

# Women in Islam



In the 6th century women were used as mere possession. With the arrival of Islam, women's position changed drastically. Women and girls were encouraged to study. Within the first 100 years of Islam, women filled important positions, especially in the private sector being entrepreneurs. This prominent role for women in society has sadly been decreased by a macho-centric culture of men, which is not based on Islamic values. In almost all Islamic societies, women have taken a leading role, in areas such as education and medicine. Notably there were many female surgeons and doctors in hospitals in the 12th century. Muslim women were in fact also warriors, leaders and engineers.

Some interesting facts about women in Islam:

- In the 9th century, Muslims already had very advanced medications. Very strict rules were applied when it came to the use and sales of these medications. One of the first medical inspectors was a woman who was appointed in 640 by Caliph Umar in Medina.
- Umm Waraqa bint Abdullah, was trained by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to function as Imam and leader of her tribe. There is a long history of female pastors (imams). In Turkey, China and the USA there are also mosque's for women only.
- Nusaybah bint Ka'b was a mother, a teacher and a warrior. At the Battle of Uhud, in the company of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), she also fought and was seriously injured. She fought at the battles of Hunain and Yamama as well. Unfortunately two of her elder sons (from her first marriage) died in the war. She got a third son and a daughter from a second marriage. In times of peace, she worked as a teacher.
- Some other female warriors were: Azdah bint al-Harith bin Kaldah, Umm Umara and Umm Hakim. Azdah, a nurse, led the defense of the army at the battle of Al-Murghab. Umm Umara, known as an excellent swordfighter, 'better than any man', as stated by the Prophet (PBUH). At the Battle of Marj al-Saffar, Umm Hakim slew seven Byzantine soldiers by herself!
- Music, in general, is not prohibited in Islam. Only music which leads to misbehavior is prohibited. One of the most famous singers in the Islamic world is Umm Kulsum (Fatima Ibrahim), also called the "Nightingale of the Nile" or the "Star of the East". She presented her poetry through beautiful, floaty singing. her father, who was a Imam at that time, taught her at a very young age to recite the Quran. She became a Quran Hafiza (someone who knows the Quran completely by heart).
- In the 14th century, education was a standard and Muslims were so highly educated that there was hardly a Muslim who could not read or write. One of the largest universities in Fez, Morocco was Al-Qarawiyin. This was built by a woman, Fatima al-Fihri, in the year 841 CE. She was the daughter of a wealthy businessman and wanted to donate a learning center (madrassa) to the community. No entry fee had to be paid and students received money for food and accommodation every month. All this was sponsored by the wealthy within the community.
- In Timbuktu (Mali, West Africa) there is the Sankore University, which was funded by a wealthy lady from the Mandinka tribe, an ethnic group in West Africa. The Mandinka also have descendants among Afro-Surinamese. This university was built around the Sankore mosque, which was built in 989 CE. The Sankore University was the largest university of the Islamic empire. It could accommodate up to 25,000 students and owned 700,000 books. Here teaching was also done by women.
- Hadhrat Hafsa (peace be upon her), who was the daughter of the second Caliph Umar (pbuh), was the custodian of the first authentic Quran. This 7th century version is used to verify each copy of the Quran created / printed thereafter.



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