofuel*

Source: <http://timbuktuchronicles.blogspot.my>

SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO PROMISING YOUTH

Iqbal al-Assaad became the **world’s youngest doctor**. She started Medical School when she was only 14 years old and completed at the age of 20.

She grew up in Bar Elias, a small village in the Bekaa valley, after her Palestinian parents arrived in Lebanon. At the age of 12, she topped her class during her high school education. By the age of 13, Iqbal secured a scholarship to study medicine in Qatar.

Finally, at the age of 20, she not only become the youngest ever medical graduate from Cornell University’s Qatar branch, but also the youngest Arab doctor ever.

Her dream is to open free clinic for the Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon, because the lack of healthcare for Palestinians there touched her most deeply.

Ms. Al-Assaad is now in the USA for a residency in paediatrics at the Children’s Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio.

<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/palestinian-child-prodigy-becomes-doctor-at-age-20>



Iqbal al-Assaad

Source: <https://walizahid.com/>

We travel to North Africa to fill our story with a bit of beauty: Sayyida Fatima al Fihri, an institution builder who began the oldest still-functioning university in the world.

3RD CENTURY

Fātima al Fihrī (d. 266 AH /880 CE)

- Migrated with her father from Tunisia to Fez, Morocco.
- She and her sister Mariam were educated and studied *Fiqh* and *Hadith*
- Founder of the **oldest academic degree-granting institution** still in existence today: The Masjid and University of Qarawiyyīn (Fez, Morocco). It was established in 859 CE.
- She was a woman of great vision and was organised. From the received inheritance of her father (a wealthy business man) and she built a masjid and educational institution.
- She began by building a well for the workers, which shows she had a good clear idea of labour justice.
- Devoted her money, her time and herself to the development and success of this project.
- As she started this project in Ramadan, she wanted this blessed project to be completed while fasting too, so she continued to fast throughout this period (2-3 years).
- It became a **centre of education** and one of the most prestigious institutions in the world. Students from all over the world would come and study astronomy, languages and sciences.
- This institution was open to all: Pope Sylvester II (then Gerbert of Auvergne) was one of the esteemed students of al-Qarawiyyin as were many others. Her university is a reminder of the work we can accomplish when we unite our communities.



Source: Rabata.org

A pioneer of our time in one particular field of education is the Malaysian lady:

Ladyana Zoraya Abdullah (Brainy Bunch)

Mrs. Ladyana embraced Islam in 1990. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, several diplomas in Montessori Education and 23 years of experience and qualifications in Early Childhood Education.

She is a **pioneer in Islamic Montessori education** in Malaysia. In 2010 she founded Brainy Bunch together with Efizah Mohtar Rasali and Mohd Fadzil Hashim. Today, they educate children from 2½ - 16 years old in 74 branches throughout Malaysia, 2 in Singapore and 1 in Indonesia. Characteristics for Montessori education are for kids to be educated at their own pace, in an environment of “learning while playing” and focussing on their empowerment without coercion and without exams (they have assessments instead).

Mrs. Ladyana believes that besides the academics a school should also teach children how to care, be helpful and productive. Therefore, they have started the “Zero Hunger program”, providing basic food on a monthly basis to families, “adopted” for this cause. One of the board members visited Syria and put the credo “there is power in proximity” into action, because once we see the suffering of people with our own eyes, we feel it and want to help. They contributed and committed themselves to help the Syrians. Even the parents are involved as the school tries to “change the narrative” in order to help more needy people. Moving forward from donations the parents can afford, these parents are encouraging others in their circle to give too.

Another motto of Mrs. Ladyana which she wants to teach children is: “be courageous”, do the things which make you feel uncomfortable and you will learn more.

Source: brainybunch.com



22 Inspirational

Ever wondered how Muslims in the past calculated the prayer times or found the Qiblah? One way was a tool called an astrolabe, which was developed by the following lady:

4TH CENTURY

Maryam al-Jīliyya al Istirlābiyya (d. approx. 345 AH)

- She originated from Syria. Some write her name as al-'Ijliyah. She had taken on the last name of the work that she did, because it was so important.
- A creative and precise **scientist, inventor and early engineer**, Maryam al-Astrolabiyah designed and built astrolabes, which was a navigational tool used by Muslims to find the Qiblah (prayer direction), discover prayer times and for navigation in general; in a sense the astrolabe was an 'old-fashion GPS'.
- Her work was very intricate, very careful and very accurate. Therefore, she was hired as the official astrolabe engineer by the ruler Sayf al-Dawla and remained employed for nearly thirty years. Her contribution to the field was equalled by none.
- We specifically highlight Maryam to all young women who are interested in STEM subjects (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and hope you are encouraged to learn more about her and be inspired.



Source: Rabata.org

A scientist in her own right is the well-known Malaysian lady:

Prof. Dr Harlina Halizah Siraj Gynecologist

Dr Harlina Halizah Siraj is a **Professor of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (O & G)** Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Dedicated to clinical teaching and learning, Dr Harlina is giving lectures in the UKM, as well as serving as an O&G Consultant in the Department of O&G UKM. Her area of interest includes family planning & contraception, adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH)

She is active in promoting and advocating the well-being and health of adolescent girls and underprivileged women and has been involved in many civil societies. She was serving in boards of several organisation related to her field of knowledge, such as: Malaysian Association of Maternal and Neonatal Health (MAMANEH), Raudhatus Sakinah Centre for Adolescent Girls, Women Section of Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)

She has over 20 years of experience as a physician and having guided thousands of medical students over 12 years. To this day, Dr. Har is still a university lecturer, whom likes to continue to teach, despite the fact that she had the opportunity to earn many times more if working in the private sector. For her, sharing the useful knowledge to others is one of the practices from which the rewards will be even extended after death. In her teachings she also incorporates the importance of Islamic morality.

As a form of community service, she is actively involved in discussions on issues of women, family and youth with the intention of educating the public to be better; specifically, in the field of family planning and contraception, sexual health and teenage pregnancies. Therefore, she often appears in the media and shares her advice in a language easily understood by the community. In addition, Dr.Har also is the author of several books ("Citra Wanita Kontemporari", Santunan Fitrah. "Bicara mengenai Kesihatan Reproduksi Remaja" and "Minda Wanita di Jalan Dakwah").

Dr.Har can be followed in drhar.blogspot.com and drharlinahalizahsiraj.com

Source: <http://sebarakanituindah.blogspot.my>



NOTEWORTHY MENTIONS

Hanadi Zakaria al-Hindi

is the first Saudi woman to become a **commercial airline pilot**. She was born in Makkah in 1978. She passed her final exams at the Middle East Academy for Commercial Aviation in Amman, Jordan in 2005. She has a ten-year contract with Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal's Kingdom Holding Company as a pilot of his private jet, the *Kingdom*.

Al-Waleed is considered a proponent for female emancipation in the Saudi world, financed her training and stated on her graduation that he is "in full support of Saudi ladies working in all fields".

Al-Hindi became certified to fly within Saudi Arabia in 2014. Reports highlighted the irony that a Saudi woman is allowed to pilot an aeroplane but may not drive a car. Al-Hindi, however, does not see this as a contradiction.



Source: twitter/Hijabi Queens

Tawakkul Karman



Source: www.enduringamerica.com

Meet the Iron woman; Tawakkul Karman: a **journalist, politician, and a human rights activist** as well as one of the 10 Muslims that has won a **Nobel Peace Prize**. Her face is stapled to the 2011 Yemeni Uprising and is also known to have co-founded "Muslim Journalists Without Chains". She became the first Arab woman and the second Muslim woman to win a Nobel Prize and the second youngest Nobel Peace Laureate to date.

When she was asked about her hijab by journalists and how it is not proportionate with her level of intellect and education, she replied: "Man in early times was almost naked, and as his intellect evolved he started wearing clothes. What I am today and what I'm wearing represents the highest level of thought and civilization that man has achieved, and is not regressive. It is the removal of clothes again that is a regression back to the ancient times."

Now we meet a traveller, *hadith* specialist, and phenomenal scholar who began her life in Turkmenistan. Upon settling in the Holy City, she became known as the Shaykhah of Makkah.

5TH CENTURY

Karīma binti Ahmad al-Marwaziyyah (d. 461 AH)

- She and her father travelled widely, as far as Iran, Jerusalem, eventually settling in Makkah, seeking teachers and knowledge.
- She gained great knowledge and became a careful and precise specialist in hadith, especially the Sahih al-Bukhari collection. She taught in Makkah and became known as a **Makkan Shaykhah**.
- She was a woman of careful assessment. Her *ijazah* (license) was not easily earned, and she had very specific requirements for her students. She would strictly assess her students, by insist of being a part of the comparison process of the work of the students with her original work, doing the evaluation herself.
- She lived until she was 100 years old, leaving a **legacy of male and female students** in her wake. Az-Zahabi said she was a woman of great knowledge, piety and goodness. Herewith giving testimony that she was a woman of worship, wisdom, and of great and beautiful faith



Source: Rabata.org

A Malaysian “shaykhah” in a different field -namely the field of Ophthalmology- is:

Prof. Dr. Muhaya Hj. Mohamad Specialist eye surgeon

Prof Muhaya originates from Kuala Terengganu and she graduated from medical school in 1985, obtained a Fellowship in Uveitis at Moorfields Eye Hospital, UK in 1998 and her PhD from University of London in Ocular Immunology. She was the first Malaysian to subspecialise in Uveitis and started the first Uveitis Service and immunosuppressive therapy in autoimmune eye diseases in the country.

To date, she is the point of reference in the management of Uveitis cases and has provided training for local ophthalmologists and residents in the field of Uveitis. Besides serving as **Consultant Eye Surgeon**, she is also a **professor**, who used to lecture under- & postgraduates in UKM and IIUM. Currently she has her own clinic in Kajang.

Prof Muhaya is the first Malaysian to have a formal training in the use and interpretation of Optical Coherence Tomography (which is the latest state of the art diagnostic instrument, crucial in the management of retina and glaucoma cases)

Apart from Ophthalmology her other passion is personal development and motivation, hence she is a regular speaker in several Malaysia universities. She is frequently invited by local mass media and has a regular column on eye care in the Utusan Malaysia. Professor Muhaya uses the holistic approach in dealing with her patients by stressing the importance of being grateful at every moment in their life. Her ability to incorporate Islamic values into everyday life and her professional practice makes her a much sought after speaker in personal and professional development talk and eye surgery in Malaysia.

<http://drmuhayalask.blogspot.my/2009/05/resume-professor-muhaya.html>

Source: <http://intrend.com.my>
(credit: Prof.Dr. Muhaya Mohamed)



Next, is a Chinese born, accomplished scholar by the age of 19, Fatima bint Sa'd al Khair. Fatima was a student to the great teachers from the generation before her and became a sought after teacher, wherever she travelled around the world.



Source: Rabata.org

6TH CENTURY

Fātima binti Sa'd al Khair (d. 600 AH)

- Her parents travelled from Valencia to China, when the situation in Spain was starting to change. She was born in China. Her father was her first teacher and she was spotted in hadith circles at the age of seven.
- She spent her whole life traveling with her scholarly family **seeking** (knowledge from) **teachers and hadith**. By 19, when her father died, she was already an accomplished scholar. Perhaps a kind of child protégé.
- She lived during the time of Salahuddin Ayyubi, who had taken back Jerusalem. She crossed continents in order to learn from the most famous teachers of her age. E.g. she studied together with her father with Ibn al Jawzi.
- And also with, the famous female scholar Fatima al-Jazdaniyyah, who was the longest living narrator of the books of at-Tabaraani and the shortest connection to those hadith.
- She was a **celebrated muhadithah** and known to be **generous and pious**.
- She taught mostly in Cairo and Damascus, leaving a long list of students who credited her with their learning.

An experiential learning traveller in her own right is the Malaysian lady:

Wardah binti Hassan (Studio of Aesthetical Inspirations)

"A knowledge seeking enthusiast, a heart-centric module developer and trainer, a translator and an author – those are among the tools for her to learn the *Dīn*. These tools were documented in her first self-help book of travelogue genre entitled "*Menjejak Cinta di Bumi Tuhan*" ("Tracing Divine Love").

While delivering her key roles in the corporate sector, she obtained Diploma in Human Resource Management and then Executive Diploma in Counselling. She is also credited with a professional certificate in translation from Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia (ITBM).

After spending 20 years in the corporate world, she bid farewell and turned her focus on reviewing the purpose and meaning of life from the worldview of Islam. She then founded a business entity known as Studio of Aesthetical Inspirations (Sanggar Ilham Estetika) that offers translation and editorial service, content development and consultation. Besides providing these services, she continues to transfer skills and knowledge via training programs and private retreats. Her undimmed desire as an

experiential learner and student of knowledge are encapsulated in her traveling, experiencing and continuous learning of both Western and Eastern civilization in 36 countries thus far. Her most recent conquest was tracing the contextualization of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan through 800 years of *tamadun* (civilization) of Islam in al-Andulus and 600 years in Balkans; 14 countries in 3 months.

Therefore, the content of her training programs, workshops etc. in Malaysia and abroad are based on the framework of Worldview of Islām, focusing on re-engaging the heart and rekindling potential of intellect (*'aql*) of a human being, contextualized with present challenges, intermeshed with skills and ability she attained during her tenure in corporate sector as well as after.

She also conduct inspiring private retreats, dedicated to individual and families such as "Being Present; the Alchemy of Happiness -- How to Respond Effectively in This Accelerating-Paced Era".



Source: Wardah b. Hassan

For the 7th century contribution, we travel to the Indian Subcontinent and meet Razia Sultan, ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. She was a warrior, leader, and institution builder who championed equal rights for all her people.

7TH CENTURY

Rāzia Sultan (d. 637 aH /1240 CE)

- Razia's ancestors were Muslims of Turkish descent who came to India in the 11th century. Contrary to custom, her father selected her, over her brothers, to be his successor. Starting 1236CE, she ruled the Delhi Sultanate for 4 years, the only female ever to rule the Delhi Sultanate and the first Muslim female ruler in South Asia
- Her father, Sultan Shams al-Din Iltumish, would often say about her, **“This daughter of mine is better than many sons”**.
- One of the first things she did as a leader was to create and build diplomatic ties with the Abbassiyyeen, important step to legitimize the Delhi Sultanate as part of the larger Muslim *ummah*.
- A **devoted ruler** who established peace and order, encouraged trade, built roads and bridges, planted trees, dug wells, supported poets, painters, and musicians.
- A **patron of the arts and education** and the sciences flourished under her directives. She established hundreds of schools (both religious and secular), research centres and libraries.
- She also worked for the rights of **people from other faiths**, concerned and assuring that there wasn't any oppression and all people were treated well and fairly and with dignity and honour. Yet, she made enemies when she tried to eliminate some of the discriminations against her Hindu subjects.
- A **defender of minority rights**, which made her popular among the general public. State meetings were often open to the people.
- She worked hard in loyalty to the country she led, yet there were rebellions and the nobility was not sure they wanted this leader, because of her ancestors were not noble, rather her family had come from slave origin.
- She was a wonderful horse woman, and during rebellions she would go herself squashing rebellions. Eventually the rebellions won, she and her husband were ambushed and killed.



Source: Rabata.org

We like to introduce you to a Malaysian resident and activist:

Azwan Martin

She was born in Australia and came to Malaysia, converted to Islam and married a Malaysian in 1967.

She joined Islamic Outreach ABIM from its beginning in 1985, and was involved in several of their outreach programs, such as visiting the sick in hospitals as well as serving as a **Masjid Tour Guide volunteer** in Masjid Negara, where hundreds of tourists from all over the world visit and would like to be informed about the masjid and Islam. Sister Azwan is one of the volunteers who encourages the visitors to discover their purpose of life in this world.

All these years she has been an activist who has helped sisters with reading of Quran and explaining the beauty of Islam to various new or potential Muslims. Besides that, she also organises weekly classes in her house with a teacher of Tafsir, Quran and *Hadith* for friends, family and anyone interested in joining.

Furthermore, she also teaches English to the underprivileged refugee children from Myanmar at the Madrasah Hashimiyah (Selayang).



In the 8th century, the people of Yemen were blessed, for 14 months, with the generous and beautiful leadership of Queen Al-Adar.

8TH CENTURY

Al-Ādār al Karīma (d. 762 aH /1361CE)

- Mother of King Ali Dawood (5th Rasulid Kings of Yemen)
- She was like a vice-regent Queen of Yemen, it was for a 14-month period, when her son left and had left her in charge.
- During this time, she was able to create peace between arguing tribes and build a sense of justice and fairness in the land.
- She sought to fulfil the needs of her people through philanthropy and giving: known to be the generous queen.
- She was named as the “Lordly Lady of Piety”, as she was a woman of great faith, prayer and *tahajjud*.
- She used her own money to established schools, opened masjids and strengthened internal security. She would sponsor scholars and those who were seeking knowledge, students.
- She was also known as the champion of the poor. In seeking to give money she would go out and find those in need, personally visiting the poor, entering their homes in order to check what their needs were and fulfil them.



Source: Rabata.org

We like to introduce you to a lady active in reviving the **Sunnah of Philanthropy** in Malaysia:

Hayati Ismail (Food Aid Foundation)

Hayati Ismail chooses to believe that one should speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, and should be the one whom speaks the rights of the poor and needy. Her involvement in charity works and community engagement began with small projects, which took place in her own community.

The event is known as the **FreeMarket**. It is a community project for the members to exchange the preloved items. FreeMarket is a unique project in which monetary transactions are completely forbidden. It is a platform for pre-loved items to find new ownership. The success story of FreeMarket took off and is organized nationwide every now and then. STAR Foundation Golden Heart Award has announced FreeMarket as the winner of national community engagement in 2012.

The next major project by Hayati was **My Street Interview** in 2014, a project to introduce pop-up interview counter targeting homeless and urban poor. Pop-up interview has given them the opportunity to break away from everlasting endeavour of being an urban poor. My Street Interview offers a long-term solution in assisting them to obtain permanent employment. This brainchild project of Hayati was again receiving recognition. She has secured government financial grant under the umbrella of *Berbudi Berganda Social*

Impact Innovative Challenge by Agensi Inovasi Malaysia in 2015.

Charity and community engagement as non-government individual has proven to be incapable of producing continuous high impact results. Therefore, in 2015, Hayati joined **Food Aid Foundation (FAF)** as the Director of Operations. FAF is a non-profit organisation, which serves as a ‘Food Bank’. The foundation wants to see food wastage reduced and end hunger in Malaysia. It rescues excessed food, which otherwise could be discarded as food wastages by collecting surplus, salvaged food and grocery products from food producers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers. Then, FAF take the role to reengineer the food, and redistribute to charitable/welfare homes, volunteer welfare organisation, refugees’ community, poor families, destitute and soup kitchen in Klang Valley. This food banking business has now diversified to other states in Malaysia.

At the same time, she also has started a program to educate the vulnerable and underprivileged community about nutrition and healthy eating. This ongoing work is providing valuable life skills to disadvantaged and marginalised communities.



28 Inspirational

We return back to India, where in the 9th century Bibi Rajee' built architecturally sound structures that still stand today, showcasing her expertise and skill.

9TH CENTURY

Malikah Bibi Rajee' (d. 822 aH /1477CE)

- A **pious, intelligent, Muslim stateswomen** from Delhi, India. She was well connected politically, married to ruler Jaunpur Sultan Mahmud Shah and used her position in society for charitable projects, and educational programs. She built **masjids, schools, religious retreats and bridges**. Some of them still standing, i.e. masjid Dargah Sulaiman; built 65 feet above the ground with a spectacular dome.
- She sponsored scholars and intellectuals, giving them stipends and prizes, while at the same time sponsoring students, offering them scholarships and living expenses, so that everyone could focus on the education rather than worry about finances.
- She was a **generous, brilliant women who elevated her community** and served scholars and students with resources and support.
- She was specifically concerned with woman's and girl's education, therefore she established a girl's school, to ensure that girls would have the opportunity to reach their intellectual potential.
- To let uneducated women relate more to the *Hijri* Calender, she started new names for Islamic calendar months. In that way they had an understanding where they were according to the Islamic Calender and could keep track of special days in time. Some names gained much acceptance in India like *Teera-tezi, barawafat, shabrat, eid, baqareid*.



Today, a lady known for her outstanding contribution to the development of humanitarian and international emergency relief is:

A trusted **humanitarian**, Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood was the driving force behind the establishment of MERCY Malaysia, the most successful nationally grown humanitarian organisation which operates both in Malaysia and internationally. She credits her interest in community service to her parents, as she grew up in a family that was very much involved in helping others, had other families living with them in the house and had no hesitation helping people, as her parents were very generous and kind.

Her deep understanding of the complexities of cross-cultural issues in the humanitarian and geopolitical arena and particularly with those surrounding the Muslim world has made her a strong voice of tolerance as well as advocacy on a wide range of issues. MERCY Malaysia, through Tan Sri Dr Jemilah's leadership, has become a model for civil community organisations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. And its success has motivated several organisations in these regions to improve their professionalism and influence.

Mercy Malaysia is actively involved in providing emergency assistance of affected populations in case of a disaster by utilising the Total Disaster Risk Management plan, which applies to all phases of the disaster management cycle, such as emergency response, recovery, prevention / mitigation, preparedness/readiness.

- In the area of health care MERCY focusses on
- 1) Primary health care with mobile clinics for vulnerable and underprivileged communities
 - 2) Cleft Lip reconstructive surgeries
 - 3) Mobile reproductive healthcare
 - 4) Mobile cataract optical service
 - 5) Psychosocial intervention and
 - 6) Emergency response unit.

Other areas of focus are: disaster reduction, water sanitation and hygiene for flood victims or other disasters.

www.merdekaaward.my/Recipients/By-Category/Education-Community/Tan-Sri-Dr-Jemilah-Mahmood.aspx

Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood (Mercy Malaysia)

Source: <https://teachformalaysia.org>



During the Islamic civilisation, numerous women excelled in various fields in Sub-Saharan Africa. Among them was Queen Amina of Zāriyah. In the tenth century in the Zāriyah province of modern day Nigeria, ruled Queen Aminatu with grace, dignity and strength.

10TH CENTURY

Queen Aminatu of Zāriyah

(b. 939 aH/ 1533 CE)

- She was the eldest daughter of Queen Bakwa Turunku, who founded the Zazzau Kingdom in 1536. She was 16 years old when her mother ascended the throne.
- Amina came to power between 1588 and 1589. It is said that she **ruled for 34 years**, inheriting the throne from her brother Karama (after a 10 years' rule).
- She is credited with being the first ruler who manages to **unify that large region** under one authority. She did that through military expeditions in order to protect trade and to stop the random wars and random attacks on caravans.
- At the time of her ascension to leadership, she was already known as a **fierce warrior**. She learned how to ride a horse in military campaigns, build weapons, introduced armour, helmets and chain mail to her army
- She was specifically known for her **military strategy, strength and engineering skills**;
- She is generally credited with the building of the famous Zaria wall and is credited with the Hausa habit of building **great clay fortress walls** around military encampments during her various campaigns. This fortress walls stayed even after the campaign and became villages.
- She controlled, and therefore made safe, trade routes. She built a network of commerce between the cities under her rule, giving the region economic prosperity. She introduced new product & goods into the region, such as kola nuts (used in Cola).
- She showed strength in leadership, authority, consistency, as was a contribution to the *ummah* by uniting and strengthening this Hausa land, the province of Zāriyah, were the people could live relatively safe, in peace and economic security.



Today, other examples of true strength can be seen in **two** of Malaysian sportswomen:

Siti Rahmah

Mohamed Nasir



She is an **athlete in Pencak Silat** (martial arts) from Kuala Terengganu. She is the daughter of former Singapore and Terengganu footballer Nasir Jalil, who was well known in the 1980s.

Siti Rahmah was the gold medal winner in the class E Puteri Silat event in Hanoi (2012). She won gold medal for women Sports Silat 60-65kg category at the SEA Games 28th (2015) in Singapore. Siti Rahmah who completed a hat-trick of wins in the World Silat Championships after wins in 2012, 2015 and 2016. Now Siti Rahmah is focussing and training hard for the SEA Games 2017 and the 2018 Asian Games.

Ras Adiba Radzi

Ras is a **newscaster** in Malaysia, is paralyzed from the waist down. She was not born disabled, but lost the ability to walk after suffering two severe spine injuries. First in a car accident in 1995, and again in 2001 when she was attacked by a man during an attempted car robbery.

Though Ras says she suffered from depression at first, by becoming active in sports -specifically, sharpshooting- this dramatically changed her outlook. The sweetest moment for Radzi was becoming Malaysia's top **sharpshooter** in the disabled category in 2003.

She has juggled both work and shooting commitments, shooting twice a week and taking a month's hiatus before the APG to focus full time on her event. Ras works from home as an independent TV producer, is a novelist and avid singer. The animated activist has never shied away from speaking about her disability, whether on or off camera. She reads the news twice weekly for

Malaysian channel NTV7. "My PWD (persons with disabilities) friends are ecstatic. When they see one of them up there, they feel that at least people are giving us some attention and are listening and taking us seriously."

Along with her TV appearances, she has also championed the same cause through different means. Ras is a record holder in the Malaysian Book of Records for her 14-day, 420-km trip in her wheelchair from Johor to Kuala Lumpur in 2003. She is also the committee adviser of Perwira K9, a support group that helps with the rehabilitation of patients with spinal cord injuries.



Source: www.kosmo.com.my

NOTEWORTHY MENTIONS

Mariam al-Mansouri

(born 1979 in Abu Dhabi), is the first female fighter pilot of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). She was one of the first women to join the United Arab Emirates Air Force (UAEAF) academy after women were allowed to join, and graduated in 2007. She flies an F-16 Fighting Falcon and leads UAE mission airstrikes against ISIS over Syria.



Source: <http://english.alarabiya.net>

Have you heard of the Taj Mahal? Did you know that it was named after a Muslim woman of deep religious practice? With 14 children and a loving husband, this testimony of Mumtaz Mahal's life is known today as one of the wonders of the world.

11TH CENTURY

Mumtaz Mahal (d.1040 aH/ 1631CE)

- This exemplary Muslim woman was born Arjumand Banu Begum, but received the title Mumtaz Mahal when she married Shah Jihan.
- At a time when marriages were most often political agreements, theirs was a love story. Mumtaz was a **deeply religious woman**, devoted, a woman of night prayers, praying for her husband and the ummah. She was his rock! Shah Jihan trusted her fully. He even gave her his imperial seal!
- She travelled with her husband on hunting trips and military expeditions. **Her prayers held him always in loving embrace.**
- She was an active part of the court, concerned about gardening and beautifying the area. She was interested in sports, and watching them.
- She gave birth to 14 children, only seven of whom lived past infancy.
- She died giving birth to her 14th child and her husband went into a full year of mourning and grief. Coming out of that state his hair had become white and his back was bent. Their daughter took the place of first lady and supported him.
- He erected the Taj Mahal (took 23 years) in her memory, hoping to build something that would speak of her greatness and in an attempt to communicate to people what she had meant to him. And indeed, the Taj Mahal became one of the **"7 wonders of the world"**.
- Her contribution both in her life and in her death is continuous, as people around the world, go to visit the Taj Mahal and learn about it, they are reminded of the beautiful spirituality of a woman who lived in the 10th century *Hijri* and uplifted the *ummah*; in her relationship with her husband, in her raising of her children, in her loving contribution to the governance and sultanate.



Source: Rabata.org

A phenomenal woman of our time, who is taking care of many children is:

Norlina Hj Alawi

She is founder of shelter of PERNIM (Persatuan Kebajikan Anak Pesakit HIV/AIDS Nurul Iman Malaysia). She has seven children and has adopted a total of 40 from among orphans, abandoned children, children out of wedlock, children that have HIV positive and she is also taking care of four disabled children, who suffer from muscular defects.

During childhood she was brought up with religious values, respect for human disabilities and a readiness to assist people in distress. Under the slogan "love without boundaries", she follows her dream of following in the footsteps of her late mother, who also loved to help people in need, without any distinction as to their status, religion, nationality, age (young or small children).

Puan Hajah Norlina Hj Alawi started safeguarding the welfare of children with HIV / AIDS in 2001, having moved from Sabah and settled in Taman Melur, Ampang Selangor. It all begun, when she had given shelter to a girl aged 23 years, who was

hearing impaired and as a result of sexual intercourse with a drug addict was diagnosed HIV positive after seven months of pregnancy. She adopted the woman's baby.

Motherly love and profound love for children with HIV / AIDS made her successfully establish a Child Welfare Association of HIV / AIDS Nurul Iman Malaysia (PERNIM), which does not charge any fee in any case. Her concentration is on fully protecting and educating the children under her care.

Since 2011 the organisation is known as Keluarga Besar Norlina Alawi Berhad. The aim of KBNAB, as the name "big family" implies, is to offer children an opportunity to lead a normal life with a set of parents, many siblings and access to religious and academic education.

<http://akuhivpositif.blogspot.my/2011/03/latar-belakang-pengasas-pernim.html>



Source: pernim.com

32 Inspirational

Arrived in the 12th century, we travel to a land we have not yet visited: The Ottoman State. Here we meet Asma Ibret, a phenomenal artist whose first work at the age of 15 was already extraordinary.

12TH CENTURY

Asma Ibret Hanım (b.1194 aH /1780 CE)

- Asma Ibret Hanım was an Ottoman artist. She studied the art of calligraphy as a young woman with the most famous teacher of her time, Mahmud Celaledin.
- She must have studied received her *ijazah* (license) at a very young age because she completed her first major work by the time she was fifteen. It was a commissioned calligraphic description of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w).
- Her work was presented to the Sultan. Since the art was so expressive of the beauty of the Prophet (s.a.w.) the Sultan gave Asma a monetary prize and started her on a regular stipend (salary), in honour of her work and to continue with her work.
- She was also given the **honourific title of "Ibret"**, which means **'exemplary'** because of her **good character and beautiful work.**
- Her surviving work can be found at Turkish museums (Topkapi) and in private collections.
- One Qur'an copied by her has been found in the Nafia al-Fayez collection. This is her last known work and was completed, when she was 28 years old and it is breathtakingly beautiful scripted, artistic decorated and of calligraphic penmanship.



Today's world also knows a few female calligraphy artists and from among the Malaysians we mention:

Dr. Nor Azlin Hamidon

Dr. Nor Azlin binti Hamidon is Head of the Department of Malay Socio-culture and Art, Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya.

Her journey in Islamic calligraphy started early on: at 11 years old, she was introduced to Islamic calligraphy and she felt in love with it. When she was 15 years old, it was explained to her for the first time, how the existence of dots serve as the measurement for the height and width of each letter. At 17 years old she competing successfully in Islamic Calligraphy competitions and in 1988 she won the first National Competition in Islamic Calligraphy.

Dr. Nor did her PhD in **Islamic Calligraphy Contemporary Arts** of Malaysia, and joined a lot of exhibitions in many galleries; such as Islamic calligraphy exhibitions in Dubai and Pakistan. Her commissioned work is abundant, in the form of painting, graphic work, logo, as well as teaching calligraphy inside or outside the campus. She is now preparing her first solo exhibition, which will commence in a year time.

Nor Azlin Hamidon remarks her artworks as the spiritual experiences through many layers of existence. Her priority is to live to the fullest and find happiness through her works, which in turn, moves to others' heart with this special dance of letters and movements of zikr throughout the canvas.

Her piece of advice is to never give up, even though there will be tribulations in achieving our goal. Being in a man dominated-field, is always challenging, but since it is her passion, each calligraphy is done with full heart and attention. The journey to create a beautiful calligraphy always starts with a *nuqtah* (dot), but ends with inner satisfaction.



For the 13th century we travel back to Africa to meet a familiar figure: Nana' Asma'u, a scholar activist, poetess, educator, and founder of an educational movement.

13TH CENTURY

Nana Asma'u (d. 1280 aH / 1864 CE)

- Scholar, poet and pedagogue, Nana Asma'u was the shining light of the Sokoto Caliphate. (West Africa, Nigeria states)
- She was a **scholar of Islamic sciences, a hafizha, expert in military science and skilled at translating** sacred text into practical community values.
- She was a prolific letter and corresponded with other scholars of her era, and was deeply respected. Her work was so important that in one letter a Shaykh Sa'd of Gwanda indicated that she is the **Mujadid** (renewer) of her generation.
- She was proficient in four languages; Arabic, Fulfulde, Hausa and Tamacheq (another local language). Her poetry was written in all different languages; depending on the language of the people she was writing for. Much of her poetry was written as curriculum material.
- She worked to bring education to the women of the Sokoto Caliphate, and made sure that women of her era were educated in Islamic sciences and health and other necessary topics, in order to uplift their minds and hearts and training them in various crafts and professions to guarantee the future of the *ummah*.
- Because of her concern about the number of uneducated women that lived in the villages, she developed a very creative method to reach them: She began an educational movement –Yan Taro- and literacy workshops. She wrote the curriculum (**in poetry form!**), like the rules of *fiqh* and intonation and trained "team-teachers". She dressed them in a particular uniform that would indicate authority and scholarship. Then she would send them off to villages in teams of two, to teach reading and writing and train women and girls in sacred sciences, health, and other curricular topics.
- Her work remains today in the collection of her writings and the modern manifestations of her Yan Taro Movement. Several schools and Muslim women's organisations were named after her, in her honour.
- She was a very deeply spiritual woman; it is said that she had *karama* (type of miracle health for the awliya', people of God)



Source: Rabata.org

A motivator in her own right is the next Malaysian lady;

Dr. Zabrina Abu Bakar

(www.siszabrina.com)

Dr. Zabrina A. Bakar, also known as Sis Zabrina is an **Author, Speaker, Columnist and Activist**.

As the Author of Bestselling Islamic Motivational Book Series 'Life is an Open Secret', she writes for her many columns, both in print and online.

Her motivational stories are based on true life daily happenings. Her writings are grounded in spirituality and the aim of her stories is for the reflection of minds and hearts of her readers. For her, Islam is easy to follow, simple, relevant and complete.

With the principle of 'No one can do everything but anyone can do something', she believes in the spirit of little people greatness. She works with many individuals and NGOs alike in a global scale including Viva Palestina Malaysia, Peace Trail UK and a few local humanitarian NGOs. Her humanitarian passion is not limited to war torn countries but also areas of natural disasters and even social cases. At the same time, she is currently also active in creating awareness of the danger of *riba'* and the importance of gold and silver.

She has a B. Accountancy and MBA both from International Islamic University Malaysia and was being awarded Doctorate in Business Administration (with Distinction) by the University of Newcastle, Australia.

Source: muslimahwritersalliance.com



In the Seventies an American-born convert to Islam would soon take centre stage: Amīna Assilmi, a woman whom dedicated her life and spared no effort of her work for Muslims in the United States and around the globe.



Source: Rabata.org

14TH CENTURY

Amīna Assilmi (d. 1431 aH/ 2010 CE)

- She was an **American Muslim pioneer**. Raised a Southern Baptist, she became Muslim in 1977.
- She was an activist, speaker and advocate for Muslim women’s rights. Her contributions to American Muslim life were so many; she established the US branch of the **International Union of Muslim Women** and with the National Organisation of Women contributed to designate rape, a war crime, during the Bosnian War.
- By her nationwide campaign, she managed to get a national Eid Stamp issued, which was reissued as a Forever Stamp in 2011.
- Amina was involved with early broadcast media endeavours of the US Muslim community, including Soundvision.
- She was a regular speaker at ISNA and other places.
- Her contribution to the Muslim community was far and wide; she fought for the rights of women, the rights of Muslims and family rights all whilst overcoming her own de-habilitating illness (bone-cancer) to create real and necessary change, despite any negativity or hardship within her own environment. She had also other struggles including with her family, who eventually all became Muslim.

A true contemporary Malaysian activist is

Dr. Fauziah Hasan

Dr. Fauziah originates from Terengganu. In 1982, she received a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) from the University of Tasmania, Australia, and MRCOG UK in 1991. She is also a Fellow at the Royal College of **Obstetrics and Gynaecology** (UK-FRCOG). She served as a consultant at the Ampang Puteri Specialist Hospital, KL. She is a mother of three and grandmother to six grandchildren.

Dr Fauziah’s age and petite size does not stop her burning passion to help out in name of humanity. She is very active in **humanitarian** projects; first with the Malaysian Medical Relief Society (MERCY Malaysia). She served in Kosovo (1999), Moluccas, Indonesia (2000), Afghanistan (2001, 2002, 2003), Aceh (2005), Pakistan (2005) and Gaza (2009 & 2012).

Since 2010 she served at Aqsa Syarif (Malaysian humanitarian NGO). Later the NGO came under the

umbrella of MyCare, which works beyond the borders of Palestine. In MyCARE she continues to lead various initiatives; such as Rose2Rose (R2R), which focuses on the empowerment of women and children, especially in Palestine.

She was selected as one of the 20 crew members of the Women’s Boat to Gaza (WBG). The mission was to challenge the Israeli’s sanctions on Gaza.

The “Zaytouna-Oliva”, which sailed out in September 2016, was intercepted near the Gaza coast by Israel’s warships on the night of October 5. All of the activists and crew were detained at Givon Prison, but later released.

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