

## Exploring the Role of Suffah in Social Governance in Medina: A Historical and Analytical Study

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### **Abstract:**

After thirteen years of struggle in Makkah, Muslims reached Medina. A group of Muslims always stayed with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They lived in veranda of Masjid e Nabvī, where they were taught by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These pious people were known as Ahl al Suffah in Medina. Although the specific word of “Ahl al Suffah” is not mentioned in Quran, but it is symbolically demonstrated in numerous verses throughout Quran. For instance in surah al Mujādilah, it is stated: “Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.” This statement describes the people of Suffah who gained knowledge from Prophet (peace is upon him) and who became the authority in Hadith sciences. One of the most prominent names from Ahl al Suffah is Hazrat Abu Hurraira, from him only a great number of hadith has been narrated. Those companions of Suffah who had spent most of the time with Prophet (peace be upon him), were given most of the administrative posts in Medina and in other parts of the world as well. This is how the institution of Suffah played a significant role in social governance in Medina. The people of Suffah were not cut out from the society; they participated in making decisions, settling conflicts, and giving counsel to the Muslim society. This paper emphasizes the contributions of Ahl e Suffah to social governance by focusing on their participation in moral reasoning, community involvement and decision-making processes.

**Keywords:** *Social governance, Ahl al Suffah, Medina, governing system in Medina*

### **Introduction**

We have to deconstruct the topic into parts for better understanding of the topic, as it is dubbed by the famous philosopher Derrida, deconstruction is, “form of critical analysis of literary texts and philosophical positions”. Now before moving to core topic we must understand the term “Social Governance”.

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In his book ‘Understanding Governance’: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity, and Accountability, R. A. W. Rhodes defines social governance as “the processes by which a society manages its affairs and solves its problems. It involves the formulation and implementation of “collective decisions and actions, often involving the interaction of different actors and institutions in society”.<sup>4</sup>

In the article “The Dynamics of Social Governance: Corporate Social Responsibility, Local Embeddedness, and Employee Relations in China” by S. Zhang and M. Chen, social governance is described as “a set of processes and mechanisms by which the Society regulates and coordinates the behavior of individuals, organizations, and institutions to solve social problems and challenges”. Social governance is a necessary third pillar of health governance alongside clinical and financial governance. They define social governance as "the process by which societal values, norms, and expectations are translated into the design, delivery, and evaluation of health care".<sup>5</sup>

Now moving towards the core topic; role of Suffah in social governance in Medina, to better understand we must know Suffah in contemporary Medina’s circumstances. The "ahl al-Suffah" were chosen group of people who lived close to the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina, usually in a veranda or other specified area.<sup>6</sup> Ibn Hisham<sup>7</sup> and Ibn Saad<sup>8</sup> both agreed that the Suffah served as an institution for education, social welfare, and government, embodying Islamic concepts including knowledge acquisition, social welfare, conflict resolution, and community engagement. Its contribution to Medina's social government had a long-lasting effect, motivating Muslims to give social welfare and community well-being first priority. Ibn Tamiya challenges the Sufi notion claiming the Companions of the Prophet who resided in Suffah (near the Prophet's mosque in Medina) shared any similarities with the Sufis of later periods in a brief dissertation titled *Ahl al-Suffah*, 18. He maintains that merely a small number of Meccan immigrants migrated to Medina with the Prophet, but later on, more and more people joined this little group of migrants, making it impossible for the

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<sup>4</sup>. Rhodes, Rod AW. "Understanding Governance: Ten years on." *Organization studies* 28, no. 8 (2007): 1243-1264

<sup>5</sup>. Liu, Xiang, and Chen Zhang. "Corporate Governance, Social Responsibility Information Disclosure and Enterprise Value in China." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 142 (2017): 1075-1084.

<sup>6</sup> Ishaq, Ibn. "Guillaume, Alfred." *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Oxford Press, 2002

<sup>7</sup>. Qomaruzzaman, Bambang. "The theology of non-violent Islamic education based on Al-Sira Al-Nabawiyya." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, (2021) Vol.77, No. 4, p.8

<sup>8</sup>. Ghiloni, Aaron J. "Muhammad, Education and Finitude" *Religious Education* 111, no. 3 (2016): 288-306.

Helpers to house the growing number of emigrants. The Prophet subsequently gave them permission to live in the Suffah of the Medina Mosque. However, the assertion that the "people of Suffah" were a settled population is historically inaccurate. However, there was an ongoing flow in and out occurring. If they could find housing for themselves and their families, the existing emigrants departed the Suffah, and new ones arrived to dwell there. Once more, the Prophet's companions at Suffah supported themselves, if they could. The Prophet only provided aid to people who were unable to support themselves. As a result, nobody from the Ahl al-Suffah had chosen to live in deliberate deprivation.<sup>9</sup>

The social and political aspects of the early Islamic period have been extensively studied by Fred M. Donner, a well-known historian who specializes in early Islamic history. Donner emphasizes the importance of the socio-political backdrop in his well-known writings. Donner, when discussing how to understand this time period. His analysis centers on the interactions between tribal, regional, and imperial systems as he highlights their impact on the developing Muslim community. Donner argues that the pre-existing social, cultural, and political realities of the Arabian Peninsula as well as the Byzantine and Tasmanian Empires formed the early Muslims rather than the other way around.<sup>10</sup>

Muslims who traveled to Medina in search of safety typically stayed in the Suffah because they were destitute, homeless, or in need. These people frequently lacked access to food and were unable to afford shelter. The Suffah was identified by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a location where people may obtain lodging and communal support.

The Suffah served as a hub for education, giving locals the chance to study directly from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions. They would gain knowledge about the teachings of the Quran, the life of the Prophet, Islamic law, and Islamic ethics, among other facets of Islam. The early Muslim community's knowledge and practice of Islam were shaped by this educational setting. The Suffah was a raised area or elevated platform that was a component of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia (also known as Masjid-e-Nabawi). It was very important during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUP) and played a vital role in the early Islamic community.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Siddiqi, Mazheruddin. "A Historical Study of Iqbal's View on Sufism" *Islamic Studies* 5, no. 4 (1966): 411-427.

<sup>10</sup> Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Haykal, Muhammad Husayn. *The life of Muhammad*. American Trust Publications, 1976, p. 74

In the early Islamic civilization, Suffah residents were also quite important. They took part in a variety of communal activities, such as military campaigns, helping with administrative duties, and enhancing the general wellbeing of the Medina Muslim community.<sup>12</sup>

The Suffah was an important institution in Medina during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that was essential to social control. A group of Companions (Sahabah) resided, studied, and participated in numerous activities at the Suffa, which was essentially a shelter or platform next to the Prophet's Mosque, under the direction and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>13</sup> The inhabitants of the Suffa were occasionally used by the Prophet Muhammad as mediators and conflict-resolution specialists. They were qualified candidates to assist in resolving conflicts and preserving community peace because of their objectivity and reputation for wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

### **Basic Needs Provision:**

Suffah's citizens frequently lived in poverty and lacked essentials. The Muslim community and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) took it upon themselves to make sure that the people of Suffah had access to food, clothing and shelter. This social support action emphasizes the need of caring for society's most vulnerable individuals, the people who are susceptible to the poverty and social inequalities, Holy Prophet cared about these people more than others.<sup>15</sup> Uthman bin Affan (RA) was one of the wealthiest men in Medina, and he used his wealth to support Suffah. He provided them with food, clothing and shelter and helped finance their education. There were other close companions also who devoted themselves and their wealth in greater cause of Islam. For instance, Abd-ur-Rahman bin Auf was a wealthy merchant from Mecca. He was one of the first to embrace Islam and a close companion of the Prophet (pbuh). He used his wealth to support Suffah and also played a role in promoting social cohesion and harmony in Medina.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cucari, Nicola, Salvatore Esposito De Falco, and Beatrice Orlando, *Diversity of Board of Directors and Environmental Social Governance: Evidence from Italian Listed Companies, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, Wiley, Online Library, Vol.25, no. 3 (2018): 250-266

<sup>13</sup> Apriyansyah, Dede, and Erik Novianto. "CLASSICAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND THE RELEVANCE OF ULAMA'S DA'WAH IN SOCIETY." *Jurnal Muftadiin* 8, no. 01 (2022)., p. 139 140

<sup>14</sup> Watt, Donald Cameron. America and the British Foreign Policy-Making Elite, from Joseph Chamberlain to Anthony Eden, 1895–1956." *The Review of Politics* 25, no. 1 (1963): 3-33.

<sup>15</sup> Sikirullahi, Bukhari, *Islamic Financial Products As Alternative To Ribā In The Cooperative Sector In Nigeria.* *Journal of Islamic Banking & Finance* 29, no. 4 (2012)

<sup>16</sup> Yusof, Nor Hafizi Bin, Aliyu Hizbullah Al-Hasan, Mohd A'Tarahim Bin Mohd Razali, Abdillah Hisyam Bin Abd Wahab, and Mohd Faiz Hakimi Bin Mat Idris. "Ketokohan al-Tabari Dalam Ilmu Qiraat dan

### **Education and Knowledge Transmission:**

In addition to meeting their bodily necessities, the people of Suffa also acquired education and knowledge from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). They were present in the Prophet's mosque, where they had the chance to watch the Prophet go about his daily business, hear his speeches, and pick his brain for information. The residents' strong moral and ethical basis was greatly influenced by this schooling.<sup>17</sup> The "ahl al-Suffa" demonstrated a steadfast dedication to learning, devoting themselves to the acquisition of knowledge in a variety of subjects, including religious doctrine, morality, and neighborhood issues. Under the direction of the Prophet Muhammad, they engaged in rigorous study, absorbing his teachings and spreading them throughout the larger Muslim community. For instance, Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd was a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the most respected Qur'anic scholars. He was also a member of the Suffa and instrumental in teaching the Quran to the youth of Medina.<sup>18</sup>

The main activity of the people of Suffah was learning from the Prophet Muhammad and his more experienced companions. They would study law, numerous other sciences, including religious doctrine. The goal of this knowledge acquisition was to improve their comprehension of Islam and how it is actually practiced. The Suffah served as a hub for education, giving locals the chance to study directly from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions. They would gain knowledge about the teachings of the Quran, the life of the Prophet, Islamic law, and Islamic ethics, among other facets of Islam. The early Muslim community's knowledge and practice of Islam were shaped by this educational setting.<sup>19</sup>

To grasp the function of education and the spread of knowledge in Medina requires a basic grasp of the Qur'an, the main sacred text of Islam. For instance, the question "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" is posed in Surah Al-Zumar (39:9). This passage emphasizes the value of information and implies the existence of people with specialized knowledge, like those living in Suffah: The Suffah's inhabitants served as a focal point for the exchange of knowledge. They would get

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Pandangan Beliau Terhadap Al-Ahruf Al-Sab'ah." *Journal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporari* 10 (2015): 81

<sup>17</sup> Ibn e Hisham, "al-Sira al-Nabawiyah." Cairo: Dar al-Fajr li-I-Turath (2004)  
<https://archive.org/details/sirat-ibn-hisham-english/page/n51/mode/2up>

<sup>18</sup> Sikirullahi, Bukhari. "Islamic Financial Products As Alternative To Riba In The Cooperative Sector In Nigeria." *Journal of Islamic Banking & Finance*, (2012) Vol. 29, no.4 p.81-93

<sup>19</sup> Haykal, Muhammad Husayn. *The life of Muhammad*. American Trust Publications, 1976.

inquiries from those who wanted answers, counsel, or instruction. They were taught by prophet, they learned new languages and taught these languages to others. As a result, the Suffah helped the community as a whole spread knowledge and Islamic beliefs.<sup>20</sup>

### **Spiritual Education and Discipleship:**

The people of Suffah were thought of as the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) disciples. They received particular consideration, spiritual direction, and instruction in numerous facets of religious and social life. They were taught by the Prophet the virtues of patience, tenacity, and humility, which were crucial for their development as individuals and for making a positive impact on society. Which among you would want to go out every morning to Buthan or al-Aqiq and fetch two large she-camels without being guilty of sin or without honoring the bonds of kinship? Said the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) when we were in Suffah. We answered, "We would like to do it, Messenger of Allah."

In response, he remarked, "Doesn't any of you teach or recite two verses from the Book of Allah, the Majestic and Glorious, every morning at the mosque?" That is preferable to two she-camels for him, and similarly, three verses are preferable to three she-camels, four verses are preferable to four (she-camels), and so on in terms of their camel count.<sup>21</sup> According to Ibn Ishaq and Guillaume, the "ahl al-Suffah" was famed for their devotion and adherence to moral standards. They upheld the greatest moral standards and served the Muslim community well by demonstrating the Islamic teachings in their deeds, interactions, and contributions.

For instance, Abu Hurairah was a former slave who became one of the most famous hadith scholars. He was a member of the Suffah and studied with Prophet Muhammad for many years.<sup>22</sup>

### **Participation in Community Activities:**

The people of Suffah were not cut off from the rest of Medina. They took an active role in neighborhood activities, lending aid and support as required. They participated in making decisions, settling conflicts, and giving counsel to the Muslim community because their familiarity with and comprehension of Islam was valued.<sup>23</sup>

On a number of issues pertaining to the administration of the Muslim community, the residents of Suffa were also consulted. The Prophet Muhammad and his fellow

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<sup>20</sup> Baqar, Sadia, and Muhammad Osama Shafiq. "A COMPARATIVE STUDY RELATED TO THE EFFECTS OF SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE STUDENTS OF AL-SUFFAH ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY AND THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES IN KARACHI CITY." *Habibia Islamicus (The International Journal of Arabic and Islamic Research)* 3, no. 1 (2019): 111-124.

<sup>21</sup> Siddiqui, Abdul Hameed. *Sahih Muslim. Peace Vision*, Book 004, number 1756 (1976)

<sup>22</sup> Bukhari, A. A. "Sahih al-Bukhari." *STUDI KITAB HADIS* (1986): p.47.

<sup>23</sup> Dr.Farhat Naz Rahman & Dr.Muhammad Rashid Kamal Ansari, *Rituals, Poetry and Literature, International Journal of Resaerch an Analysis, Vol. 3, p.19,20*

companions frequently sought their opinions and counsel on significant issues. This participative method promoted a sense of inclusion and community. The Qur'an emphasizes the idea of consultation (Shūrā) as a crucial tenet of administration. According to Surah Al-Shūrā<sup>24</sup>, "And those who have responded to their lord, established prayer, and whose affairs are [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what we have provided them, they spend." This passage implies that decision-making should involve mutual deliberation and consultation. The Suffah was a living example of Islam's emphasis on compassion, social solidarity, and aiding the less fortunate. It served as a metaphor for the communal nature of life and the Muslim community's obligation to help those in need. The Suffah exemplified the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) teaching that it is crucial to support and uplift the weaker members of society. The Suffah also acted as a forum for dialogue and consultation with the local populace.<sup>25</sup> The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) would consult the people of the Suffah when making decisions, demonstrating the importance the early Muslim society in Medina placed on their ideas and insights.<sup>26</sup>

According to al-Tabari<sup>27</sup>, the "ahl al-Suffah" actively participated in Medina's social government and was instrumental in local affairs. They were significant decision-makers and conflict-resolution figures in early Muslim society because of their in-depth knowledge of Islamic principles and adherence to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. The Suffah served as a place of learning where the Companions learned various facets of Islam straight from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)<sup>28</sup>. It offered a setting for learning about the Quran, Hadith, Islamic law, and ethics, influencing how the early Muslim society understood and applied Islam. For instance, Salman al-Farsi was a Persian convert to Islam and one of the most influential figures in the early Muslim community. He was a member of the Suffah and was instrumental in promoting social cohesion and harmony in Medina.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Al-Raysuni, Ahmad. "Al-Shura." *The Quranic Principle of Consultation*, "International Institute of Islamic Thought" (2012) p.4,5

<sup>25</sup> Qomaruzzaman, Bambang. "The theology of non-violent Islamic education based on Al-Sira Al-Nabawiyah." *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021) p.5

<sup>26</sup> Hussain, Amjad M., *Education of the First Muslim Community*. Malakand University Research Journal of Islamic Studies (MURJIS) ISSN: 2708-6577 4, no. 02 (2022): 01-14.

<sup>27</sup> Yasin, Selman Sami. "Hadith Studies in Hijri 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries.

<sup>28</sup> Bozkurt, Nahide. "The Life of Muhammad Before Prophetic Call in The Sirah of Ibn Ishaq." *Siyer Araştırmaları Dergisi* 11-Hz. Muhammed (sas) Özel Sayısı (2021): 11-28.

<sup>29</sup> The History of al-Ṭabarī Vol. 12: The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine AD 635-637/AH 14-15. State University of New York Press, 2015, p.120

Social welfare and charitable giving: The people of Suffah participated in social welfare activities as well. They were crucial in helping the underprivileged, delivering aid, and meeting the needs of the neighborhood. The Quran calls on believers to do good deeds and help those who are less fortunate. They inquire about how much money they should spend, O Muhammad, according to Surah Al-Baqarah (2:215). Say, "Whatever good you spend, spend it on your parents, your relatives, your orphans, the poor, and the traveler."

Those who live in the Suffah were picked with care based on their religiosity, dedication, and desire to study. They received guidance from the Prophet Muhammad, who also helped them develop their leadership skills and get ready to take on leadership positions in the community. The Suffah served as the educational and training center for many of the early Muslim leaders, including Abu Hurraira and Abdullah ibn Abbas (Al-Faruqi, 1986). For instance, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari was a member of the Ansar, the indigenous community of Medina. He was a rich man and used his wealth to support Suffah. He also played a role in the education and training of Medina's youth.

In addition, the Suffah served as a welfare facility, providing help, food, and shelter to those in needs. It was a prime example of the Islamic values of compassion, social solidarity, and aid for the underprivileged. Within the Muslim community, the Suffa also participated in mediation and dispute settlement.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Suffah community was an exceptional and committed group within Medina's early Muslim civilization. They were regarded as the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) pupils and were given particular spiritual direction and life lessons in a variety of areas. The Prophet urged people to pursue knowledge by reciting passages from the Quran, stressing the value of qualities like perseverance, humility, and patience. Suffah's citizens were renowned for their steadfast dedication to moral principles and their model follower of Islamic law. They took an active part in community events, lending their knowledge to counseling, dispute resolution, and decision-making. They were great benefactors to the Muslim society because of their profound knowledge of Islam and its tenets. During the early Islamic era, the "ahl al-Suffah" had a considerable impact on Medina's social government<sup>30</sup>. They held a prominent role in the Muslim

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<sup>30</sup> Guillaume, Alfred, and Muḥammad Ibn-Ishāq. "The Life of Muhammad: A translation of [Ibn-] Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* [engl.][Hrsg.: 'Abdalmalik Ibn-Hiṣām.] With introd. and notes by A [lfred] Guillaume." (1955) p. 181

community due to their commitment to learning, piety and close ties to the Prophet Muhammad. This study emphasizes their contributions to social governance by focusing on their participation in moral reasoning, community involvement and decision-making processes. Suffah's legacy continues to inspire people. They remind us that we can all make a difference in the world and that we can all work together to create a more just society. The Suffah played various roles in the social administration of Medina. They kept the community safe; they maintained the mosque and its facilities; they educated and trained young people; and they served as a forum for discussion and debate.

The Suffah community operated on the basis of consultation and conversation, in accordance with the Qur'anic concept of "Shurā." The Suffah community was a living example of Islam's emphasis on compassion, societal cohesion, and helping those in need. In accordance with the Quran's injunction to perform good acts and aid the poor, they engaged in social welfare activities and offered instruction and training for upcoming Muslim community leaders.

In conclusion, the inhabitants of Suffah actively contributed to the formation of the first Muslim community in addition to being beneficiaries of the Prophet's teachings. Their dedication to learning, moral principles, community service, and altruism created a long-lasting legacy that illustrated the significant influence of their deeds and Islamic teachings on society.