

Islam Had Its Share of Female Scholars Too

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KUALA LUMPUR: There have been over 8,000 Muslim women who have narrated and taught the hadiths in Islamic history, an Islamic scholar said Tuesday.

"In addition to transmitting hadiths, women can give fatwa (edicts) too," said Dr Mohammad Akram Nadwi at a public lecture at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) that shed the popular belief that such activities were strictly in the male domain.

"The Prophet Muhammad left an ummah (muslim community) where men and women were treated equally," he added, citing as examples several Muslim women who had taught and narrated the Sahih al-Bukhari in mosques and to several caliphs.

Dr Nadwi, who was speaking on the *Role of Women in the Hadith Movement*, is currently revising his 40-volume biographical dictionary of women narrators and scholars of the hadiths, that is, the reports of the sayings or actions of the Prophet or his companions, together with the tradition of their chain of transmission.

A research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies currently, he noted that in some parts of the world today, questions have been raised about women's presence in mosques when a woman had even taught at the prophet's mosque in Medina, sitting by his grave, long ago.

To a question from the floor on whether there were any "qualitative differences" between the narrations of men and women, Dr Nadwi replied: "Gender is not an issue. The qualification to narration is that the person must be pious and honest and he or she must be accurate, whether from memory or in writing."

"I must add that there have been many men who fabricated a hadith but there have not been any women who have been guilty of doing so."

On why Muslim women are more excluded from public life these days and few even know of the role of women in the hadith movement, Dr Nadwi said that many male Muslim scholars were not very keen to tell that their women were learned.

"I got the names of many of the women because their students wrote about them. There may be thousands others have not been mentioned at all.

"There was also no partition separating the men and women during the teaching and debate sessions on hadiths in mosques then -- I found that the names of male and female students were mixed and not segregated."

At a press conference later, he said that a fatwa is just legal advice that can be issued by a qualified and some Muslim women in Egypt, Syria and India had issued fatwas in recent times.

On why the Taliban had excluded Afghani women from public life if the Quran was gender blind as stressed by Prof Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali, the IAIS chairman (Hashim) said the dynamics of society was changing, citing how the new Constitution in 2004 that had included an affirmative action clause resulted in 68 women getting

elected into Parliament in the 2005 general election.