

TEA & CHAT

Sahabiyyat and the Revelation of the Qur'an

29 JUNE 2026 • KUNAFI & TEA RESTAURANT



Ethnicity of Participants – Over 60 Attendees

Pakistani 80%



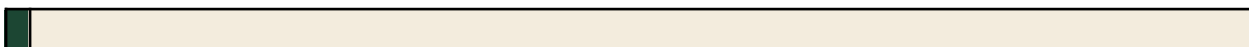
Indian 15%



White British 3%



Afro-Caribbean 2%



Led by Dr Shuruq Naguib

Location: Kunafa & Tea Restaurant

Attendance: Over 60 women

Introduction

The Muslim Women's Council was delighted to welcome over 60 women to its monthly Tea & Chat gathering on Monday 29 June 2026, for an inspiring and thought-provoking evening led by Dr Shuruq Naguib, Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Lancaster University and Chair of the Muslim Women's Council.

The session, Sahabiyyat and the Revelation of the Qur'an, explored the remarkable life of one of the lesser-known female Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah (رضي الله عنها). Through extensive research, Qur'anic exegesis and classical Islamic sources, Dr Naguib reconstructed the extraordinary story of a courageous young woman whose actions not only shaped her own destiny but also influenced Islamic law and the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The evening brought together women from a diverse range of backgrounds, and reflected the Muslim Women's Council's commitment to creating spaces where women can deepen their understanding of Islamic history, scholarship and spirituality while learning from one another.



About the Speaker

Dr Shuruq Naguib is a Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Lancaster University, within the School of Global Affairs. Her academic work focuses on Qur'anic hermeneutics, classical Arabic rhetoric and the intellectual history of Islamic thought. Alongside her research into Qur'anic interpretation, she has developed an extensive body of work exploring women and gender in Islam, particularly the ways Muslim women have contributed to, transmitted and shaped Islamic scholarship throughout history. She has previously served as Co-Chair and Interim Chair of the British Association for Islamic Studies, and currently serves as Chair of the Muslim Women's Council.

The Story of Umm Kulthum (رضي الله عنها)

Dr Naguib explained that the account presented during the session was carefully reconstructed from numerous historical sources, including classical works of Islamic law, Qur'anic commentary (tafsir) and collections of hadith. Although Umm Kulthum's story is not often told in detail today, the historical evidence reveals the profound influence she had on early Islamic society.

Umm Kulthum belonged to the Quraysh tribe in Makkah and, despite coming from a family who had not embraced Islam, she accepted Islam at a young age. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ migrated to Madinah during the Hijrah, she was unable to accompany the Muslims because she had no male guardian to travel with, and therefore remained behind in Makkah.

Several years later, following the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah between the Muslims and the Quraysh, one of the treaty's conditions required that anyone leaving Makkah for Madinah as a Muslim should be returned. At the same time, Umm Kulthum faced increasing pressure from her family to marry a non-Muslim man.

Recognising the danger to both her faith and her future, the young woman devised an extraordinary escape. She travelled alone, disguising her journey as one of her regular horse-riding excursions beyond Makkah so that her family would not immediately suspect her intentions. Dr Naguib invited the audience to reflect on the immense courage required for such a journey: travelling alone as a young, unmarried woman across the desert, knowing there was every possibility she could be returned under the treaty and face severe punishment, or even death.

Upon arriving in Madinah, Umm Kulthum sought refuge with one of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ. Veiling her face, she explained her situation and pleaded that women should not be treated in the same way as men under the terms of the treaty. The Prophet ﷺ listened carefully while his wife advocated on Umm Kulthum's behalf.

It was at this moment that revelation descended. Dr Naguib explained that Allah revealed verses from Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60:10), confirming that believing women who migrated should not be returned to the disbelievers after their faith had been verified. The revelation directly supported Umm Kulthum's actions and established an important legal distinction between male and female migrants. As a result, the treaty's condition was no longer applied to believing women.

This powerful moment demonstrates how the lived experiences of Muslim women formed part of the historical context surrounding Qur'anic revelation, and how divine guidance addressed their circumstances with justice, compassion and protection.

A Life that Continued to Shape Islamic Law

Following her migration, Umm Kulthum proposed marriage to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by offering herself in marriage. Although the Prophet ﷺ did not marry her, he arranged her marriage to Zayd ibn Harithah (رضي الله عنه), his adopted son.

After Zayd was martyred approximately a year later, Umm Kulthum married one of the Prophet's cousins. Dr Naguib explained that despite her husband's strong faith and noble lineage, the marriage itself was unhappy, with historical reports describing him as harsh in his manner, a reminder that personal character within a marriage cannot simply be measured by a person's status or piety.



One particularly fascinating legal incident occurred while Umm Kulthum was heavily pregnant. As labour began, she requested that her husband grant her a single divorce. He agreed, and she gave birth the following day. Because Islamic law states that the waiting period (iddah) for a pregnant woman ends upon childbirth, her waiting period concluded almost immediately, making the divorce final.

When her former husband complained to the Prophet ﷺ that he had been deceived and should not have to pay a new marriage gift (mahr) if they remarried, the Prophet ﷺ upheld the legal ruling. Dr Naguib highlighted how this incident became one of the foundational examples used by classical jurists when discussing the iddah of pregnant women.

Umm Kulthum later married Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf (رضي الله عنه), one of the Prophet's closest Companions. Historical reports describe this as a happy marriage, blessed with three children. During his final illness, some narrations record that she rushed to the mosque seeking patience (sabr) and strength from Allah, illustrating the deep humanity found within the lives of the Companions.

Her final marriage was to Amr ibn al-As (رضي الله عنه), the renowned Companion who later led the Muslim conquest of Egypt. She remained married to him until her death.

Throughout her life, Umm Kulthum became associated with the interpretation of several Qur'anic passages, demonstrating how the actions of individual Muslim women helped shape Islamic legal understanding for future generations.

Audience Reflections

The discussion prompted a deeply engaging question-and-answer session, with many attendees expressing surprise that they had never previously encountered Umm Kulthum's story.



Several women reflected on how the account challenged common cultural assumptions surrounding Muslim women. Participants commented that her determination, intelligence and independence demonstrated that women in early Islam exercised agency, made courageous decisions and actively contributed to shaping Islamic history.

One attendee remarked that the story challenged many contemporary misconceptions and should be far more widely known, describing Umm Kulthum as a strong, ambitious woman whose example deserves greater recognition.

Another participant reflected on the significance of Umm Kulthum proposing marriage, observing that some cultural traditions discourage women from taking such initiative, despite the precedent established within Islamic history.

Questions also arose regarding her unhappy marriage to one of the Prophet's noble relatives. Dr Naguib explained that righteousness alone does not automatically guarantee marital compatibility, and that every marriage has its own dynamics; Islamic history honestly records these realities rather than presenting idealised narratives.

Drawing upon the writings of Imam al-Shafi'i, Dr Naguib also highlighted how Umm Kulthum's story contributed to legal discussions concerning the protection of women within Islamic law.

Lessons for Today

As the evening concluded, Dr Naguib reminded attendees that women such as Umm Kulthum should not be viewed merely as historical figures, but as integral contributors to Islamic civilisation. Their lives, scholarship and experiences helped shape legal rulings, ethical understanding and the interpretation of the Qur'an itself.

She encouraged participants not to allow cultural attitudes or fear of challenging misconceptions to prevent them from studying the rich legacy of Muslim women, and urged everyone to continue reading, researching and learning from authentic Islamic sources.

Her closing reflection was a powerful reminder that these women did not simply witness Islamic history, they lived it, influenced it, and, through their courage and faith, became living examples of the Qur'an in practice.

The evening concluded with heartfelt appreciation for Dr Naguib's scholarship and engaging delivery. Attendees left with a renewed appreciation of the remarkable women who surrounded the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and a deeper understanding of how their lives continue to inspire Muslim women today.

Islamic Terminology

Sahabiyyah (plural: Sahabiyyat): A female Companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who believed in him, met him and died as a Muslim.

Qur'an: The final revelation from Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ over approximately 23 years.

Hadith: Recorded sayings, actions and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Hijrah: The migration of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the early Muslims from Makkah to Madinah in 622 CE.

Quraysh: The tribe of Makkah into which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born.

Surah: A chapter of the Qur'an.

Surah Al-Mumtahanah: The 60th chapter of the Qur'an, containing guidance relating to believing women who migrated to Madinah.

Tafsir: Scholarly explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an.

Mahr: The obligatory marriage gift given by a husband to his wife as part of the Islamic marriage contract.

Iddah: The waiting period observed by a woman following divorce or the death of her husband before she may remarry.

Sabr: Patience, perseverance and steadfastness, especially during times of hardship.

Iman: Faith and belief in Allah and the teachings of Islam.

Masjid: Mosque; a place of worship for Muslims.

Hudaybiyyah Treaty: A peace treaty agreed between the Muslims of Madinah and the Quraysh of Makkah in 628 CE.

رضي الله عنها (Raḍiya Allahu 'Anha): "May Allah be pleased with her," an honorific used after mentioning a female Companion of the Prophet ﷺ.

رضي الله عنه (Raḍiya Allahu 'Anhu): "May Allah be pleased with him," an honorific used after mentioning a male Companion of the Prophet ﷺ.

ﷺ (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam): "Peace and blessings be upon him," recited after mentioning the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Report created by the Tea & Chat participants
supported by the MWC Team

