

## **Women and Community Services in Islamic History**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of women rights, freedoms, and their role in public sphere are few important areas which have been in news in the past few decades. There is no doubt that women were deprived of their rights such as right to vote, freedom to mobility etc. in Muslim communities in the past few centuries. However, not much later, the fight for women rights and freedoms are being observed among the various Muslim communities. Another aspect among the Islamic communities is related to social service. The foundation of Islam religion was based on the principles of social justice, equality and service to mankind. However, both these concepts including women role and social services in Islam have been influenced by various factors since the founding of Islam religion. Therefore, it would be an interesting area of research to investigate evolution and changes relates to these two areas through the Islamic ages in order to analyse if factors of influence and whether or not these changes are relevant in the current times. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to review the role of women and community services through Islamic ages, and analyse its implications in the current scenario. A narrative review approach is adopted in this study in order to reflect the developments from the history. Findings from the review indicated that the women in Islamic ages enjoyed equal rights and status in society in contrast to the women in the modern world. However, social services continued to be a part of the Islamic principles since its emergence in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It can be concluded that there is a need to create awareness among the Muslim elites (who base discrimination in the context of religion, culture, and traditions) regarding the equality rights for women and their increased participation in social, economic, and cultural fields in the society.

**Keywords:** Women; Community Services; Islamic History; Islamic Ages

### **Introduction**

Muslim women across the world have been playing various roles in the society in the past few decades. However, the number of Muslim women who have been recognised or popular in any fields may be very few compared to other women. The conditions in the Middle East are slowly improving for women, as they are able to take greater participation in society. However, majority of the Muslim women who are excelling in various fields in the recent times belonged to other regions. For example, Sabah Nazir is a successful entrepreneur from UK, who has established company called Islamic Moments, focusing on designing and producing various greeting cards and gift items, incorporating Islamic art in to modern designs.<sup>1</sup> Aina Khan is another Muslim woman from UK, who is the manager of Aina Khan Law Solicitors, and a member of International Bar Association. She founded a growing women's rights campaign "Register Our Marriage," calling for the establishment of legal civil marriages, alongside religious ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> While Muslim women across the world are excelling, the women in the Middle East are left behind, as they are deprived of various rights. These restrictions adopted were in accordance with Shariah law followed in various countries. For instance, in a recent study,<sup>3</sup> it was identified that the socio-economic conditions of Muslim women in India were very poor compared to other minority groups; and their participation in education, economic activities and household-decision making is relatively low. Similarly, inequalities in different aspects, such as socio-economic, educational, decision-making in relation to Muslim women was identified in different countries including the UK, Germany, and Arab countries,<sup>4</sup> and it was identified that the religion is used as a

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<sup>1</sup> BBC (2016), The rise of the Muslim female entrepreneur, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-37798677> [retrieved 8 December 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Islamic Relief Worldwide (2020), 6 Inspirational Muslim women you need to know, <https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/6-inspirational-muslim-women-you-need-to-know/> [retrieved 8 December 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Ohlan, R. (2020), "Muslim Women in India: Status of Demographic, Socioeconomic and Health Inequalities," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 429-440.

<sup>4</sup> Khan, S. (2020), "Social Exclusion of Muslims in India and Britain," *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 56-77; Eden, E. (2021), Muslim women in Germany: A look at gender inequality and integration – Social Science Works,

context to support social rules which reflect discrimination.<sup>5</sup> However, Islam as a religion, opposes the discrimination of women in the society. Various passages in Qur'an reveal that men and women are equal in every aspect. Prophet Muhammad in his last sermon mentioned the importance of women, and they should be treated with kindness and be supported by men, by stating:

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well never to be unchaste.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike the current situation, Muslim women have a greater participation in society, polity, culture, arts and literature, science and many other fields during the medieval times. For example, Sumayyah bint Khayyat, a slave of a prominent Meccan leader Abu Jahl was identified to be the first martyr of Islam, as she refused to give up Islam, when her master insisted and got killed.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, social service is another aspect, which has been in existence since its formation, being one of the foundations and fundamental principles of Islam. Allah defined the righteous as those who help others in the society, stating that:

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but (true) righteousness is (in) one who believe in Allah, the last day, the angels, the books and the Prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, those who ask (for help) and for freeing slaves (and who) establishes prayer and gives Zakah (those who) fulfil their promise and (those who) are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. These are the ones who have been true and it is those who are the righteous. (Chapter 2, Verse 177)

In a similar context, Prophet Muhammad stated that: "He who sleeps satiated while his neighbour goes hungry is not dear to Allah. A Muslim has been a revered companion of the Prophet. He cites the Prophet as directing his people to gladly accept an invitation to lunch or dinner from the neighbour, as it promotes understanding and solidarity."<sup>8</sup>

While social service continues to be one of the important ethics to be followed in Islam, the role of Muslim women in the society has been curtailed by dedicating women to family duties. These two aspects including the role of Muslim women and the social services are highly relevant to the Islamic principles, and have been followed since the emergence of Islam. However, changes in the context of religions, society and lifestyles is in evident with the rapid developments that have been taking place. In this context, it is important to research if the changes that have been noticed are in particular supported on the basis of historical context, especially the lifestyles and roles in Islamic ages and the principles of Islam, which is poorly researched. Reviewing the historical conditions with current practices can highlight the differences and be used to strengthen the support for rights and equalities for Muslim women and promote social services by Muslims. Focusing on these aspects, this paper reviews the role of Muslim women and the aspect of community services during Islamic ages.

### **Preparation of Narrative Review**

Unlike systematic reviews, there is no consensus among the researchers on the standard structure of a narrative review.<sup>9</sup> As a result, different formats have been followed in defining the approaches followed

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<https://socialscienceworks.org/muslim-women-in-germany-a-look-at-gender-inequality-and-integration/> [retrieved 25 May 2021]; Yassine-Hamdan, N., & Strate, J. (2020), "Gender Inequality in the Arab World," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 25-50.

<sup>5</sup> Azid, T., & Ward-Batts, J. (2020), "Dimensions of Women Empowerment and Gender Inequality: A Muslim World Perspective," in *Economic Empowerment of Women in the Islamic World*, 595-603.

<sup>6</sup> McIntire, S., & Burns, W. (2009), *Speeches in world history*, New York: Facts on File, p.79.

<sup>7</sup> Buhl, F. & Welch, A.T. (1993), *Muhammad. Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), Brill. pp. 360-376.

<sup>8</sup> Ansur, K. (2017), Understanding the concept of social work in Islam, <https://oracleopinions.com/2017/11/15/understanding-concept-social-work-islam/> [retrieved 8 December 2020].

<sup>9</sup> Ferrari R. (2015), "Writing narrative style literature reviews," *Medical Writing*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 230-235.

in preparing review, which may be organised in a chronological order, with a summary of the history of a research when clear trends are identified, or presented as a 'conceptual framework', if the dependent and independent variables and relationships between them are identified.<sup>10</sup> Considering the context of this study, which focuses on the role of women and community services in Islamic ages, this study focused on the developments in the role of women, their social status, and contributions to the society. Similarly, the importance of social services, the practices of the society in Islamic ages were reviewed. Accordingly various databases including journals related to medicine and Islamic history were searched for relevant articles reflecting the developments in healthcare. A combination of Keywords including Islamic history and women, Islamic civilization and social services, women empowerment, community services etc. were used for searching relevant articles. In addition, few historical texts and literature, especially sayings from Quran and hadiths were used to interpret the developments in Islamic context. As the study focused on Islamic ages, most of the literature was identified from historical contexts or old texts in Islam.

## **Women in Islamic Ages**

Various guidelines through Qur'an and hadiths were identified which defines and specifies the role of women in the society, in similar to the specifications and obligations for men in Islam. Interpretations derived from hadiths (records of Prophet Muhammad teachings and sayings) by fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) relating to the roles of men and women in the society were agreed by majority of the Muslim scholars for fulfilling the responsibilities embodied on them by Allah.<sup>11</sup> However, the interpretations of hadiths were influenced by the societal conditions in the Muslim world during the time they were written. These interpretations from hadith and Qur'an were not enough to apply in different contexts arising over the time. As a result, Islamic scholars referred to various authentic documents, discussions and early records and achieved a consensus to define the religiously approved course of actions for both men and women.<sup>12</sup> In addition, religious schools were established to promote and implement the course of actions agreed by the scholars. These courses of actions were prescribed in a set of documents such as ijma, qiya, ijthihad etc. Fatwas are one such documents which are issued by Muslim clerics to the Muslims in society, which are either delivered orally or in writing. They were used to describe the roles and responsibilities and behaviour of women in public, and rights of women in accordance with religious requirements. Though it was not necessary to obligate to Fatwas, they have been considered, accepted, and implemented effectively by the Muslim believers. The behaviour of the Muslim women was controlled (by issuing fatwas) using five types of influences including obligatory, commendable, permissible, despised, and prohibited in relation to various actions. However, controversies and conflicts regarding the secondary sourced documents (except Qur'an and hadiths) have emerged over the time.<sup>13</sup> This may indicate that either the rules specified (in relation to women rights, behaviour, and code of conduct) in the secondary sourced documents were either irrelevant according to the changes in the society over time; or they do not endorse the principles reflected in hadiths and Qur'an.

Islam's view of genders (men and women) reflects complementarity in various events or incidents in the universe; and accordingly, men and women were created as a pair by the god to complement each other, indicating neither a man is complete without a woman, and nor a woman is complete without a man (Surat al-Dhariyat, 51:49). According to the perceptions of Islam by Muslim scholars, it was reflected that the universe is in equilibrium because of harmonious relationships between pairs, which facilitates our existence; and all the phenomenon or events that occur in this world are created by the god with a purpose.<sup>14</sup> The same idea was reflected in men and women roles and relationships, reflecting them as equals. However, the issue of equality has emerged in the process of undertaking social

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<sup>10</sup> Green BN, Johnson CD, Adams A. (2006), "Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade," *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 101–117; Randolph JJ. (2009), "A guide to writing the dissertation literature review," *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 1–13.

<sup>11</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.) (1998), *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. xii–xx; Stowasser, B. F. (1994), *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Motahhari, M. (1983), *Jurisprudence and Its Principles*, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an; Kamali, M. H. (1991), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society.

<sup>13</sup> Kamali (1991), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*; Hosen, N. (2004). "Behind the scenes: fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975–1998)," *Journal of Islamic Studies*. Vol.15, No.2, pp. 147–179.

<sup>14</sup> Sachiko, M. (1992), *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 14.

functions.<sup>15</sup> Though there were no references to the division of duties or inequality in early sources of Islam, the division of societal duties became a necessity to manage and organize social life in the society. Accordingly, women were considered to be the epicentre of home, managing all activities within home; and men were associated with outside world by indulging in various activities for earnings in order to take care of the family. However, these norms were identified to be unpractical during the medieval Islamic age, as number of Muslim women were identified who have reflected their role in public life in various fields including polity, administration, business, science and literature, arts, and research.<sup>16</sup>

There are various verses in Qur'an which are dedicated to women and their rights in addition to Sura 4, called 'An-Nisa', meaning women with 176 verses.<sup>17</sup> For example, one of the following verses reflects the rights of women in inheriting their ancestral properties, which states that both men and women have equal share in inheriting their parent's property: "For men there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave, and for women there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave—whether it is little or much. 'These are' obligatory shares" (Qur'an 4:7).

Both Qur'an and hadiths promoted equal rights for men and women to seek knowledge. Qur'an states that all Muslims (both men and women) must regularly read, think and learn from the nature, understand the signs of god, and constantly strive to live in pursuit of knowledge. Prophet Muhammad actions can be used to understand the way women should be treated, their rights and responsibilities in the eyes of Islamic philosophy. Muhammad announced that seeking knowledge is the right of every Muslim, be it male or female; and encouraged education for all, irrespective of genders. Prophet Muhammad also stated that women are obligated to seek knowledge, develop intellectual skills, broaden their awareness and cultivate talents, which they can use for development of society and also themselves.<sup>18</sup>

In relation to marriage, though Islam do not have any limit on the number of marriages, but reflects the male dominance in the aspect of marriages by referring to fear and potential: "If you fear you might fail to give orphan women their 'due' rights 'if you were to marry them', then marry other women of your choice—two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then 'content yourselves with' one1 or those 'bondwomen' in your possession.2 This way you are less likely to commit injustice" (Qur'an, 4:3).

Muhammad married more than nine women in different contexts. Most of his marriages were dependent on the larger needs of the society: forming alliances between tribes, extending cooperation and support between communities etc. Most of the Muhammad's marriages were identified to be politically motivated for strengthening the relationships between Arabian communities.<sup>19</sup> One of the interesting aspects identified was virginity of women at the time of marriage was emphasized as a tribal honour,<sup>20</sup> reflecting the attitudes or restrictions specified towards women alone. However, with respect to other rights and freedoms women had equal opportunities as men did. For example, Prophet Muhammad himself taught both men and women at the same time under the same roof; accordingly, at the time of his death, he was surrounded by many male and female scholars of Islam who were his student.<sup>21</sup> Further carrying the teachings of Prophet Muhammad to the future generations, Aisha (Prophet Muhammad's wife) also taught various subjects including teachings of Qur'an, hadiths' and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) to many men and women, who were Prophet Muhammad's followers and students. There were no restrictions on women in choosing the field or career in the process of seeking knowledge.

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<sup>15</sup> Eaton, G. (2000), *Remembering God: Reflections on Islam*, Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> Bassiouni, M.C. (2012), *The Social System and Morality of Islam*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/social-system-and-morality-islam> [retrieved 7 December 2020].

<sup>17</sup> University of Southern California (2015), *Al-Nisa (Women)*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150501064500/http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/verses/004-qmt.php> [retrieved 8 December 2020].

<sup>18</sup> Haifaa, J. (1998), *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 85–86.

<sup>19</sup> Watt, W. M. (1956), *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, p. 175-177.

<sup>20</sup> Sonbol, A. (2009), "Rise of Islam: 6th to 9th Century," in *Encyclopaedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1872-5309\\_ewic\\_EWICCOM\\_0002](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_EWICCOM_0002) [retrieved 7 December 2020].

<sup>21</sup> University of Southern California (2015), *Al-Nisa (Women)*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150501064500/http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/verses/004-qmt.php> [retrieved 8 December 2020]; Haifaa, J. (1998), *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*, pp. 85–86.

Accordingly, women in Islamic ages participated and excelled in all aspects of life. Fatima al-Fihri was one of the prominent scholars who excelled in Islamic jurisprudence Fiqh and the Hadith founded Al-Qarawiyyin mosque, which after many centuries was developed in to the University of al-Qarawiyyin in 1963 in Morocco.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, there were women like Sutayta al-Mahamili, who excelled in various subjects such as mathematics, medicine, administration, judiciary, management, and philosophy. In addition, there were women who have successfully implemented their role in polity, and oppressed the rebellions in the Islamic ages. Some of those included Labana of Cordoba of 10th century (Spain), Sitt al-Mulk of 11th century (Egypt), Melike Mama Hatun of 12th century (Turkey), Razia Sultana of Delhi of 13th century (India).

Several roles were prescribed for women in various administrative and legal positions in the society during the Islamic ages. Some of the prominent positions include Faqihat (A title dedicated to female jurists who completed their studies and excelled in Shariah teachings); Motafaqehat (A title dedicated to female jurists who are in the process of studying Islamic law); women muftis (A title dedicated to women teachers or women who can issue legal opinions) etc.<sup>23</sup> Fatemah Bint Mohamed Ahmed Al-Samarqandi was one of the prominent female jurists (faqihat) belonged to the city of Aleppo in Syria during fifth and sixth century. Fatemah was a scholar in fiqh of Hanif sector, who wrote numerous books on Shariah. Al-Nisaa Bint Rostom Ibn Abi Ragaa Al-Asbahani Om Ayman was another woman, who held one of the most important positions (Sheikhat Al-Haram) in Mecca in sixth century. In the field of medicine, Rufayda al-Aslamiyyah was known to be the first nurse in the medieval period, who treated the wounded soldiers in various battles led by Prophet Muhammad in the sixth century. Sutayta was another popular woman, who was different to other popular women, as she was a polymath, who excelled in various subjects including hadith, culture, arts, literature, mathematics (hisab or arithmetic's and fara'idh or successional calculations), and jurisprudence, who was praised by various historians including Ibn Kathīr.<sup>24</sup> Dhayfa Khatun was another woman who excelled in polity. She was Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo, who reigned as the queen for six years during 12th century. She faced threats from powerful tribes such as Mongols and Seljuks, but successfully responded to the emerging threats. In addition, she reformed many policies which Dhyana were identified to be leading to injustice to the people and removed unfair taxes in Aleppo. She supported donations to poor and gave importance to science, research and development. The women in later periods of 11th century were more patriarchal than the women in early Islamic societies, and were not usually identified in public sphere. Some historians argue that this sudden change in the role of women was due to the impact of foreign cultures such as Byzantine culture on Islamic societies. The integration of foreign cultures also affected the way Islamic scriptures were interpreted in relation to women and their roles in family and public sphere.<sup>25</sup> In addition, there were instances where the women rights were restricted by some rulers. For example, Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim ordered that women should veil and avoid presence in public in the evenings. However, these restrictions were removed by Sitt al-Mulk, half-sister of Al-Hakim, who later came to the power.

### **Social Services in Islamic Ages**

Creating social order, eradicating injustice, forming a society with principles of kindness, collaboration, support and love were the basic aspects which were focused by the Prophet Muhammad in the process of laying foundations for Islamic society. The development of a society and social order depends on every member of that society, the cooperation and collaboration between each other, and adopting common principles of faith and practices. This sense of collective morality is expressed in the Qur'an in such terms as equality, justice, fairness, brotherhood, mercy, compassion, solidarity, and freedom of choice. In Islam, the responsibility of implementing these principles were laid on the leaders of Islamic community through the ages. Social service is one of the most important principles of Islam, which has been continuing since its emergence in sixth and seventh centuries. There were many instances where

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<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey, K.T., and Moosa, E. (eds.) (2013), *Islam in the Modern World*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Women and Memory Forum (2013), *Women and Islam in the Middle Ages*, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/1168/77186/Folk/Inspiring-Women/Women-and-Islam-in-the-middle-ages.aspx> [retrieved 7 December 2020].

<sup>24</sup> Al-Hassani, S. (2020), *Women's Contribution to Classical Islamic Civilisation: Science, Medicine and Politics*, <https://muslimheritage.com/womens-contribution-to-classical-islamic-civilisation-science-medicine-and-politics/> [retrieved 7 December 2020].

<sup>25</sup> Khan Academy (2020), *Medieval Muslim Societies*, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/medieval-times/social-institutions-in-the-islamic-world/a/medieval-muslim-societies> [retrieved 7 December 2020].

the aspect of social services was mentioned in Qur'an as the duty and responsibility of a Muslim. Some of which include the following: "By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye love; and whatever ye give, of a truth God knoweth it well" (Qur'an 3:92).

The statement reflects that God recognises those who freely donate and shower love and kindness on the needy. In addition, the inequalities in economic situations were referred to as those created by God for letting the rich provide services to the poor, as reflected in the following verse: "And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful" (Qur'an 6:165).

In addition, the extent of social service was also linked to the family properties and inheritance of wealth. It was reflected that, if there is a presence of poor and needy in the locality, the people may consider distribution of a small share of their property to the poor along with their children or legal heirs: "If 'non-inheriting' relatives, orphans, or the needy are present at the time of distribution, offer them a 'small' provision from it and speak to them kindly" (Qur'an 4:8).

Through the history, the philosophical context of Islam can be based on developing positive attitudes towards individuals who are needy and in disadvantaged situations. The classical literature and early practices reflected that disabilities or special needs as part of human existence, and provided suggestions for caring and supporting the people with special needs. Various references can be drawn from the history in this context. For example, during the time of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, the third Muslim leader, a person came to his mercy complaining Omar that his sin was not able to come to mosque because of his disability (blindness). Reacting to his plea, Omar provided a house near the mosque to the family of the disabled boy. Similarly, in the second Islamic state, Umayyad caliph, Al Walid Ibn Abd Al Malik established first care home and built first care home for the intellectually disabled people in Damascus.<sup>26</sup> These examples indicate that support and assistance was provided to the people with special needs in the early Islamic societies.

Accordingly, though the history of Islamic ages, the philosophical context of social service was based on developing positive attitudes towards the people who are poor and those belonged to the disadvantaged groups such as disabled, diseased etc. for creating social equality. Various early sources of Islamic literature provided references to the concept of social service in Islam. One of the early references to the concept of service can be identified during the reign of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. A blind person came to his court and begged for mercy as he was not able to visit mosque which was far from his home because of his blindness. Addressing his concern, Omar granted the blind person, a house which was near to the mosque, from where it was easy for him to visit the mosque. Similarly, various Muslim leaders have shown their generosity towards poor and needy which can reflect the attitudes of Islam towards the social services. For example, Umayyad caliph, Al Walid Ibn Abd Al Malik built care homes for the disadvantaged groups in Damascus.

Similarly, the act of generosity and social service was not only the responsibility of the leaders, but also the common people who are in a position to help or provide voluntary service. Muslims have been practising the act of zakat (regularly donating a part of income to the charity). This approach was initially promoted by Prophet Muhammad for addressing the social concerns of inequality, rising population of poor etc.<sup>27</sup> However, the approach described by Prophet Muhammad was slightly different from the practice that is being followed in the later ages. Prophet Muhammad opined that the act should not only limit by donation, but a collective responsibility of the community in collecting money, and direct involvement of the community in providing services reflecting a collaborative approach which requires the direct participation in social service.<sup>28</sup> The acts of Prophet Muhammad reflect this approach, which can be understood from various references in hadiths. Prophet Muhammad himself was involved in various social service acts, such as visiting diseased and treating them, feeding the poor, supporting the disadvantaged groups by instilling a sense of confidence by providing support, care, kindness and

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<sup>26</sup> Aljazoli, A. (2004), *Islam position on disability*, Morocco: ISESCO.

<sup>27</sup> Nadzri, F.A.A., Abd Rahman, R., and Omar, N. (2012), "Zakat and Poverty Alleviation: Roles of Zakat Institutions in Malaysia," *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, Vol.1, No.7, pp. 61-72.

<sup>28</sup> Hagrass, H. (2006), "Definitions of disability policy in Egypt," in C. Barnes and G. Mercer (eds.), *The social model of disability: Europe and the majority world*, Leeds: Disability Press, pp. 148-162.

love. Another instance can be related to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the higher positions. Prophet Muhammad appointed a blind man as the leader of Medina, which was considered as one of the holiest cities in the Arab world.<sup>29</sup>

However, as mentioned earlier various interpretations were drawn from hadiths which may either support or contradict with the foundations on which the Islamic principles were laid down. For example, here are scores of verses in the Quran that deal with the necessity of social service: 107; 74:38-46; 90:12-18; 89:17-24; 92:5-10. However, few Muslims consider social services as a rewarding activity, but are not mandatory activities such as prayers and fasting.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the basic philosophical essence of Zakat is being lost in the current times, as there are various incidents and reports of misuse of money from zakat,<sup>31</sup> even after laying down strict regulations by Waqf boards.

## **Conclusion**

The role of women in Islamic ages can be identified to be very different from the role that can be identified in the current times. Women enjoyed equal rights and larger freedoms in relation to career and various roles in public spheres during the early ages of Islam, specifically during the period of Prophet Muhammad. However, their role in the latter ages have been drastically reduced around the duties associated with home. This change was attributed to the various interpretations of Quran and hadith, by issuing fatwas, and also influence of foreign cultures of Islamic civilization. However, Muslim immigrants in some countries continued to prosper in various roles in Public sphere. In contrast to women role through Islamic ages, the concept of social services constantly evolved and practiced for centuries. Social services remained at the heart of Islamic civilization through the ages, which are still being practiced by the Muslims across the world. Zakat is one such approach towards community service, which has been followed since early Islamic ages. However, there are few incidents identified in the current times, which are related to misuse of zakat system, and misinterpretations of social services in Islam.

This study has various implications and recommendations. Firstly, there is a need to redefine the policies aimed at empowering Muslim women and providing them equal rights along with men. This has observed that the current practices of discriminating Muslim women and misusing social services such as that of zakat, are against the principles of Islam, and in contrast with the practices adopted in Islamic ages. Therefore, it is also essential to implement awareness strategies and policies for educating Muslim elites and clerics who support the discrimination of women in the name of religion, cultural, and traditional contexts. Moreover, this study contributes to the theory of Islamic principles and their applicability in the current world. However, there are certain limitations in this study. Firstly, this study did not collect the primary data directly from Muslim women, but relied on the secondary data collected from the review of other studies. Secondly, this study used statements mostly from Quran, but there are extensive historical literature such as hadiths, and biographies and travel diaries of scholars in Islamic ages. Therefore, future studies may focus on analysing the current conditions of Muslim women in different regions, and critically analyse with the conditions in Islamic ages that were supported and upheld in Islam.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibn Ashur, M. (1973), *Altahrer w Altanwer*, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp> [retrieved 8 December 2020]; Tantawi, M. (1928), *Al waseet fe tafsir Al quran Al kareem*, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp> [retrieved 10 December 2020].

<sup>30</sup> At-Thani, R. (2020), *Muslim misperceptions about social services*, <https://www.soundvision.com/article/muslim-misperceptions-about-social-services> [retrieved 9 December 2020].

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