In the name of Allah, the Benevolent, the Merciful

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Islamic Center Newsletter

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CALENDAR

MONTHLY GATHERING
Saturday, March 27, 2004

MARCH 2004 HOST FAMILIES
Dr. Mobeen and
Sumra Rathore

APRIL 2004 HOST FAMILIES
Tahir and Nabeela Sharif
Arsala Parwin

MANAGING COMMITTEE MEETING
March 28, 2004
2:00pm

DEADLINE FOR APRIL'S NEWSLETTER
April 02, 2004

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This issue is in honor of the Muslim women who have shaped and influenced our lives. March is Women's Awareness Month, bringing women's issues to the forefront of international discussion. Various organizations from around the world engage in a variety of program meetings, political activities, and service actions to address women's issues. It is indeed a wonderful idea, dedicating an entire month towards becoming aware of women.

In this issue, we have focused on the role that women have played in Islamic history. Despite the stereotypes, Muslim women have been an important part of the Muslim community. However, their achievements have gone unrecognized even in Muslim countries. Since the advent of Islam 1400 years ago, women have been scholars, mystics, orators, preachers, writers, warriors, and political and social activists. It is my intention to take this opportunity and showcase the outstanding achievements of women in our history. I hope their stories not only educate, but also inspire.

WOMEN IN ISLAM

By Imam Zaid Malik

Lots of people ask: "why are women oppressed in Islam?" and then they give examples of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan. Or they may ask: "what did Islam give to women?"

Before we can discuss what Islam gives women, we should discuss the treatment of women before the advent of Islam. There have been many civilizations before and in the time of the holy Prophet (pbuh). Persia, Rome, and India had great civilizations.

In Iran, women were sold just like any other commodity. Same was the case during the Roman Empire, where she was also considered the source of evil. This notion was supported by religious beliefs. Until 1856, it was legal for a man to sell his wife in England. In France, they debated for centuries whether women had souls or not (Herbert Spencer: Sociology). In India, there was and still exists today a Hindu ritual called "satti". This means that when the husband dies, his wife also has to be burnt alive with him. This belief stems from the thought that a woman has no right to live after the death of her husband. In Arabia, where the holy Prophet (pbuh) came, the birth of a girl was considered a shame. Some tribes used to burry their daughters alive.

In all these civilizations women had no right to inherit the property of her father. Only the sons inherited. In England, the law of primogeniture was famous by which only the oldest son could inherit.

Women were in this situation when Islam came and elevated the status of women. Islam gave women the right to own property, the right to choose her spouse or reject the proposal, the right to keep her own last name after marriage, and the right to be financially independent, which means that all women have the right to demand the fulfillment of their financial needs from their fathers before marriage and from their husbands after marriage, among other rights. Generally speaking, Islam gave all the rights to women that men had, because in the Eyes of Allah the All Mighty both men and women are equal. Here, I would like to mention some of the verses of the Qur'an and some sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) concerning women.

Allah the All Mighty says: "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor." (Qur'an 17: 23)

The holy Prophet (pbuh) said about mothers: "Paradise lies under the feet of the mothers". Once a man asked the holy Prophet (pbuh): "who deserves the best of my conduct among the people?" He replied: "Your mother." The man said: "Then who?" He replied: "your mother" and the man asked the same question and his answer was the same. On the fourth time his answer was: "your father."

The holy Prophet (pbuh) said concerning wives: "The best among you is the one who is the best in conduct with his wife and I am the best among you with my wife."

Concerning daughters he said: "Who ever raises three daughters and educates them well, I guarantee for him Paradise." A man asked: "what about two daughters?" He replied: "Yes, even if he has two." Another man asked: "what if he has one daughter?" He replied: "even if he has one daughter and he raises her properly and educates her, he will enter Paradise." The holy Prophet (pbuh) used to stand up in respect whenever his daughters visited him. He used to spread for them his shawl while he himself sat on the floor.

Concerning sisters we have the example of the holy Prophet (pbuh). He had a foster sister. When she visited him he received her warmly, respected her, and gave her lot of gifts upon her departure.

Regarding all Muslim men and women Allah the All Mighty says: "The believers, men and women, are helpers, supporters, friends and protectors of one another. They enjoin to do the good deeds and forbid from the evil. They perform prayers and give charity. They obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely Allah is All Mighty All Wise." (Qur'an 9: 71).

In Surah Al-Ahzab, Allah the All Mighty says: "Verily the Muslims (those who submit to Allah), men and women, the believing men and women, the obedient men and women, the truthful men and women, the patient men and women, the humble men and women, the generous men and women in giving charity, the fasting men and women, the chaste men and women and the men and women who remember Allah much, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward."

WOMEN SCHOLARS OF FIQH

ALIYYAH BINT HASAN
(d. 2nd century AH)
Aliyyah was the mother of Ismael ibn Ibrahim. She was a slave of Banu (tribe of) Shayban in Basra. Ismael's father was a cloth merchant who would travel to Basra frequently. He married Aliyyah after he manumitted her (set her free from slavery). She was a noble soul, wise and illustrious. Her knowledge of hadith and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) caused the nobles of Basra including Saleh al-Mari to come to her house and discuss religious and Islamic law.

AMINAH RAMLYAH
(d. 3rd century AH)
Aminah was born in 162 AH in Ramla, a suburb of Baghdad. She was very intelligent and had a longing to attain knowledge since early childhood, but as her parents were very poor they could not afford her education. When she was young she accompanied her mother on hajj. In those days an elderly male scholar gave dars (lectures) at the mosque in Mecca. She joined his lectures and learned from him the knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith. After his death, she went to Medina where Imam Malik had laid his rug for seekers of knowledge. Aminah joined his classes and learned hadith from him. Hafiz ibn Abdul Birr said that the number of ahadith reported from her is around 100. Afterwards she returned to Mecca and studied fiqh from Imam Shafi Rahimullah. When she was 36, Imam Shafi Rahimullah left for Egypt and she left for Kufa. By the time she reached Kufa, word had spread about her knowledge and she began to deliver lectures (dars) to those seeking knowledge. Her reputation was so great that Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal Rahimullah would visit her.

QADFAH BINT GHAFFAR IBN NUSAYR TAMIMI
Qadfah was a lady of excellence during the Muslim rule of Spain under Caliph Hakam Thani (Al-Mustansar). She collected books on various subjects and created a stockpile of invaluable books on literature, art, and other subjects. She recited the Qur'an beautifully and swayed her audiences with eloquent speeches.

KARIMAH BIN AHMAD MARUZI
(d. 464 AH)
Karimah was a world reputed scholar in the 5th century. She went to Mecca after having been qualified to narrate hadith and began to give lectures (dars). The noted Muhaddith (scholar of hadith) of Spain, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Sabaq Saqli Rahimullah, was a devoted learner from her. Khatib Baghdadi says in Tarikh Baghdad (History of Baghdad) that he, in 463 AH, during the days of hajj, heard Sahih Bukhari from Karimah. Hundreds of seekers of knowledge would be at the lectures (dars) of Karimah.

SHIRIN BINT ABDULLAH
(d. 640 AH)
Shirin was a native of India. She was the slave of the renowned scholar Ibn Bandayhi, who set her free. She had a distinguishable place among the scholars. Among her students was Abar Kohi, who later became a scholar. In later years people would refer to her as the Shaykh of Abar Kohi.

UMM-UL-KHAYR
(d. 640 AH)
Umm-ul-Khayr was born in Baghdad and was known for her vast knowledge of hadith. She reached such a high level of knowledge that she was given the title "Jamal un Nisa" ("Elegant Woman"). She gained knowledge from scholars such as Al-Bati, Abu Al Muzaffar, and Shuja Al Harbi. Later she established her own school which in turn generated many more scholars such as Fatimah bint Sulayman, Ibn Shehnah, Ibn Sadah, Ibn Asakir, and Taqi-ud-Din Sulayman.

MARYAM BINT ALI
(d. 8th or 9th century AH)
Maryam memorized the Qur'an at an early age, as well as the well known book on 'Nahve' (syntax) and Mukhtasir Abi Shujaa, a noted book of the Shafi jurisprudence. She was an authority on 'Nahve', fiqh, and hadith. She established her own school and was one of the teachers of Shaykh Jalaluddin Suyyuti.

Other Muslim women scholars: Rabia al Adawiya al Qadsiyya; Rabi'ah bint Mu'awwad; Umm 'Atiyyah; Sayyida Nafisa; Fatimah bint Qays; Hafsa bint Sirin; Shudah, Fakr Un Nisa; Fatimah bint Ibrahim; Aishah bint Muslim Harrani; Fatimah bint Jamaluddin; Khadijah bint Ahmad; Rajab; Zaynab bint Abdur Rehman; Habibah Muhaddithah; Zaynab bint Abdullah Al Azhari; Aishah Andalusyah; Satt ul Fuqaha; Hanifah; Malikah; Umm Umar; Amat ul Khalique; Fatimah bint Ibrahim; Zaynab bint Sulayman; Zumarrad Khatun; Satt ul Ahl; Hamdah; Amaim; Bint Imam Tahawi

POLITICALLY ACTIVE WOMEN

KHADIJAH BINT KHUWAYLID
The wife of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Khadijah is considered the model archetypal Muslim and was described by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) after her death in the following words: "she believed in me when no one else did; she accepted Islam when people rejected me; and she helped and comforted me when there was no one else to lend me a helping hand." Khadijah, the first woman to accept Muhammad as a prophet of God, was perhaps the most significant reason behind his success.

BELQUEES, QUEEN OF SHEBA
She represented a democratic ruler who consulted with her people before making important decisions (Surah 27: 29). She visited Prophet Sulaiman, talked to him, and made decisions for herself and her people.

SUMAYA ZAWJAAT YASIR
Sumaya was the first martyr in Islam. She was tortured and killed because of her belief in the Prophet (pbuh) and the message he brought of one God.

UMM SALAMA,
ONE OF THE PROPHET'S WIVES
She was instrumental in advising the Prophet (pbuh) during the crisis at Hudaybiya in 628 AD. Her advice prevented disunity among the Muslims after the Treaty of Hudaybiya and her opinion prevailed over that of many men, including Umar ibn al Khattab. She asked the Prophet (pbuh) why only men were mentioned in the Qur'an and in response God revealed the following verse:
"Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before God, and all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for all of them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward." (Surah 33:35).

UMM HANI BINT ABI TALIB
She offered refuge to two non-Muslim men who sought protection after the opening of Mecca. After she offered them refuge she went to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him what she had done. He said to her, "we offer refuge to whomever you offered and we guarantee the safety to whomever you guaranteed safety." Thus, in essence, Umm Hani, performed a significant political function, one often reserved only for the ruler, when she granted political asylum to these men.

GHAZALA (699 AD)
Ghazala led her male warriors in prayer in Kufa after having controlled the city for a day. Not only did she lead Muslim men in prayer, she recited the two longest chapters in the Qur'an during that prayer. (Some scholars do no accept her as a legitimate precedent because she belonged to the Kharijite sect, a group of puritans known for their piety who revolted against Ali and Muawiya).

UMM WARAQA BINT ABDULLAH
Umm Waraqa was an Ansari woman who was well versed in the Qur'an, was instructed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) to lead "ahl dariha," (ahl means the people of her home and dar means the home and can be referred to one's residence, neighborhood, or village) which consisted of both men and women, in prayer. The "people of Umm Waraqa's home" were so numerous that the Prophet (pbuh) appointed a "muezzin" for her. She was also one of the few to hand down the Qur'an before it was written.

SULTANA RAZIA OF DELHI
Razia was the only woman ever to sit on the throne of Delhi, India. Contrary to custom, her father selected her, over her brothers, to be his successor. After her father's death, she was persuaded to step down from the throne in favor of her stepbrother Ruknuddin, who, like her brothers, continued to neglect the kingdom and live a pleasure filled life. Disgusted with his rule, the people demanded that she become Sultana in 1236. She established peace and order, encouraged trade, built roads, planted trees, dug wells, supported poets, painters, and musicians, and constructed schools and libraries. State meetings were often open to the populace at large. She made enemies when she tried to eliminate some of the discriminations against her Hindu subjects.

Other politically active women: Asma bint Umais; Shajar Ad Durr; Shaghab; Sakandar Begum; Al Udar Al-Karimah Shihaab Addin Salaah; Umm Aiman Barakah; Umm Salamah; Fatimah; Samra bint Nhayk Al Asadiya; Rumaysa bint Milhan; Princess Iparhan

WARRIOR WOMEN

UMM IMARA
She defended the Prophet (pbuh) during the Battle of Uhud after the Muslims were defeated. Umar ibn al Khattab said: "I heard the Prophet (pbuh) saying, 'On the day of Uhud, I never looked right or left without seeing Umm Imara fighting to defend me.'"

NUSAIBA BINT KAAB
Nusaiba was another famous female warrior who fought with the Prophet (pbuh) in the Battle of Uhud and later with Caliph Abu Bakr in the Ridda war. She was known as a courageous and dedicated warrior that Abu Bakr himself attended her reception upon her return to Medina. She fought and wounded 12 at Uhud, and the Prophet (pbuh) praised her fighting by saying, "Never did I look right or left but she was there defending me and fighting before me."

AISHA, ONE OF THE PROPHET'S WIVES
In the year 658 AD, she played a major role in the armed resistance against Ali, the fourth successor after the death of the Prophet (pbuh). Aisha went to mosques and rallied people. She was the only woman on the battlefield and led thousands of men into the "Battle of the Camel."

UMM AL DHOUHHA BINT MAS'UD
She attended the Battle of the Khayber and the Prophet (pbuh) gave her an equal share of the spoils to the men's.

UMM HAKIM
After the death of the Prophet (pbuh), she "single-handedly disposed of seven Byzantine soldiers at the battle of Marj as Saffar, as well as groups, even battalions, of women participating in the fighting."

Other Muslim women who participated in wars: Umm Saleem; Safiyya bint Abdul Muttalib; Khaibar and Umayyah bint Qais; Women of Banu Ghifaar; Yarmuk Contingent; Azdah bint Al Harith; Khawalah bint Al Azwar

WOMEN BENEFACTORS

NUR JEHAN
Married to the Mughul Emperor Jahangir, she was an excellent conversationalist, a fine judge of Persian poetry and a poet herself. Nur Jahan was a patron of painting and architecture whose interests also extended to the decoration of rooms as well as the designing of ornaments, brocades, rugs and dresses.

ZUBAIDAH BINT JA'FAR B AL MANSUR
She was the wealthiest and most powerful woman of her time. She was the wife of Harun Ar-Rashid. She is often described as a benefactor of political acumen and understanding, noble woman, generous and munificence, possessor of great intellect and profound opinions, eloquent master of Arabic, a builder of cities, Mecca's water supply, and the pilgrimage route. She was also a patroness of writers, poets, and physicians - irrespective of their religion.

Other Muslim women benefactors: Turkaan Khatuun; Fatimah Al Fihriyah; Zubaidah bint Ja'far

WOMEN IN MEDICINE

RUFAIDAH BINT SA'AD
She is recognized as the first Muslim nurse. Her full name was Rufaidah bint Sa'ad of the Bani Aslam tribe of the Khazraj tribal confederation in Madinah. She was among the first people in Medina to accept Islam and was one of the Ansar women who welcomed the Prophet (pbuh) on arrival in Medina. She did not confine herself to the clinic, but went out to the community and tried to solve the social problems that lead to disease. She was both a public health nurse and social worker. In peace time she set up a tent outside the Prophet's mosque in Medina, where she nursed the sick. During war time she led groups of volunteer nurses who went to the battlefield and treated the casualties. She participated in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, Khibar, and others. Rufaidah's field hospital tent became very famous during the battles and the Prophet (pbuh) used to direct that the casualties be carried to her.

ASH SHIFA BINT ABDUALLAH
Her actual name was Layla, and "Ash Shifa" was the title given to her. She was appointed inspector of the markets at Medina by Caliph Umar ibn Al Khattab. She was also skilled in medicine and public administration.

ARTISTIC WOMEN

WALLADAH BINT MUSTAKFI
Walladah was the daughter of the caliph of Cordoba in Islamic Spain. Cordoba was a tolerant, multicultural society famous for its many libraries and sophisticated literary life, in which women were often scholars. After her father's death, she inherited enough wealth to guarantee her independence. She was well known as a poet and hosted literary gatherings for both men and women.

NANA ASMA'U
Nana was a poet, teacher, and role model for Muslim women. She was also a scholar of Islam and a key advisor to her father as he taught Islam in Nigeria.

INFLUENTIAL WOMEN OF THE PRESENT

SHIRIN EBADI
Shirin is an Iranian human rights activist who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for her work fighting for democracy and the rights of women and children. She became the first woman and the first Iranian to receive this accolade.

ZAYNAB AL GHAZALI
She is a defender of the rights of Muslim women. She has been an organizer of women and a strong Muslim activist. At the age of 18 in 1936, she founded the Muslim Women's Association, in order to organize women's activities.

KHADIJA HAFFAJEE
She is a retired schoolteacher who is originally from South Africa. In 1996, she was elected Assistant Secretary General of the International Muslim Women's Union and was a member of the 1996 Steering Committee for Christian-Muslim NGO Dialogue on Development.

SHAMIMA SHAIKH
A foremost Women's Rights Activist in South Africa, a founder and National Coordinator of the Muslim Youth Movement's Gender Desk, editor of the progressive Muslim monthly "Al Qalam", and Chairperson of the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust in Johannesburg.

SHAHINA SIDDIQUI
She is a social worker and the executive director of the Islamic Social Services Association of the United States and Canada. She has written extensively on social topics such as marriage.

DR. INGRID MATTSON
She is the director of Islamic Chaplaincy and a professor at the Macdonald Center for Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary in Hartford. Her research is focused on Islamic law and society, especially in the early Islamic period. In 2001, Dr. Mattson was elected Vice President of the Islamic Society of North America.

Other influential women of the present: Marym Jameelah; Iman Elkadi; Aminah Assilmi; Rasha Al-Disuqi; Kishwar Bayunus; V P Suhara

Announcements

PEACE AWARENESS DAY AT UNF
By Samad Subedar

When: Saturday, March 27th
Time: 1pm to 4pm in the Robinson Theatre
4pm to 7pm on The Green

A day of learning covering nonviolent conflict resolution and peace building will include speakers, live bands, other performances, and will end with a drum circle. Organizations in the area that are working for peace will have information booths and other activities at the event. For further information, please contact the Muslim Student Association at: unfmsa@hotmail.com.

SECOND ANNUAL MEENA BAZAAR
By Saman Quraishi

When: Sunday, March 28th
Where: Islamic Center of Northeast Florida
What: Ethnic foods, huge yard sale, big-ticket auction items, and games for everyone.

Come Out and Support a Good Cause!

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To:

Attitudes Towards Women

O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them,-except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good. (An-Nisa 4:19)