

PROFESSOR RIFFAT HASSAN was born in what is now Pakistan. After receiving her early education in her homeland, she attended the University of Durham in England, from which she obtained a Double-Honors degree in English Literature and Philosophy (1964), and a Ph.D. in Arts (1968) for her thesis on the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the most outstanding Muslim thinker since the death of Jalal ad din Rumi in 1273.

Professor Hassan immigrated to the U. S. in 1972 and began her academic career in 1973. She taught at Villanova University, University of Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma State University, before joining the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1976. During her career at the University of Louisville, she introduced several generations of students to Islam and articulated a theology of Progressive Islam that has influenced Muslim men and women around the world. She was awarded the status of Professor Emerita when she retired from this University in 2009 after 33 years of distinguished service.

Professor Hassan is the founder of Islamic feminist theology, a discipline not known until 1974 when she began her systematic study of normative Islamic teachings relating to women. Her scholarly research and its dissemination worldwide became a life-long quest which she pursued with utmost dedication and unswerving courage. Her work was highly challenging and she encountered many dangers and difficulties in patriarchal Muslim culture. However, her forty-six years of ground-breaking work in the Qur'anic theology of women has inspired scholars around the world to undertake a thorough reinterpretation of core Islamic teachings on the roles and rights of women. This has not merely transformed the study of Islam in the academy; it has also directly affected the lives of millions of women in Muslim societies and communities.

Professor Hassan is also an activist who has traveled around the world talking to girls and women, as well as women's rights groups, in different Muslim countries. On account of her international stature as both a research scholar and an activist-educator, she became the principal Muslim feminist theologian at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994, and she was the only University Professor who was invited to speak at a plenary session of the Fourth U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

In 1999, she set up a non-governmental organization called *The International Network for the Rights of Female Victims of Violence in Pakistan (INRFVVP)* to focus public attention on the nature and magnitude of "honor crimes" in Pakistan which is the world's leading country in crimes which kill, maim, burn, and do grievous physical and psychological harm to hundreds of girls and women each year. The *INRFVVP* influenced the Government of Pakistan to outlaw "honor killings" in 2000 and to set up Burn Centers for indigent girls and women who are victims of acid-throwing or kerosene burning (a very common crime in the country). Its global network also made a significant contribution toward giving "honor crimes" priority on the international human rights agenda.

Professor Hassan has had another long-term commitment - to interreligious dialogue, particularly amongst the adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths. She was a member of the pioneer group of Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars who met periodically for several years in Washington D.C. under the sponsorship of the Kennedy Institute for Ethics. She is regarded as a leading Islamic scholar in the field of interreligious dialogue to which she has contributed a number of highly-commended scholarly papers published in academic books and journals. Throughout her career, she has participated in interreligious dialogue at every level - local, regional, national, international. She has been a presenter in many fora of interreligious/intercultural dialogue, including conferences, colloquia and seminars. In 2003, she was awarded the Distinguished International Service Award by the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville, in recognition of the extensive work she had done internationally to promote religious harmony.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Professor Hassan got an opportunity to respond to the global challenge in a novel and creative way. In 2002, the U.S. Department of State invited proposals which aimed at creating greater understanding between Muslims and Americans. Dr. Hassan spearheaded the College of Arts and Sciences' application for an exchange program entitled "*Islamic life in the U.S.*" involving South Asian Muslim scholars, religious leaders and community activists and their American counterparts. The application was successful, and brought the largest federal grant ever awarded to the College of Arts and Sciences up to that point.

In 2006, the U.S. Department of State awarded a follow-up grant for a program entitled "*Religion and Society: A Dialogue.*" During the exchange visits, intensive interaction took place in a variety of settings such as academic, interfaith, and community-based. Professor Hassan developed and directed both peace-building programs funded by the U.S. Department of State which regarded them as a model for all future exchanges involving Muslims. Her pivotal role in the programs' success was widely recognized.

Professor Hassan has traveled extensively within Asia, North America, Europe and North Africa, speaking to diverse audiences about important contemporary issues. She has made presentations at more than 250 events such as international conferences, symposia, colloquia, and workshops, in 30 countries, and at over 500 events sponsored by academic institutions, interfaith groups, Muslim groups, community-based groups and others in many states in the U. S. She has been a Distinguished Lecturer and featured speaker numerous times at scholarly events sponsored by colleges, universities, and other institutions or organizations. She has been a consultant to several international agencies, political and civic leaders, media organizations, as well as women's associations on human rights and women's rights. She has founded a number of non-governmental organizations including *The Iqbal Leadership Institute (ILI)* which is focused on the education and training of young Muslims who have the capability of becoming the future leaders of their communities and societies.

Professor Hassan is a prolific author who has published books, chapters in books, papers in journals and articles in newspaper special supplements. Many of her writings have been posted on

her website-in-process: www.riffathassan.info Lengthy profiles of her work have appeared in books published by major presses in Indonesia, India and Pakistan, as well as in North America and Europe. Researchers from Germany, the Netherlands and Indonesia have written their dissertations about her theology, and journalists from many countries have written about her.

Professor Hassan is the recipient of many honors and awards. Among the recent ones the following may be mentioned: Induction into the University of Louisville, College of Arts and Sciences Hall of Honor (February 2012); The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Award (March 2012); The awarding of an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by the Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago for “outstanding academic achievement and commitment to peacemaking and interreligious dialogue;” and the Mosaic Award given by the Jewish Family and Career Services for her services to the Louisville community (May 2013).

Professor Hassan received The 2019 Amel Zenoune-Zouani Rights and Leadership Award given by the International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL) on April 25, 2019 in San Francisco. In her letter informing Professor Hassan about this award, Nancy Newman, Founder and President of IANGEL, wrote: “Your passionate commitment to women’s human rights represents everything that we are working for at IANGEL. Your groundbreaking work to elucidate the Qur’an as rooted in fairness and affirming the equal dignity of women has made an immeasurable impact on the struggle to protect the human rights of women and girls. Through decades of research, teaching, writing, and speaking, you have been a powerful voice for equality and justice, and a courageous advocate against oppressive patriarchal dictates in the Islamic world. For all the outstanding work that you have done, we are deeply honored that you have agreed to accept the Amel Award of 2019...Thank you so much for your lifetime of achievement and inspiring work.” (Two articles about this Award written by Siddique Malik were published in the *Courier-Journal*, Louisville, on February 24, 2019 and August 3, 2019)

Professor Hassan founded *The Salaam Network (TSN)* in Louisville, in the Fall of 2016. *Salaam* is an Arabic word (*Shalom* in Hebrew), derived from the root s-l-m which is most often translated as *peace*, but it can also be understood as wholeness, safety, well-being, tranquility, and vitality. *Salaam* symbolizes *TSN*’s goal to work toward making our Beloved Community of Louisville *Whole* by making it free of disunity, division and discrimination, so that it can experience safety, a sense of well-being, positive energy, and peace of heart, mind, and spirit. *TSN* comprises educators, writers, artists, and peace-and-justice activists committed to countering Islamophobia and other manifestations of bigotry, hatred and mistrust in Louisville, the city of Muhammad Ali, America’s best-known Muslim and a universal peacemaker.

TSN defines itself as an education network as it believes that education is the best way of eliminating ignorance in which misconceptions and negative stereotyping of those who are different from us, are rooted. In view of the alarming escalation of anti-Islamic rhetoric and actions in the U.S. in recent times, *TSN*’s team of educators have made numerous presentations to

disseminate accurate information about the core beliefs and practices of Islam, its history and culture. Highlighting the commonalities amongst the three Abrahamic faiths has been one of *TSN*'s most notable educational contributions to our community. The Qur'anic exhortation "*O followers of earlier revelation! Come to a word that is equitable between us and you*" (Surah Al- 'Imran: 64) to Muslims to invite Jews and Christians to come to an equitable understanding with them, has encapsulated the spirit of several *TSN* presentations. Cognizant of crucial contemporary issues, *TSN* has also developed programs to address issues of religious and socio-political discrimination against women, LGBTQ individuals, immigrants and refugees.

Professor Hassan directs *TSN* with utmost care and commitment. Her unstinted labor of love has borne rich fruit and *TSN* has become a valuable instrument of education, advocacy, and progressive action in Louisville. In its journey onward *TSN* continues to be inspired and energized by a video on "Celebrating Cultural Diversity," made by its gifted Art Director, which holds before us the vision of an all-inclusive community where no one is seen as "the Other:"

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=5h0pG53kY98>

Website: <http://www.salaamnetwork.org>