

Book Review

The Muslim 100: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of the Most Influential Muslims in History, by Muhammad Mojlum Khan

By exploring the ideas, thoughts and achievements of the Muslim world's most influential people, the author develops a new and exciting approach to the study of Islamic history and culture.

THROUGH the lives of 100 most influential Muslim rulers and conquerors, religious scholars and philosophers, writers and literary figures, scientists and explorers, military generals and freedom fighters, reformers and educationalists, this book takes you to the heart of Islamic thought, history, culture and civilization.

This book is an anthology of biographies of one hundred influential Muslim personalities whom the author has selected according to their influence on Muslims throughout the fifteen centuries of Islam. Influence, based on their contributions and achievements, was therefore the main criterion for selection and inclusion in this book. But this raises an interesting question, namely how the nature and extent of each person's influence was to be measured?

The author explains that he began by examining their lives and thoughts, and then proceeded to assess the nature of their contribution by evaluating what they actually did and what was so special or extraordinary about their deeds, actions and accomplishments. In so doing, he claims to be able to determine whether their contributions and achievements had made them national, regional or international figures.

The Muslim 100 is a bold attempt by a young scholar and writer to explore Islamic history through the lives, thoughts and achievements of a selection of most influential Muslims. For Khan, a Muslim scholar, writer, literary critic and social scientist to start his book with the last messenger, Prophet Muhammad, is unquestionable. But he had to acknowledge the difficulties he faced if he tried to rank his one hundred especially if he had chosen not to arrange them chronologically. The selection was meant to be representative of all periods from the advent of Islam to modern times, who belong to a vast area that extends from China to Morocco and whose contribution have covered all fields of human knowledge and endeavour.

The author attempted to evaluate the intellectual, social, political, economic or cultural importance, value and impact of each personality's contributions and achievements over time. For example, by pursuing this approach he was able to include Professor Muhammad Yunus (the great Bangladeshi economist, banker and the pioneer of the system of micro-credit) in his book, but exclude Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the founding father of Bangladesh) since the latter's accomplishment has been largely national or at best, regional, while the former is today widely considered to be an important "international" figure whose contribution and achievement has become global, thanks to the increasing popularity of micro-credit across the world.

The hundred names include twenty personalities from modern times which indicated the gap between the bright past of the Muslim world and its stagnant present situation. Among the one hundred, the author listed four females. It is a fact that men have had a much higher profile in public life in every civilisation and this explains why only four women feature in this book.

The author's one hundred most influential Muslims include the first four Caliphs of Islam, Abu Hanifah, Al-Ghazali, Ibn al-Arabi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Uthman Dan Fodio, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Sir Muhammad Iqbal and Malcolm X.

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The book ends with useful supplements; a chronological list of the main events in Islamic history, a select bibliography and two indices one of names and places and the other of ideas and concepts. It is easy to read, well written and the author has avoided using technical language or unnecessary jargons.

The Muslim 100 is aimed primarily at students and the general educated readers although scholars will also find it useful and informative. This book has filled a gap in modern Islamic authorship, where the demand is urgent for quick desk reference books on the lives and thoughts of leading Muslim personalities in various epochs of Islamic history. It is recommended to Muslim youth who are eager to learn more about their history and heritage. The author and Kube Publishing deserve credit for filling such gap. This book is bold in its assertions, encyclopaedic in its scope and monumentally effective in its approach. It will inform, inspire and stimulate its reader, and also generate much discussion and debate both in the Muslim world and the West.

The author is a young British scholar and writer who has published more than 150 articles, essays and reviews throughout the world and we look forward to reading his forthcoming book on the Muslim heritage of Bengal.

This amended review was originally written by Professor Farid el-Shayyal, a well known Islamic historian and academic.