

MATRIARCH

who inspires

2nd Edition - May 2026

**DIFFERENT
BY DESIGN**

**OUR WOMEN IN
THE COMMUNITY**

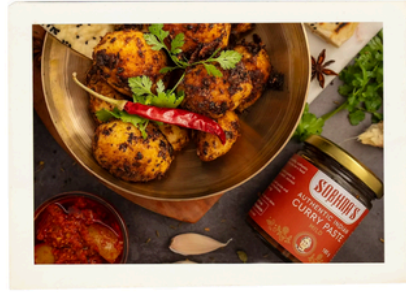
**WHY
OUR VOICES
MATTER**

ETHNIC WOMEN LEADERSHIP MAGAZINE

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Welcome to our second edition, one that feels especially meaningful to me, as it carries more women's stories of their matriarchs' journeys. From exercising our political role in society, to the art of motherhood, to the leadership bond between mother and daughter.

I would like to thank all our contributors who have openly shared their knowledge and lived experiences, with the hope that women like you reading this will not feel alone and will find the inspiration to lead, both in your community and in your family.

Beyond stories, this edition also highlights the work the Lady Khadija Trust and the Ethnic Women's Leadership Programme Team have been dedicated to throughout the first quarter of 2026.

You will also find two art pieces, one from our regular contributor and one from a wonderful new voice joining our community.

I hope you enjoy this second edition. Please do reach out if you have any suggestions or an art piece in mind for our next edition.

With warmth and solidarity,
Dinda Veska

E ditor's Note



Lady Khadija Trust
Empowering communities through compassion

WELCOME FROM OUR FOUNDER

Salam Alaikum – Kia ora

I am pleased to introduce this edition of the Ethnic Women's Leadership Magazine, themed "Matriarchs in Our Life." This theme invites us to pause and honour the women who have shaped us, guided us, challenged us, and held our communities together across generations.

Matriarchs are often the quiet architects of communities. They are the mothers, grandmothers, aunts, elders, teachers, neighbours, and community leaders whose wisdom is carried not only in what they say, but in how they live. Their leadership may not always be loud or visible, yet it is deeply influential. Through care, sacrifice, courage, humour, and steadfast commitment, they create the conditions in which others can grow and thrive.

Within our ethnic communities especially, matriarchs often serve as anchors of identity, culture, language, and belonging. As I look back and reflect on my own life, I find my maternal grandmother who had a great impact on the way I choose to live my life.

As you read through the pages of this edition, I invite you to take a moment to reflect and honour the matriarchs in your own lives with gratitude.

Ngā mihi nui,

Dr. Hafsa Ahmed MNZM

Co-Founder & Trustee of Lady Khadija Trust



OUR ALUMNI

F

ahima Saeid Where She Arrived, What She Built

By: The Editor



In this edition, we celebrate one of our alumni. Dr Fahima Saeid completed the Ethnic Women Leadership Course in Tāmaki Makaurau. She was already changing lives across Aotearoa, and her story is one we are proud to call part of ours.

Dr Fahima Saeid is originally from Afghanistan and came to New Zealand some 20 years ago. She trained as a medical doctor in Afghanistan, holding a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, and later completed a Master's Degree in Counselling with First Class Honours from the University of Auckland. She is a registered counsellor with NZAC and strongly believes in social justice, equal rights, and an inclusive society for all.

Fahima arrived in New Zealand as a refugee, a trained and experienced medical doctor whose qualifications were not recognised. She had to go through extensive training, university studies, and a change of career to secure decent work. It would have been easy to turn inward. Instead, she turned toward everyone arriving after her.

Together with her husband Dr Arif Saeid, she co-founded the New Settlers and Family Community

Trust (NFACT) in 2019, becoming its chief executive in 2020. As Chief Executive, she has organised Triple P parenting seminars, wellness retreats for women and youth, and provided assistance following the Christchurch terror attack in 2019 and the influx of Afghan refugees escaping the Taliban in 2021.

Her advocacy goes beyond programmes. Fahima calls for a shift from short-term support to long-term settlement investment, and for proper recognition of refugee qualifications and skills — an issue she describes as deeply personal.

In the 2026 New Year Honours, she was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the refugee community.

The honour reflects a journey that began with loss — of home, of recognition, of certainty. What Fahima built from that place is proof that leadership is not always born in comfort. Sometimes it is forged in the very hardship it goes on to address.

Emerging from the global pandemic, Nimeesha and her mother, Sobhna transformed their shared love of cooking into an online curry paste business after farmers' markets were no longer an option. As a daughter who treasures the memories and generations-old family recipes, Nimeesha wanted to ensure that her mother's passion for feeding people could continue despite the lockdown.

“ We grew up with really good food, and she was always really passionate about healthy meals.

The online business, Sobhnas.co.nz, sells at least five varieties of authentic Indian curry pastes in jars, alongside a range of spice blends. Each recipe is the result of knowledge that lives in Sobhna's hands and in the memories of generations of women who learned by watching their mothers cook.

The recipes have been carried by Sobhna across continents. From Gujarat, where the recipes were born. Through Zanzibar, where she spent her childhood and where her father took her twice a

week to the local leprosy mission to donate milk and bread. "The most important thing you can do," he told her on every trip, "is feed the people." Through India and England, and the long adjustment of building a life somewhere new. And finally, to Auckland, where the cooking continued, as it always had.

When Nimeesha needed to come up with a name for the business, she called it Sobhna's "Because I wanted it to be her legacy to the world." Not for the marketing but for something older and quieter than that.

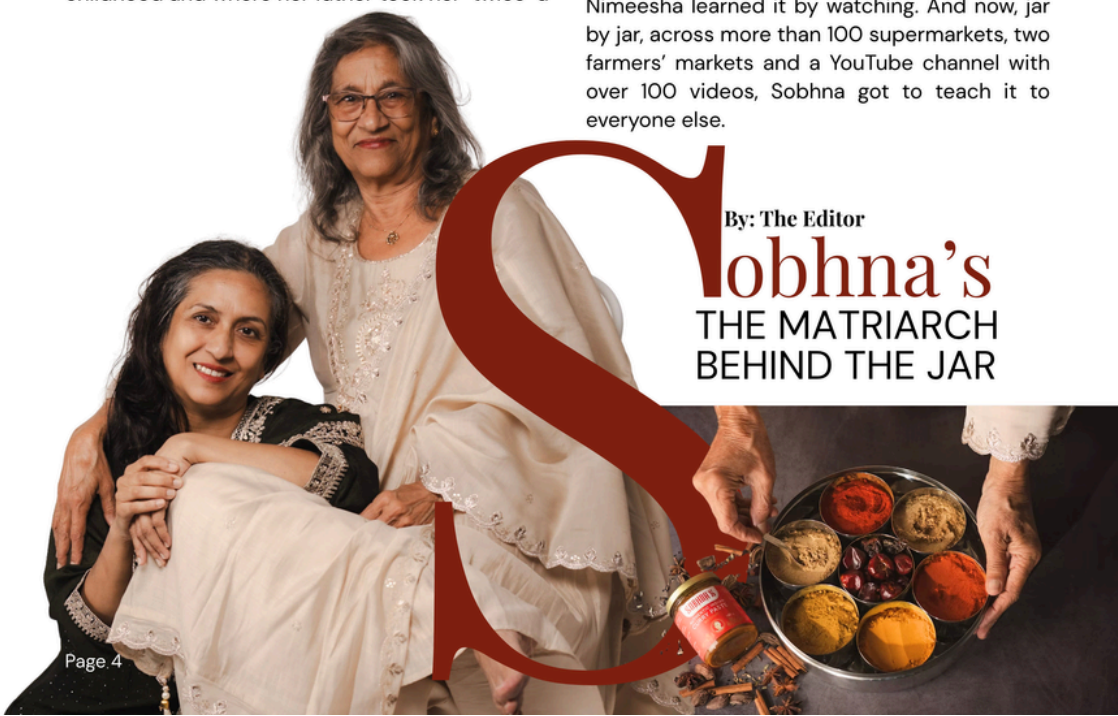
Just as her mother had worked to preserve their culture and carry forward the traditions of past generations, Nimeesha was determined to bring her family's recipes into a new world – one unfamiliar to her mother, yet increasingly embraced by a younger generation rediscovering heritage cooking.

Beyond selling their products, Nimeesha began creating cooking tutorial videos even before they launched a website. At the time, making money was never the focus; she simply wanted to share their family traditions.

Nimeesha learned it by watching. And now, jar by jar, across more than 100 supermarkets, two farmers' markets and a YouTube channel with over 100 videos, Sobhna got to teach it to everyone else.

By: The Editor

Sobhna's THE MATRIARCH BEHIND THE JAR



The work did not go unnoticed. Sobhna's was selected as one of only five businesses for Countdown's Kete Accelerator Programme in 2021, which brought \$250,000 in support, including a \$20,000 cash grant. The Authentic Original Curry Paste won a Silver Medal at the NZ Outstanding Food Producers Awards 2021. And the recognition kept coming. Sobhna's won the Healthy Food Guide Award for Healthiest Asian Sauce or Paste, two years in a row – 2025 and 2026.

That is what passes between Sobhna and Nimeesha. Not a recipe. A way of being in the world. A belief, held quietly and acted on daily, that food is love, and love is not abstract. It is a meal. It is the act of making sure that the person across from you is nourished.

Nimeesha knew what she was doing when she put her mother's name on a jar. She was not building a brand. She was building a record, proof that the work was real, that it mattered, that a woman who spent her life quietly feeding people had, in fact, changed something. This is what it means to be inspired by a matriarch. Not to admire her from a distance, but to see her, name her, and carry her forward.

“ Now everyone
in our family
cooks.

And across more than 100 supermarkets, in kitchens all across Aotearoa, so does everyone else.

Sobhna cooked quietly for decades. A daughter watched and decided the world should know her name. That is what it means to be inspired by a matriarch. Not admire her from a distance, but to see her, name her, and carry her forward.



Why our Voices matter

The Power of Showing Up in Public Life

By: Dr Viviana Zanetti

A Spark in Classroom

I have always joked that I'm a bit of a civic-participation nerd, though in truth I wear that label quite proudly. I can still picture the exact moment it all began. I was in my last year of high school listening to a former student introducing us to the electoral law, how parliament works, and the delicate dance between rights and responsibilities in a democratic system. Something inside me lit up and that spark carried me through a law degree and eventually a PhD in Constitutional Law.

Years later, that spark grew into a firm conviction: public life belongs to all of us. Not just to politicians, or policy experts, or those who dominate public discourse. Democracy thrives when ordinary people, especially those whose voices have historically been pushed to the margins, claim their space within it.

For many of us, ethnic women, navigating public life can seem intimidating. Systems weren't always built with us in mind. Sometimes they weren't built for us at all. And yet, this is exactly why our participation is so powerful. When we show up, when we ask questions, challenge decisions, vote, speak at community meetings, or advocate for change, we help shape a system that reflects who we are and what we need.

A Living Promise

Constitutional law has taught me that democracy is not just about choosing leaders. It's about making sure those leaders don't misuse the power we entrust to them. The-



..public life belongs to all of us. Not just to politicians, or policy experts, or those who dominate public discourse.

constitution is not a dusty document sitting in a drawer somewhere; it is a living promise: a promise that power must be limited, that the rights of individuals and minorities cannot simply be swept aside by the will of a majority. But here's the truth we often forget: those protections only work when people know about them, insist on them, and are willing to hold leaders accountable. A constitutional system, a democratic system - doesn't defend itself. We defend it.

This is why civic participation matters so deeply. The health of any democracy depends on whether its people understand how it works and feel confident enough to engage with it. When communities like ours stay informed and involved, elected members cannot simply claim to represent us; they must actually do it.

Participation doesn't have to look dramatic. It can be as simple as turning up to a local consultation, writing a submission, asking your councillor a question, or encouraging a friend to vote. It can be choosing to speak in a room where people don't expect you to speak. It can be telling your story in a way that shifts someone's understanding of an issue. These small actions build a culture of accountability, one where leaders know we are paying attention.

For ethnic women especially, participating in public life is not just a civic duty; it's a form of self-advocacy. It is a way of saying: we are here. We belong. And our perspectives strengthen our communities. When we engage, we help ensure that democracy reflects the richness and diversity of the people who make up Aotearoa today.

“ask questions, challenge decisions, vote, speak at community meetings, or advocate for change

Your Turn

My journey began with a spark in a high school classroom. Yours might begin with a conversation over coffee, a community gathering, or the decision to vote for the first time. Whatever the starting point, what matters is that we continue showing up.

Democracy is not something that happens once every three years at the ballot box. It happens every day, and when ethnic women participate fully in public life, democracy doesn't just function better, it becomes fairer, stronger, and more beautiful.

DILMINI PERERA AND THE SCHOOL BUILT FROM CULTURE AND HEART

The girl in the photograph

She did not plan a dance school that day. But looking back, she says, that image says everything about where the journey began.

Dance has been part of Dilmini's life for as long as she can remember. Her father — a passionate writer, musician, dramatist and dancer — filled their mornings with deep conversations about culture, society and life. "That environment shaped who I am today," she says.

“ And I now see the same curiosity and passion continuing through my children.

When her family moved from Wellington to Christchurch, she noticed something missing. There was a significant gap in the Sri Lankan cultural space, especially in dance. So she began where she always does: at home, quietly, teaching her own children whenever she had time.

She Dance So They Remember

By: The Editor



Built on relationships, not promotion

The school did not grow through marketing. It grew through trust. Her first student was Sasmitha. Slowly, other families noticed. More children joined. What began as informal performances at cultural events became something more structured, a school that teaches not just steps, but storytelling, tradition and identity.

At the dance school, the steps are only the beginning. Students talk about identity, belonging, social justice and equality. "In New Zealand, biculturalism is essential — but so is multiculturalism. Without diversity, the world would be a very dull place. We need different colours, different stories, and different art forms. That is what makes society rich and meaningful."

The performance that changed everything

Around 2020–2021, Dilmini choreographed her first dance for the New Zealand Indian Association multicultural festival. Her eldest daughter, Sasmitha, performed it.

"The response was overwhelming. People truly connected with it." The performance was shared widely across community platforms. That was the moment, she says, her hidden passion came to life.

With encouragement from her close friend Rathika, she began to see what she was doing differently. Showcasing cultural roots was not just a passion; it was a responsibility. That realisation led her to found the Christchurch Sri Lankan Dance School.

“ For me, it has never been about personal recognition. My focus has always been on children, the next generation, and giving them something meaningful to carry forward.

The moment she knew the work had real meaning came at the multicultural festival at La Vida Centre. The hall was completely full. When the performance ended, the applause was overwhelming. "People came up to us personally to share how much they loved the choreography, the costumes, and the storytelling. That moment stayed with me."

The hardest years

Time has been Dilmini's greatest challenge, balancing life as a mother, full-time worker, student and community contributor. The years around 2020–2021, during COVID, were especially difficult emotionally and economically.

H

But dance became my strength during that time. It gave me purpose and healing.

There were also moments when people misunderstood or challenged her work. But she never looked back. Instead, she focused on the community that showed up for her, friends, families and supporters who stood by her through it all. "Those challenges became blessings."

What she sees ahead

The children Dilmini teaches are not learning dance alone. They are learning identity, confidence, teamwork, and wellbeing. She talks openly with them about mental health, belonging, and the importance of staying connected to culture.

"I am very protective of my students. I don't see them as performers for profit or entertainment. I see them as individuals who need guidance, care, and a safe environment to grow."

Many of the children see her not just as a teacher but as a mentor, or a mother figure. The school, in her own words, is like a family.

"I always tell my students, one day, this responsibility will be yours. This is not just about dance. It is about carrying forward culture, identity, and values."

Dilmini moved quietly, built slowly, and asked for nothing in return but the chance to pass something on.

"That is the legacy I hope to leave behind."



OUR WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

By: The Editor

Renee Liang

Dr Renee Liang MNZM is a second-generation Chinese New Zealander, a paediatrician, poet, essayist, short story writer, playwright, theatre producer, and medical researcher. In a country still learning to tell its own stories, she has spent her career making sure the ones that matter does not disappear.

Renee has written, produced and toured seven plays. She organises community arts events such as New Kiwi Women Write, a writing workshop series for migrant women. She was named a Sir Peter Blake Emerging Leader in 2010 for her activities in arts, medicine and science, and was appointed a Member of the NZ Order of Merit for services to the arts in 2018.

But it is one work, above all others, that reveals what drives her. The Bone Feeder is an opera by Renee that explores the mysteries, traumas and gifts of migration, home and belonging. A magical cicada and Māori Ferryman guide a young Chinese man searching for his roots. He crosses to 'the other side', where ghosts reveal secrets of love, loss and betrayal.

The opera is grounded in a real and largely forgotten chapter of New Zealand history. The SS Ventnor set sail from New Zealand in October 1902, chartered to repatriate the remains of 499 Chinese gold miners to their homeland. These men had toiled in the New Zealand goldfields but could not accumulate sufficient funds for their return passage during their lifetimes. The ship struck a reef off the Taranaki coast and sank off

the Hokianga Heads, a profound cultural loss, as traditional beliefs emphasise the importance of the deceased's return to their homeland.

What followed was quietly remarkable. Over the next few months, the remains washed ashore. The local iwi found the bones and cared for them as they would their own members. The Te Roroa and Te Rarawa hapū interred them in their urupā. Two communities, bound by grief across cultures, in an act of care that history almost swallowed entirely.

The wreck was discovered in 2014 and Heritage New Zealand designated it a protected archaeological site. A memorial was unveiled in Ōpononi in April 2021, listing the names of the 499 miners and the 13 men who drowned in the wreck.

Renee did not wait for the memorial. She had already put the story on stage and then into opera, because she understood that some histories need an artist before they can find an audience. As the NZ Herald noted, her work became a powerful drama in which longing for a return to the ancestral homeland is set against the immigrants' desire to put down roots in their adopted home, exploring how this continuously evolving dialectic shapes the identity of all who arrive, then find themselves staying in a new country.

E nsures others can too

What makes Renee's work remarkable is not simply that she tells these stories, but also that she ensures others can too. The writing workshop in Ōtautahi, where she shared the story of the SS Ventnor with a room full of aspiring Asian writers. The programme for migrant women who needed a space to find their own voice. The opera sung in English, Māori and Cantonese, so that no one in the audience would be left outside the door.

The SS Ventnor marks the honouring of a special bond between Chinese and Māori, offering an opportunity to create a sense of belonging for the Chinese community through a connection to the land. Through her art and her community work, Renee has made that belonging tangible, not just for the ancestors whose bones rest in Hokianga, but for every person still searching for where they fit in this country.

Some people preserve history in archives. Others carry it forward in ways that future generations can actually feel.



d

By: **Hamidah Hashim**

ifferent by design

I came to understand my neurodivergence through my child. For most of my life, I understood myself through effort. I knew how to adapt, how to observe, how to meet expectations. Like many ethnic women, especially those of us who are migrants, I learned early how to adjust quietly to the spaces around me.

But there were always questions beneath the surface. Why did things feel harder than they seemed for others? Why did my mind move so quickly in some moments and stall in others? Why did I feel both deeply capable and constantly overwhelmed?

Motherhood did not just change my life. It reflected back to myself.

In raising my son, I began to recognise familiar patterns –sensitivity, intensity, a different rhythm of thinking and being. What I once saw as isolated traits slowly formed a clearer picture. Not just of him, but of me.

I live at the intersection of culture and neurodivergence, where both identity and understanding are still emerging.

Recognition, I have come to understand, is not always immediate. It is relational. It happens through connection, through moments of safety, and often through the people closest to us. Sometimes, it takes decades.

As an ethnic woman in Aotearoa New Zealand, this recognition comes with additional layers. In many of our communities, neurodivergence is not widely understood. Difference is often interpreted through cultural or behavioural expectations rather than neurological ones.



When we talk about neurodivergence in New Zealand, we often talk about it through a single cultural lens. But ethnic families experience neurodivergence at the intersection of culture, migration, language, and expectation. Without recognising this intersection, many ethnic neurodivergent children — and adults — remain unseen, misunderstood, or identified very late. This is not because we are absent, but because the systems were not designed to see us.



We are expected
to adjust. To meet
expectations.
To not disrupt.
And yet,
neurodivergence
does disrupt.

There is
grief in that
realisation.
But there is also clarity.

It challenges narrow ideas of what is “normal,” what is “appropriate,” and what is considered “successful.” It asks our systems — education, employment, and even our own communities — to stretch beyond a single way of being.

For me, this has meant unlearning deficit-based narratives. I no longer see neurodivergence as something to fix or hide. I see it as part of human diversity — different ways of thinking, sensing, and experiencing the world. Not a mistake, but a variation.

That does not mean the journey is easy.

As a mother, I hold both protection and advocacy. I want my child to grow up knowing himself without shame. At the same time, I am aware of the systems he must navigate — systems that may not always recognise his strengths.

I also find myself renegotiating my own identity. I am learning to understand myself not as someone who struggled to fit in, but as someone who was never meant to fit narrow definitions in the first place.

We are all, in different ways, coming into awareness. As ethnic, neurodivergent women — many of us mothers — we stand at a unique intersection. We carry culture, expectation, care, and often invisibility. Yet we also hold knowledge shaped by lived experience. We understand nuance. We live in complexity.

Perhaps that is where change begins.

Not in forcing sameness, but in recognising difference as intentional, valuable, and deeply human.

And in that recognition, we begin to make space — not just for our children, but for ourselves.



T

ablescaping

With Syeda Laila Iftikhar

Tablescaping is more than arranging plates and candles on a dining table; it is a creative form of self-expression that transforms ordinary gatherings into memorable experiences. For many, including me, it has become a relaxing and rewarding hobby that combines creativity, hospitality, and personal style. From selecting colour palettes and floral arrangements to layering textures and thoughtful details, tablescaping allows hosts to create an atmosphere that reflects the mood and meaning of an occasion.

Whether it is an intimate family dinner, a festive celebration, or an elegant high tea with friends, a beautifully styled table instantly elevates the experience. It encourages conversation, creates warmth, and makes guests feel welcomed and cherished. Even the smallest details like handwritten name tags, candles, or coordinated tableware can turn a simple meal into something special and unforgettable.

Here's a step-by-step guide to recreate this dreamy Galentine High Tea Or call it whimsical high tea tablescape and impress your girls at your next party with effortless elegance and cozy charm.

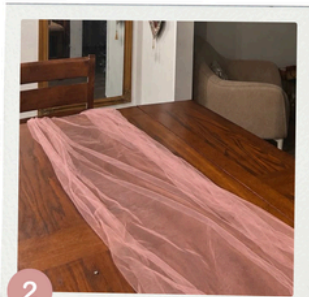
Items required to create this style:

- A pink table runner
- Placemats
- Napkins
- A garland
- Taper candle holders
- Taper candles
- Tableware: plates, glasses, tea set
- Floating flowers
- Ceiling(optional)
- Faux flowers
- Fish wire thread
- Glue
- Needle
- Tape

1 Floating flower ceiling (optional)



Separate the flowers from the stems using wire cutters and arrange them in rows in your preferred order. Cut a long strand of fishing wire and begin tying the flowers in a line. Tie a knot near the top of each flower, leaving a small space between them. Hang each strand, starting from the middle row and working outward, to keep everything centred. I used tape to attach them to the ceiling.



2

Down the centre of the table, place a plain or textured pink table runner. Mine was made from net fabric.



3

Add a garland and artfully arrange pillar candle holders with candles in contrasting colours.



4

Place a placemat at each seat around the table. I used paper placemats, which are versatile and budget-friendly.



5

On each placemat, arrange the dinner plate, dessert plate, glass, and teacup. Everything doesn't need to match perfectly; presentation and styling matter more.



6

Place a neatly folded napkin with a ring cinched in the centre to create a bow shape, then position it on top of the plate with the ends tucked slightly underneath.



7

Finally, add the finishing touches to the table setting by tying ribbon bows around each glass.



8

Don't be afraid to be a little extra, a fresh strawberry placed in the glass instantly adds the pretty aesthetic every girl secretly loves.

“ Table scaping is all about turning simple moments into beautiful memories. With a few thoughtful details, you can make any gathering feel extra special and unforgettable.

Side Notes / Extra Tips

- Invest in reusable décor pieces like candle holders, napkin rings, tag holders, and neutral table runners that can be styled repeatedly for different themes.
- Paper placemats, printed or handwritten menu cards, and labelled dishes are simple, affordable ways to instantly elevate your table setting.
- Fresh fruit, ribbons, flowers, or handwritten name tags can add a personalised touch without costing too much.
- Choose a colour palette before styling your table to keep the setup elegant and cohesive.
- Layering textures — such as net runners, linen napkins, glassware, and candles — helps create a more luxurious feel.



Reframing Settlement Report:

Migrant women are arriving in Aotearoa with world-class skills, rich cultural backgrounds, and the drive to contribute, yet too many are being held back by systemic barriers that go unnoticed. This report brings to life the powerful and often untold stories of women from South America, Asia, and Africa navigating settlement in New Zealand, uncovering two defining challenges: **social bankruptcy (the deep loneliness and loss of connection many experience)** and **reputational bankruptcy (the frustration of having hard-earned qualifications and professional status go unrecognised)**.

Beyond these, the report highlights significant challenges that shape the settlement journey: lengthy credential recognition delays, language and communication barriers that affect confidence and opportunity, subtle discrimination and cultural misunderstanding, social isolation during those critical early months, and the complex task of balancing cultural identity while adapting to a new way of life. Together, these findings point to clear, actionable solutions and introduce an exciting new initiative by the Lady Khadija Trust, forming a working group to act as a lighthouse for migrant women across the country.

Scan the QR code to read the full report:



WEAVING YOUR STORY WITH INTENTIONALITY

Your Story

Every other day, we are bound to find posts or hear someone say, 'You are unique,' 'Believe in yourself,' and the list goes on. Of course, this is not hard to believe; however, the issue arises, and the conflict within us deepens when we start examining it more closely. What do I mean?

When I constantly heard this and believed it, I created trouble for myself, and my life became chaotic. My actions did not align with the boxes created to categorise me into clear descriptions of who I am and who I am not. This led to –frustration and unhappiness – with myself and others. And because of my own personal nature, all of this frustration and sometimes anger manifested itself in many health issues. What gave me hope was my faith – as a person of faith, I believed this struggle was refining me, and I needed to be patient. I believed my existence was not an accident, and there was a sacredness within me that needed time to be revealed. More importantly, for that sacredness to be revealed, I had to seek... seek what lay within my soul.

Listening to your soul

When I began this journey as a seeker, I came across many sources and books. While spirituality from my faith was the main source, two mainstream books revealed a lot about the flawed measures society uses to categorise individuals and assess success.

We are so distracted by the inconsequential and have been living much of our lives unintentionally. The distractions around us are all enemies of intentional living – be it the latest social media trends or influencers giving a peek into their amazing lives. In the false pretence of achieving a good life by comparing it with others, the sacredness and elevated nature of our souls are being sold a confused happiness to pursue.

As I began to break these models of success and explore what I really wanted, I could connect with

What lies within you?

So what is different about you after all?

It is your uniqueness and your unquietness.

Your uniqueness comes from you, your identity, your values, the multiplicity of your experiences, and the lenses you have. Your unquietness stems from the conflict between you, the protagonist and the antagonist of your story.

Understanding what thwarts you and what enlightens you helps you weave your story with a **measure of success defined by you for you.**

Explore what Unquietness Lies within you

By: Dr. Hafsa Ahmed MNZM

After leading numerous leadership sessions with individuals, I believe that both your uniqueness and your unquietness are not random; they are what drive your story.

It is your role to intentionally participate in your story, to discover your sacredness and make choices. Each choice is like a brush stroke on the canvas of who you are becoming.

So my invitation to you now is to become the seeker of your sacredness by asking yourself – Am I ready to explore 'who am I'?

Follow her Substack – A Bit of Unquietness
<https://hafsaahm3d.substack.com/>



The Ethnic Women Politics and Advocacy Course

A brief report by our Programme Lead, Benish Ibrahim.

More than a course, it was a journey of voice, confidence, and possibility. Through the Ethnic Women Leadership Programme, the Lady Khadija Trust brought together a diverse group of ethnic women for a transformative three-day Politics and Advocacy Course designed to strengthen civic participation, political understanding, and community leadership across Aotearoa New Zealand. Created specifically to equip ethnic women with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to engage with political systems and civic leadership, the programme offered far more than information-sharing. It created a welcoming space where women connected through shared experiences, explored their leadership potential, and discovered what meaningful change within their communities could look like.

Across three engaging days, 12 participants took part in expert presentations, interactive discussions, self-reflection activities, and networking opportunities. Participants explored key questions such as “Who are you and what do you stand for?” while developing a stronger understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand’s political and governance systems and pathways for civic engagement. The course featured a range of inspiring voices and leadership experiences. Panel discussions with Anne Galloway, Dr. Sunita Gautam, and Sophie McInnes offered valuable insights into governance, public leadership, and community participation. A media masterclass strengthened participants’ ability to communicate key messages effectively and advocate confidently for issues important to their communities.

Sessions also examined political pathways, civic participation, advocacy approaches, and practical opportunities for engagement. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own advocacy journeys and future leadership aspirations. A guest session from the Electoral Commission provided practical guidance on democratic participation and community engagement pathways, helping participants connect knowledge with action.

The impact of the programme was reflected strongly in participant feedback. One participant shared:

“Each session added to my knowledge wealth. I am confident that I am a perfect fit for political leadership.

The programme created a supportive environment where learning, confidence, and leadership flourished. Participants left with stronger networks, increased confidence, and practical tools to contribute positively within their communities. Most importantly, they left with a clearer sense that their voices matter and that leadership and civic participation are spaces where they belong.

Book Recommendation



“ Home cooking through generations since Chinese women settled in New Zealand over the last 100 years.

Por Por is the Chinese name for a maternal grandmother. It is also the heart of one of New Zealand's most quietly significant cookbooks.

Written by Carolyn King and published in 2013, Por Por's Cookbook records home cooking through the generations since Chinese women first settled in New Zealand over the last 100 years. It contains over 140 recipes and 15 Chinese women's life stories.

What makes it remarkable is not the recipes alone — it is what lives inside them. Through the generations, the recipes were passed down by show and tell. They learned by observation, not by recipe. The knowledge moved hand to hand, kitchen to kitchen, without ever being written down — until now.

These women faced verbal abuse and racial prejudice. Many New Zealanders may not have understood what hardships the Chinese endured in the earlier years up to the 1960s. And yet they cooked. They kept culture alive in the only space that was entirely theirs.

Now in its third edition, the book stands as Carolyn's tribute to women whose contribution to New Zealand society was real, lasting, and for too long, unrecorded. A reminder that the stories matriarchs carry are never just about food. They are about survival, identity, and the quiet act of making sure the next generation never has to start from nothing.



Zalindah

Like a lake protected in a cave,
when the outside world rages,
her waters remain calm,
a safe place for me to stay and reflect.

While the world tries to break down her
walls to add storm to her waters,
she remains every yet serene.

The silver maple outside bend
to the will of the wind,
but she keeps her limits straight.

The tulip inside struggles to bloom in
the dark,
so she channels sunlight straight to her,
to help

I am the tulip which she helps grow.
I am the silver maple that she is
teaching.

Zahra

Sayyeda | YEAR 8



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