

## EXHUMING A LEGACY: FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF THE ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

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In 1870, the Married Women's Property Act was passed in the United Kingdom, which gave women the right to have possessions of their wealth for the first time. All thanks to the tireless efforts of Caroline Norton, this act was marked as one of the milestone achievements in the post-Renaissance Europe. The act, however, got repealed by another act with the same name in 1882 which gave women the right to own property besides having control over their earnings.



Worth noticing is that the Holy Qur'an had outlined these basic rights for women 1400 years ago and had rammed it down on a society in a single attempt which was more downtrodden and misogynistic in nature than Britain, Arabia. Today, hardly it receives applause from historians.

Without a doubt, historians at large, the Muslim ones in particular, have turned blind-eye to the feminine contribution to Islam. Women in certain parts of the Islamic world today face restrictions, repercussions and even death-threats over enrolling in schools or universities, yet on the other hand, it is barely known to anyone that the oldest surviving university in the world, the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco was built by a 9<sup>th</sup> century Tunisian Muslim woman, Fatima al-Fihri.

One such philanthropist contribution was also done by Lubna of Córdoba, a Spanish slave girl turned secretary of Caliph Al-Hakam ibn Abd ar-Rahman in 10<sup>th</sup> century Andalusia. A mathematician, she was the driving force behind the famous library of Medina Azahara and

was tasked with translating manuscripts. She spent her life travelling to Damascus, Cairo and Baghdad chasing books for her library.

Travelling itself wasn't a piece of cake back then. Arabs used to gaze at stars for directions and later on used astrolabes, an ancient astronomical device which calculated time and mapped the stars. In short, it can be called the Google Maps of that time.

Mariam al-Astrulabi is credited with the development of high-class exemplary astrolabes during the Islamic golden age. Her innovation immensely benefited the field of astronomy to an extent that the main-belt asteroid 7060 Al-'Ijliya in a rare move was named after her in her honour by Henry E. Holt in 1990.

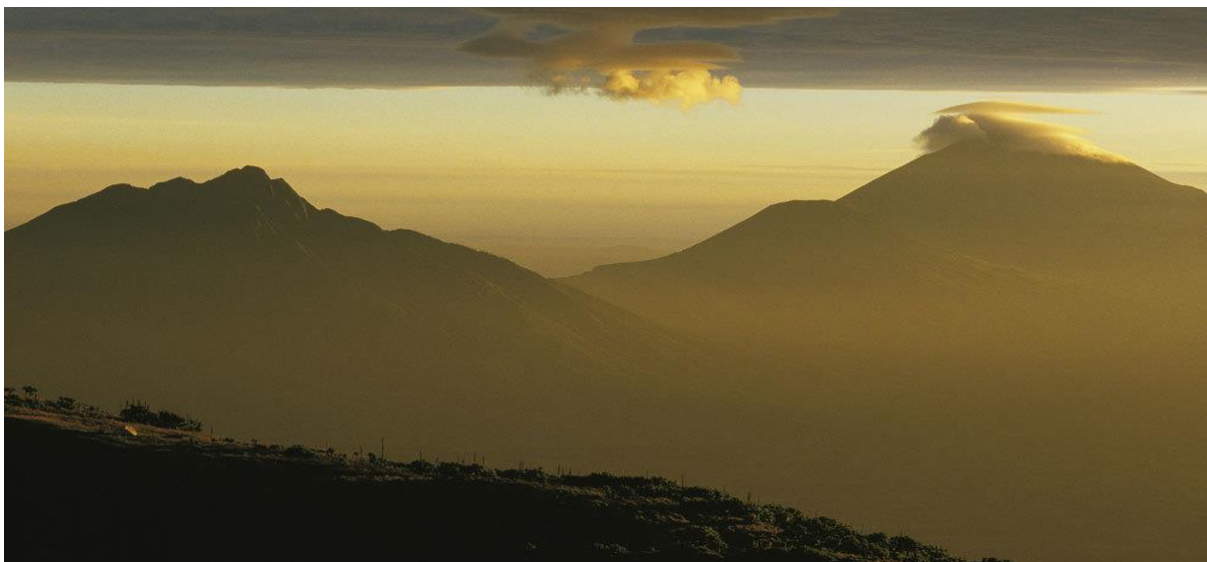
It's true that women were given very few chances to prove their leadership, especially when it came to politics or military, but they never let their people down whenever they got the chance of taking shot.

For example, Khawla bint Azwar, a great female commander at the time of Umar al-Khattab, had bravely faced-off with the Roman Byzantine soldiers all alone at the battlefield in the outskirts of Damascus just to rescue her brother. Impressed, Khalid bin Walid from that point on asked her to join his ranks in the military. Today, she has streets and buildings named after her in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, etc.

In diplomacy, Princess Sitt al-Mulk, a regent in the Fatimid Caliphate, showed her statesmanship skills by kick-starting the unfeasible peace process with Byzantine Empire which helped reduce tensions between the two states. Sadly, her sudden death stalled all of that.

In governance, Razia Sultana of the Delhi Sultanate was extraordinary in all aspects. Her four-year reign saw increase in trade, construction of schools, libraries, roads, wells and overall economic empowerment of the people. But, resentment to her rule grew within her inner-circle as she failed to understand the political dynamics and did certain blunders which made her overthrow imminent. She was deposed in a silent coup by her own slaves whom she had emancipated.

With all of the undisputable happenings mentioned above, I hope one can get retrospective next time in the defence of women leadership.



*About the Author: Pursuing B. Tech in Mechanical Engineering from Galgotias College of Engineering and Technology, and interested in current affairs, monitoring politics and creating and editing articles at Wikipedia.*

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