

# THE CONTRIBUTIONS *of* WOMEN in ISLAMIC STUDIES and EDUCATION

*Malay Archipelago*

This book is the result of a group of scholars' writings sponsored by Yayasan Bukhari who want to recognize the important role that women have played in Islamic education across the Malay archipelago. The book acknowledged that the pre- and post-colonial systems had an impact on popular perceptions and beliefs on Islamic studies, highlighting the diverse educational backgrounds of each individual. The purpose of this book is to explain and comprehend the ways in which women, particularly in the area of Islamic studies, contribute to the educational system. It uncovers how women's empowerment has been attained through the system, and how the system influences women's duties and responsibilities in all spheres of life. Justice in gender equality has been achieved as a result of the major works and writings in this book, which extensively discussed the importance of education as a game-changer that raises the bar for women's empowerment. The goal of the empirical facts and scientific research is to raise awareness, aid in understanding the importance of women's roles in Islamic studies and society, as well as encourage women everywhere to make positive contributions to their own well-being as well as the Islamic education of those around them.

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Edited by

RAUDLOTUL FIRDAUS FATAH YASIN  
MEK WOK MAHMUD

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# **THE CONTRIBUTIONS of WOMEN in ISLAMIC STUDIES and EDUCATION**

*Malay Archipelago*

*Foreword*

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# CHAPTER 10

## Women Contribution in Spreading Qur'anic and *Hadīth* Teachings Before 20th Century (Malay Archipelago)

NURDIYANA NAJIHAH MOHAMMAD RIZAT KHAN,  
RAUDLOTUL FIRDAUS FATAH YASIN

### 10.1 Introduction

In Islam, there is no distinction between men and women in terms of their relationship with Allah, as all men and women are promised the same reward and punishment for good behaviour and the same punishment for bad behaviour. In Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Allah asserts that men and women receive similar rewards and punishments:

*And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women (Qur'an, 2: 226).*

In addressing the Muslims, the Qur'an frequently uses the phrase "*believing men and women*" to emphasise their specific duties, rights, and virtues as believers. According to the Qur'an, women possess identical souls to men and will enter paradise if they perform charitable deeds. Allah says,

*Who so does that which is right and believes, whether male or female, him or her will, We quicken to a happy life (An-Nahl, 16:97).*

Therefore, this verse bolsters the claim that men and women are treated equally in Islam, without discrimination or special privilege.

History demonstrates that the presence of women is essential to a society's prosperity, expansion, and long-term development. Unquestionably, the presence of women was crucial in transforming an illiterate society into a literate one, particularly in the formation of the Malaysian government during independence. On August 31, 1957, Malaysia officially declared its independence from British colonial rule and embarked on a new path as a free nation, regardless of gender and race. On that historic day, numerous names were inscribed as warriors for their contributions to the nation's independence. In addition to the individual achievements of the courageous heroes and warriors, a group of accomplishments was also remarkable. They contributed to society by disseminating information globally, which aided in the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of religious teachings throughout the nation. Islam has remained the religion with the most adherents in Malaysia since it was first introduced to the country. During the early period, the Al-Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic teachings were taught to the locals by the preachers and teachers who initially entered Malaya as merchants. By portraying positive role models as Muslim fighters, some warriors have indirectly encouraged society to adopt Islam. However, historical records contain scant information regarding female soldiers, instructors, and ministers. While the majority of the famous warrior names in student textbooks and children's stories are male, Malaysia has many female warriors who were instrumental in the spread of Islamic teachings during earlier periods.

## **10.2 Women as Leaders**

Throughout history, there are numerous examples of Muslim women engaged in the work of *da'wah* and the propagation of Islam. Fatimah bint al-Khattab and Sa'id ibn Zayd's devotion to Islam, for instance, influenced her brother Umar, who

converted to Islam and devoted the rest of his life to it. This demonstrates that Muslim women played significant social and political roles in the early Islamic period.

In the context of Malay Archipelago, there were numerous women who contributed to the spread of Islam by serving as national leaders. Ratu Nur Ilah, the queen of Samudera Pasai, is the first example. She was a reigning queen, a monarch with absolute control over the realm she ruled. She adhered to Sunni beliefs and taught Islamic doctrine to her people. With the aid of Islamic religious teachers, the more orthodox Sunni doctrine of Islam became the prevailing belief system in the Kingdom of Samudera Pasai. Ratu Nur Ilah was a powerful queen who was able to reclaim lost lands, eliminate a rebel group, and maintain Sunni orthodoxy as the state religion of her nation (The Malay Matriarchs, 2018). Her power as a queen has brought glory to her country and people.

Ratu Nahrisiyah was also one of Samudera Pasai's female kings. The Kingdom of Pasai (1267-1517 M) is the earliest Islamic kingdom in the Malay Archipelago, and Ratu Nahrisiyah ruled the kingdom for over two decades (1405-1428). During her reign, she elevated the status of women in her country, and as a result, a significant number of women participated in the propagation of Islam. Some of them became religious preachers who disseminated Qur'anic and *Ḥadīth* teachings throughout the community (The Malay Matriarchs, 2018). Ratu Nahrisiyah's ruling has had a significant impact on the spread of Qur'anic and *Ḥadīth* studies throughout the country.

The aforementioned statistics indicate that women are capable of holding positions involving crucial decision-making.

### ***10.2.1 Women as Educators***

First and foremost, women have the same status and position as men in Islam. In the Qur'an, the status of men and women is equal. It denounces women's inferiority and inequality

with respect to men, as befits the claim that men and women share the same soul.

Allah said in the first verse of Sūrah an-Nisa':

*"O men! Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single being, and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you."*

This verse urges humanity to recognise that all humans have the same ancestor. In Islam, women have legal rights, such as the right to purchase and sell their own property. The Qur'an also describes women's inheritance rights. In light of this, women in Islam are strongly encouraged to pursue and acquire knowledge on par with men. In addition, Islam mandates that every Muslim pursue an education.

In the majority of Muslim societies of the 19th century, women were expected to be submissive to their husbands and fathers. Similarly, their career options were severely limited. The vast majority of middle- and upper-class women remained at home to care for their children and run the household. There were few opportunities for women to further their education despite the fact that education is a crucial tool for empowering women to build self-confidence and achieve economic stability and success. Education enables women to advocate for their rights. As a result of the establishment of Islamic female schools, also referred to as female seminaries or institutes, women were granted access to formal Islamic education.

According to Khairul Jasmi (2020), in Indonesia, Syekhah Rahmah El Yunusiyah, who is also a teacher, founded the first female religion school, Boarding Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang. The establishment's purpose was to assist women in receiving a proper Islamic education, indicating a heightened awareness of the significance of providing women with a formal education.

A woman educator's effort to establish an all-female educational institution exemplifies the increasingly prevalent



contemporary ideal of the female role. It emphasises further that women can pursue education while maintaining their femininity. Female educators play crucial roles because they hold the keys to ensuring that more young women have equal access to learning opportunities as their male peers. Having the support and guidance of a fellow female supervisor may also make female students feel more secure and comfortable studying in a classroom setting.

### *Qur'anic Teachings*

Muslims' primary source of knowledge is the Qur'an. It is essential to study the Qur'an because it is the primary source of Islamic law. Typically, preachers and teachers impart Qur'anic teachings. They will instruct on how to recite and write the Qur'an, comprehend its meaning, and memorise its Sūrah and verses. It is typically the responsibility of male preachers and teachers, but there are also women who stand and teach others about the Qur'an.

Zainun Munshi Sulaiman is one of the teachers in Malaysia who is dedicated to teaching the Qur'an to children. During her childhood, her father exposed her to both Islam and Christianity, but she ultimately decided to embrace Islam. Consequently, she established numerous religious schools to ensure that all children had access to Al-Qur'anic knowledge (Maisarah, 2018).

Khairul Jasmi (2020) noted that in Indonesia, Syekhah Rahmah El Yunusiyyah, the founder of the first female religious school, 'Boarding Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang,' evaluated her students on their ability to recite and write verses from the Qur'an. The test revealed that the majority of students can only recite short Sūrah, such as Sūrah Al-Fatihah. Some of the students could not even recite the Qur'an. From that point on, Syekhah Rahmah El Yunusiyyah was determined to help more women by establishing her school and educating those women who were still denied formal education about Islam. In her school, students would

Be taught to memorise and recite the Qur'an, as well as spell and write in the Jawi alphabet and become literate in the Qur'an.

In Vietnam, the Qur'an is taught by two distinct groups: the Tun, who are male educators, and another group that consists primarily of female educators. Female educators impart a Qur'anic education in the respective homes of their students. Additionally, known as Mai Tun, the majority of instructors are widowed women. They specifically instructed women and children in the Qur'an. They are highly regarded by the people of Champa due to their commitment to teach Al-Qur'an for free. The classes are free, but they will accept donations from parents who wish to contribute. In that era, Qur'anic teachings circulated throughout Vietnam because the majority of these women were willing to serve as teachers and preachers until their last breath (Hishamuddin et al., 2014).

### *Ḥadīth Teachings*

*Ḥadīth* is the second primary source of Islamic knowledge. Therefore, it is obligatory for every Muslim to study the *Ḥadīth* and Sunnah. In order to meet these educational needs, religious schools were established in Malaysia in the 19th century. Ramli et al. (2015) conclude that religious schools are solely focused on delivering Islamic teachings regarding the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* to Muslim students. The parents believe that these schools will provide their children with a comprehensive understanding of *Ḥadīth*. These schools' instructors were prestigious educators, and some of them were women.

### *Islamic Teachings*

Islamic teachings include instructing others about Islamic beliefs and practices. They include topics on *tauhid*, *fiqh*, and morality, among others. World-travelling sailors and merchants spread Islamic teachings across the South China Sea roughly one thousand years ago. Islam eventually spread

throughout the Malay Archipelago, and many men and women adopted it as their religion. They continue to teach their community Islamic principles.

According to Maisarah (2018), there was a woman named Shamsiah Fakeh in Malaysia who was the leader of the AWAS movement in Malaysia in the 20th century. She consistently inserted Qur'anic verses into her speeches. Hajjah Zainun Sulaiman did the same thing in her journal entries, including *Bulan Melayu*, which was transcribed using Jawi letters (Arba'iyah, 2020).

Jawi is an alphabet used to write the Malay language and several other Southeast Asian languages. Jawi is based on the Arabic script and consists of all 28 original Arabic letters as well as six additional letters designed to fit the phonemes native to the Malay language that are not found in classical Arabic letters. As is the case, Arabic script and language are recognised as the language used in the Qur'an. Thus, Islamic teachings have been indirectly disseminated throughout Malaysia as a result of the use of the Jawi letter in the primary magazine and journal.

According to Alexander Wain (2019), Cik Siti Wan Kembang, also known as the warrior princess from Kelantan, was one of the figures who contributed to the dissemination of Islamic teachings among her people. She ruled Kelantan and became one of Southeast Asia's most successful rulers of the 17th century. Similarly, Shi Daniang and Shi Erjie preached Islam throughout their respective lands and became Islamisation's central figures.

Tun Teja and Tun Fatimah from Malaysia, Laksamana Kuemalahayati and Cut Nyak Dien from Indonesia, and Sultanah Safiatuddin Tajul Alam Shah, the first Sultan of Aceh, who produced an arguably unrivalled legacy of Malay Islamic scholarship, were also instrumental in the spread of Islamic teachings across the Malay Archipelago. These women were successful in spreading Islamic teachings indirectly to other individuals (Maisarah, 2018).

## **10.2.2 Impacts on Society**

These individuals have had numerous positive effects on their society. They assisted their people in obtaining an Islamic education. In their era, the impact can be measured by the speed with which the Islamic movement and Islamic teachings spread and were accepted in their respective countries. This demonstrates that their role in disseminating Islamic teachings was successfully executed and accepted by their community. Though it may have been a difficult journey for some of them to preach Islam because some people do not accept women as educators for their children, these figures have ensured that the Qur'anic and Ḥadīth teachings have been disseminated to the present day.

### *10.2.2.1 Impacts on Society Prior to the 20th Century*

The significance of these women in the development of Islam in Malaysia and the Malay Archipelago is also documented. In journals, articles, and books, their role and contributions in spreading Qur'anic and Ḥadīth teachings are documented. This demonstrates that their contribution remains appreciated today. The reformation of Islamic family law is one of the major effects that can still be observed today. Aishah Ghani, a Muslim woman, reformed this law in 1980 (Maisarah, 2018) to protect the social justice of Muslim women.

The roles and positions of these women in society have affected the response of society to Islamic, Qur'an, and Sunnah teachings. In their respective countries, some of these women hold powerful positions, such as queen or Sultanah. These powerful figures use their authority to protect and care for their people, causing their citizens to view them as role models and adopt their lifestyles. This includes the option to adopt Islam as a religion. In the end, their efforts to spread Islamic teachings throughout society were successful due to their influential positions. Their people feel close to them despite their dominant social positions. The teachings of these

women preachers and educators among ordinary citizens have also contributed to the spread of Islamic teachings, as society is more receptive to face-to-face instruction.

#### *10.2.2.2 Present Impact on Society*

This research makes extensive use of articles, journals, and books as references. However, records regarding these women's contributions were difficult to locate among these sources. There were a few articles that elevated the status and honour of women as warriors because they assisted their nations in attaining independence. Some of them even served as national leaders. However, female teachers and preachers who were responsible for spreading Qur'an and Sunnah teachings throughout society are not mentioned in the majority of articles. It is essential to preserve the contributions of these historical women so that their efforts and sacrifices can serve as examples and be remembered by future generations.

Their teachings have helped people comprehend Islam and have created a community that adheres to Shari'ah and Islamic law. This is because the Qur'an is a comprehensive guide that provides a wealth of information on how to establish an advanced, Allah-blessed civilisation. It counsels us to be wary of God, to be righteous, to treat fellow believers with mercy and compassion, and to promote peace among them. In both the 19th and 20th centuries, the teachings of the Al-Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* remain applicable to the education of society.

### **10.3 Conclusion**

For Muslim women, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century marked a significant turning point. Women are now able to participate in a variety of fields, including politics, education, and others, in addition to the traditional role of housewife. The dissemination of Islamic education by these female Muslim figures has elevated the

status of Muslim women to a greater extent. Their community's Islamic education had enlightened them to alter the lifestyles of Muslim women.

Their contribution also had various effects on pre-20th-century and contemporary societies. They have demonstrated indirectly that women are capable of preaching Islamic beliefs and that women should not be oppressed due to their gender. The social standings and teachings of these figures were instrumental in promoting the notion that women can stand on their own two feet. Lastly, their contributions have ensured the propagation of Islam as a beautiful religion that protects the rights of women and treats them with compassion. Their contributions are still relevant and valuable, as evidenced by the fact that their teachings are still practised today. Therefore, it is necessary to carry on their legacy in order to ensure that more individuals acquire Islamic knowledge.

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