

AN EXPLORATION OF AMINA WADUD'S THOUGHTS ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN MUSLIM PUBLIC RITUALS

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***Abstract:** Gender inclusion in contemporary society is prominent in recent studies, especially, among female scholars. Among the many issues often discussed is women's leadership, which remains controversial in the Muslim world. One of the prominent advocates of this gender issue is Amina Wadud, whose opinion is extended to the leadership of women in public rituals, such as the deliverance of Khutbah and the leading of Salah, despite their dominance by menfolk since the Prophetic era. This paper, therefore, examines the views of Amina Wadud on gender inclusion in the public ritual of Islamic worship and juxtaposes them with other scholastic views. Historical and analytical methods have been employed for data collection. The historical method was used to account for the biography of Amina Wadud, while the analytical method was used to explain her thoughts on women's leadership in Islamic public rituals. The findings show that Amina Wadud's views are based on her position on gender equality, an issue in the feminist world. The non-definite proofs of the prohibition of women leading a community or congregation of men also assisted her in establishing her feminist idea. The paper concludes by encouraging Muslims to hold onto the practices of the early Muslims and not to philosophise against Islamic practices.*

Key Words: Amina Wadud, Muslim Public Rituals, Qur'an and Hadith, Women Leadership.

Introduction

Leadership is the capability of a person to lead a cluster of individuals for the completion of a certain specified mission and to groom them with the aim of successive management so that no flaw can be created.¹ A true leader is a person of good principles who is firm and dynamic. Sincerity, commitment, positive attitude are charisma needed in the conduct of their personal as well as

¹ Muhammad Yousaf Jamil, "Islamic Perspective of Leadership: A Role Model for Today's CEOs," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 5, no. 2 (July, 2015): 25.

professional lives. Leadership is looked upon as a means of motivating and guiding people² in a manner and direction that is planned such that it is in the preeminent concern of the organisation; it is making a change for the betterment of the organisation.³

Leadership is important in breeding a better and more secure human life. It is the process which mobilises an individual or society to achieve the desired objectives without being coerced.⁴ For Islam, Thus, it plays an important role in building the society especially when it is administered based on Islamic principles of governance which are the conglomeration of the Glorious Qur'an and the exemplary life of the Prophet. By this, the Prophet becomes an undisputed example to emulate in the leadership affairs of this world. Hence, Allah says "There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often" (*Surah al-Ahzab*: 21).

This verse shows that Allah intends that people who seek the pleasure of Allah and reward in the hereafter, should emulate the lifestyle of the Prophet. The Prophet administered matters of *Sharī'ah* smoothly and properly to ensure peaceful coexistence among the Muslims. The importance of leadership cannot be disputed as without it, all administrative affairs may be stalled. Thus, Islam places much importance on the concept of leadership even if within a small group.⁵ Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri and Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with them) reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "When three persons set out on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their leader."⁶

Leadership is generally associated with *al-Siyāсах* or *al-Siyādah* or *al-Imāmah* or *al-'Imara'* or *al-Ri'āyah* or *al-Wilayah* or *al-*

² Rafik I. Beekun and B. Jamal, *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective* (Beltsville: Amana Publishers, 1999), 12.

³ Jamil, "Islamic Perspective," 26.

⁴ Ezad Azraai Jamsari, Wan Kamal Mujani and Noor Inayah Ya'akub (eds.), "The Basis of Leadership in Islam," *Journal of Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 8 (2012): 1399.

⁵ Beekun and Jamal, *Leadership*, 13.

⁶ S. A. Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, 3 (Beirut: Daru'l-Hadith, 1974): Book 8, Hadith 960.

Ri'asah and *al-Khilafah*.⁷ All these words are defined as leadership. Thus, leadership in the Arabic language covers a wide area and is not limited to state or racial (group) leadership, but extends to leadership in the fields of knowledge, worship as well as custody and guardianship of a trust.⁸

Generally, a leader is a servant of Allah selected based on the majority nomination by the people. He is the trustee in shaping and developing society in all aspects of life based on his planning policies. The concept of leadership covers everybody regardless of gender, race, colour and status. Islam differentiates further the leadership roles of individuals. For example, a Hadith narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Umar:

The Messenger of Allah says: Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The Amir (ruler) who is over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children and she is responsible for them; and a man's slave is a shepherd in charge of his master's property and he is responsible for it. So each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock.⁹

Based on the above hadith, men are charged with the leadership and protection of their household which includes their wives and children, while a woman is also charged with the responsibility of taking care of her husband's household and children. It also entailed that, taking care of the household has been traditionally regarded as the duty and responsibility of a woman in which she holds a leadership role as a vice to the husband.

Therefore, the traditional roles of women are mothers and child bearers. But, there are arguments that the role of a woman should not be limited to the confinement of her home. This led to the rise against this traditional belief which has excluded women from the role of leadership in both religious and political spheres. Fatima

⁷A. Kelawa, *Female Leadership in Islam: Status in Shari'ah* (Kuala Lumpur: Peberbit University, 1990).

⁸Jamil, "Islamic Perspective," 26.

⁹A. H. Siddiqi, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, (Beirut: Daru'l-Arabia, 2007) Book 20, Hadith 4496.

Mernissi, an Islamic Scholar and a leading feminist, claims that Hadiths were contrived and that men took advantage of and used them as a political weapon to maintain what they saw as vital to them, one of these being the oppression of women.¹⁰ Her view is further supported by another female scholar Asma Barlas who also noted sexual inequality and discrimination against women in most Muslim societies.¹¹ Among these strong proponents of women's leadership is Amina Wadud, who is an advocate for Gender Justice which she refers to as 'Gender Inclusion.' She opined that the act of gender justice runs through the veins of every Muslim woman and that marriage and family are the 'birthplace' of Gender inequalities.¹²

Amina Wadud also added that little research has been done on female leadership in ritual worship. Rather focus has been diverted to the political aspect. She regards the attitude of scholars condemning the act of female leadership as a form of gender oppression which has a major effect on women folk.¹³ It is against this background that this paper discusses her views on both ritual and political leadership. A brief biography would help situate and discuss her thoughts.

Biography of Amina Wadud

In 1952, Amina Wadud was born in Bethesda (Maryland, USA), into an African-American Methodist family and named Mary Teasley. At that time, her father was a Methodist preacher. She grew up in Washington D.C.¹⁴ Wadud's first interest was in the field of

¹⁰ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 119.

¹¹ A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019), 4.

¹² Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: One world, 2006), 12.

¹³ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 13.

¹⁴ Edward E. Curtis, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76.

education, but she was told that “learning is not important.”¹⁵ She is married with five children.¹⁶

During the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s, she converted to Islam, while still studying at the University of Pennsylvania and adopted an Arabic name. Wadud experienced life as an African-American woman living in a community where white supremacy was practised. In that living condition, Wadud’s family was deprived and lived in poverty as the community discriminated against women. The depth of discrimination that she faced as a poor and black female drove her to look for transcended tranquillity which she finally found during her college years when she was introduced to Islam.¹⁷

She earned her degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania (1970-1975) and her Master’s Degree in Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan. She later obtained her Ph.D. in Islamic Studies and Arabic at the same institution in 1988. As preparation for her PhD in Islamic Studies, Wadud went to Egypt to study Arabic and used the knowledge she gained in Islamic Studies to attain a reading of the Qur’an and its view on women.¹⁸ After completing her Doctoral degree, Wadud took lecturing appointments at different universities such as Qar Younis University in Libya, the International Islamic University (IIUM) in Malaysia, and the Virginia Commonwealth University in the United States.¹⁹

It was when she was teaching at the Department of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) between 1989 and 1992 that she became involved with the Sisters in Islam (SIS) and wrote several articles in pamphlets that highlighted, according to her, the Qur’an’s support for sexual equality. Her seminal work, *Qur’an and Women* was also published during her service with the university. In 1992, a

¹⁵ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 76.

¹⁶ Amina Wadud, “Aishah’s Legacy: The Struggle for Women’s Rights within Islam,” in *The New Voices of Islam: Rethinking Politics and Modernity: A Reader*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 201.

¹⁷ Maureen E. Fiedler, *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling: Women Religious Leaders in Their Own Words* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), 74.

¹⁸ Fiedler, *Breaking*, 75.

¹⁹ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 76.

Malaysian Press Company published her book entitled *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. The book was later republished by the Oxford University Press in 1999.²⁰

In 1992, Wadud accepted an appointment to teach in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Virginia Commonwealth University. 'Women and the Qur'an' and 'The Patriarchal Misinterpretation of the Scripture' were her main areas of focus. In Berkeley, she was also a visiting professor at the University of California as well as the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.²¹ Wadud was also involved in many women's organisations such as Sisters in Islam (SIS), Muslim World United (M.W.U), and Together Righteousness Unites the Heart (T.R.U.T.H). She is the Director of the Progressive Muslim Union, a leading Islamic Feminist group in Malaysia. She is also known as one of the most important figures of Islamic feminism. She has written extensively about Islam and Gender Justice. Among her books that have been published are 'Qur'an and Women' (1999) and 'Inside the Gender Jihad' (2006)²² which are the Primary source of her views and position on the leadership of women in Public Ritual.

Amina Wadud and Public Ritual Leadership

Islam is not merely a religion but a way of life for a Muslim whom it guides from cradle to the grave.²³ *Ibādah* (worship) is an Arabic word derived from *abd* (a slave) and it means submission.²⁴ All the actions of a slave which he makes to please his master are *Ibādah*, so being a Muslim we are servants of Allah and all our actions which are done for the sake of Allah's pleasure are considered

²⁰ Wadud, "Aishah's Legacy."

²¹ Alexandra Samoleit, *Amina Wadud and Feminist Interpretation of Surah 4:34* (Münich: GRIN Verlag, 2008), 4.

²² Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 76.

²³ Abdur-Rahman Doi, *The Cardinal Principles of Islam* (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1983), 1.

²⁴ Samee-Ullah Bhat and Mohamad Ilham Shiekh, "Concept of *Ibādah* (Worship) In Islam: A Study of Some Relevant Qur'anic Text," *International Conference on Recent Research and Innovations in Social Science and Education* (Osmania University Centre for International Program, Hyderabad India: May, 2018), 64.

‘*Ibādah*.²⁵ The famous 13th-century thinker *Ibn Taymiyyah*, defined ‘*Ibādah* as an act that encompasses everything that Allah likes and is pleased with ranging from actions, thinking and sayings inside and outside.²⁶ According to *Imam Abu Hanifa*, ‘*Ibādah* is the action of a Muslim that stifles and subdues his hedonistic desires and which is done for the respect and pleasure of his Lord.²⁷

Allah has therefore commanded the Muslims in several verses of the Glorious Qur’an to perform acts of ‘*Ibādah*. The Qur’an says in *Surat Hijr: 99*

وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ ٩٩

And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty (death).

Islam legislates a series of rituals which explain the connection between Allah and mankind such as prayer (*Salah*), supplication (*Ad-Du‘ā*), dedication, fasting (*Ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*Al-Ḥajj*), charity to the poor (*Az-Zakah*), enjoining what is good and forbidding what is bad (*Al- Amr bi’l- Ma ‘ruf wa- n- Nahyu ‘ani’l Munkar*), calling to Islam (*Ad- Da’wah*), struggle (*Al Jihād*) in the way of Allah, recitation of the glorious Qur’an and other ritual actions which bring man near to Allah.²⁸

Salah (prayer) is the most primary and the most important of these obligations. It is the first act of worship decreed on Muslims by Allah and was ordained on the night of the Prophet’s (S.A.W) ascension to the seven heavens. It is the second of the five pillars of Islam after the *Shahada*.²⁹ Allah has enjoined it on every believing Muslim as an important act of ritual. Allah says, “But those who hold fast to the Book and establish prayer - indeed, We will not allow to be lost the reward of the reformers” (*Suratu’l A ‘raf: 170*).

²⁵ Bhat and Shiekh, “Concept of ‘*Ibādah*,” 64.

²⁶ Muhammad ‘Abdul Haqq Ansari, *Ibn Tamiyyah expounds on Islam: Selected Writings of Shaykh al- Islam Taqi ad- Din Ibn Tamiyyah on Islamic Life, Life and Society* (Riyadh: Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa’ud Islamic University, 2000), 169.

²⁷ Muhammad Masudur Rahman, “The Inter-relationship between *Ibādah* and *Halal* Finance-A Critical Study,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 5, no. 1 (2015): 15.

²⁸ Nathif Jama Adam and Kitab Al-Salaah, *The Book of Prayer*, www.islambasics.com (Assessed on April 28th, 2020).

²⁹ Abdurrahman Ahmad bin Shu’aib, *Sunan an-Nasa’i*, 1 (Cairo: Daru’l-Ma’arif, 1974): Book 5, Hadith 464.

The importance of this act has also been explained by the Prophet in a hadith where he is reported to have said. “It was narrated from 'Abdullah bin Buraidah that his father said: ‘The Messenger of Allah said: The covenant that stands between us and them is the *Salah*; whoever abandons it, he has committed disbelief.’”³⁰

This Hadith expounds on the fact that a Muslim who neglects his *Ṣalāh* is no different from a *Kāfir* (non-believer). However, Islam has prescribed a specific time limit for each prayer as stated in the Qur'an. Thus, the prayer consists of five obligatory prayers.³¹ Performance of which, with the other Muslims in the congregation at the Mosque, is a duty upon every male Muslim of sound mind. On this, the Prophet said

The prayer offered in congregation is twenty-five times more superior (in reward) to the prayer offered alone in one's house or a business centre because if one performs ablution and does it perfectly, and then proceeds to the mosque with the sole intention of praying, then for each step which he takes towards the mosque, Allah upgrades him a degree in reward and (forgives) crosses out one's sin till he enters the mosque. When he enters the mosque he is considered in prayer as long as he is waiting for the prayer and the angels keep on asking for Allah's forgiveness for him and they keep on saying: 'O Allah! Be Merciful to him, O Allah! Forgive him, as long as he keeps on sitting at his praying place and does not pass the wind.'³²

The above quotation shows the value and importance of attending congregational prayer in the mosque. Furthermore, women are also enjoined to participate in congregational prayers at the mosque. Ibn 'Umar reported the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as saying: “Do not prevent your women from visiting the mosque; but their houses are better for them (for praying).”³³

Therefore, in every congregational prayer, the participants are to choose from amongst themselves an Imām (leader) to lead them in

³⁰ Adam and Al-Salaah, *The Book of Prayer*.

³¹ Adam and Al-Salaah, *The Book of Prayer*.

³² M. M. Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, 1 (Cairo: Daru'l-Fikr, 1997): Book 8, Hadith 466.

³³ Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yazid, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, 3 (Beirut: Daru'l-Hadith, 2008): Book 5, Hadith 1000

the *Salāh* (prayer). The word *Imām* is an Arabic term used throughout the world to refer to a Muslim leader both in the mosque and the society. The word *Imām* as it occurs in the Qurʾān means a leader in the religion and society, a pattern, a model and a guide.³⁴ Al- Ilory has divided the concept of *Imāmah* into two (2) divisions as follows.³⁵

- a) *Al- Imāmatu l- Kubrā*: This division of *Imāmah* indicates an overall leader and encompass religious and political leadership.
- b) *Al –Imāmatu s- Sughrā*: This division is a form of minor leadership which deals with religious activities such as leading *Salāh* (prayer).

Traditionally, an important criterion for being an Imam and leading *Salāh* (prayer) of mixed gender is for the person to be a male. The performative practices of prayer are embedded in the cultural norm for only men to lead *Salāh*. As the Qurʾān is silent about male leadership in prayers, Muslims turn to the Hadith and the example of Muhammad’s life as a source of religious legitimacy.³⁶ One such Hadith is reported by Jabir: “Let absolutely no woman lead a man in prayer.”³⁷

However, in modern times, some women scholars have begun to yearn for the right of inclusion in every aspect including the act of leading a mixed-gender *Salāh*. Even though it is permissible for a woman to lead a congregation of female folks in *Salāh*, they still clamour for more. Among this group of women is a renowned scholar Amina Wadud.

Twenty-five years ago, Amina Wadud led a mixed-gender congregation after delivering a *Khutbah* at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in South Africa.³⁸ This was an unusual attitude in the Islamic world; it was the first time a woman would lead both genders

³⁴ S. B. Suraju, “Analysis of women Leadership in Islam,” *Ad- Dariyah International Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2013): 8.

³⁵ Why Islam, “Status of Women in Islam;” www.whyislam.org (Assessed on 21stFebruary, 2020).

³⁶ Why Islam, “Status of Women in Islam.”

³⁷ Muhammad At-Tirmidhi, *Jami’ at-Tirmidhi*, 4 (Riyadh: Daru-s-Salam, 2014): Book 7, Hadith 2262.

³⁸ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 34.

in an act of public worship in Islamic history. This brought about a very much controversial topic, “Can a woman lead *Salah*?”

In affirming and establishing her position on the permissibility of women leading the *Salah* for both genders, Amina once again broke the norms by leading over 100 male and female Muslims in *Salah* on the 18th of March, 2005 at a mosque in the City of New York. The prayer setting was however not the traditional way of separation between males and females; rather the two genders were mixed, sitting together without any demarcation.³⁹

To support this action of hers, Amina quoted the *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) where he permitted an Ansari woman, Umm Waraqah bint Abdullahi to lead her household (*Ahl dariha*) in *Salah* (prayers).

The hadith is narrated as follows:

When the Prophet proceeded for the Battle of Badr, I said to him: Messenger of Allah allow me to accompany you in the battle. I shall act as a nurse for patients. It is possible that Allah might bestow martyrdom upon me. He said: Stay at your home. Allah, the Almighty, will bestow martyrdom upon you. The narrator said: Hence she was called a martyr. She read the Qur'an. She sought permission from the Prophet to have a mu'adhdhin in her house. He, therefore, permitted her (to do so). She announced that her slave and slave girl would be free after her death. One night they went to her and strangled her with a sheet of cloth until she died, and they ran away. The next day Umar announced among the people, "Anyone who has knowledge about them, or has seen them, should bring them (to him)." Umar (after their arrest) ordered (to crucify them) and they were crucified. This was the first crucifixion at Medina.⁴⁰

Another tradition has also been narrated through a different chain of transmitters by Umm Waraqah daughter of ‘Abd Allah b. al-Harith. “The Messenger of Allah used to visit her at her house. He appointed a mu’adhdhin to call adhan for her, and he commanded

³⁹ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 34.

⁴⁰ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 35.

her to lead the inmates of her house in prayer.” ‘Abd al-Rahman said: “I saw her mu’adhdhin who was an old man.”⁴¹

Wadud interprets the Arabic word *Ahl dariha* to mean a ‘community’ which includes the male and female gender rather than her household which comprises just the female gender.⁴² However, she did not give an extensive explanation as to what she meant even though the hadith was the basis used for the argument as to a woman leading a mixed gender in *Salah*.

She goes further to state the fact that the Qur’an never mentioned that the Imam must never be a woman, thus restricting the position to men only will be an act of injustice which Islam stands against. Wadud in her opinion that everyone is a *Khalīfah* of Allah on earth which she calls the “Tawhidic Paradigm” which gives the right to every human, be it male or female, to serve in whatever capacity, he or she wishes to stand as a leader be it social, religious or Political.⁴³ She points out the fact that every human is independent on its own, however, they all co-depend on Almighty Allah to whom belongs all Power. Wadud opines that the cultural and traditional way of male dominance in religious leadership should not be the yardstick of depriving females of this role. Rather, the *Tawhid* belief that everyone is a *Khalīfah* on earth should be the prerequisite.

Woman as a *Khatībah*

Besides the five obligatory prayers, Allah has also ordained the *Jummah* (Friday Congregational Prayer) as a necessary prayer in the Muslim Nation (*Ummah*). Allah says in Sūratu’ l *Jumu’ah* thus: “O you who have believed, when [the adhan] is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu’ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That would be better for you if you only knew.”⁴⁴ On the virtue of this prayer, the Prophet is reported to have said, as narrated by Al-Ja’d ad-Damri: “The Prophet said: He who leaves the Friday prayer (continuously) for three

⁴¹ Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York, Oxford University Press 1999), 40.

⁴² Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 177.

⁴³ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 168.

⁴⁴ Abdurrahman Ahmad bin Shu’aib, *Sunan an-Nasa’i*, 1 (Cairo: Daru’l-Ma’arif, 1974): Book 14, Hadith 1370.

Fridays on account of slackness, Allah will print a stamp on his heart.”⁴⁵

The performance of the *Jum‘ah* prayer is only allowed in the Congregational Mosques where Muslims congregate and the time for the *Jum‘ah* prayer is the time of the *Zuhr* prayer. The prayer is divided into two; the *Khutbah* (sermon) and the two *rakats Salah*. Much importance is attached to the *Khutbah* as the Prophet said this thus,⁴⁶ “If anyone performs ablution, doing it well, then come to the Friday prayer, listens and keeps silence, his sins between that time and the next Friday will be forgiven, with three days extra; but he who touches pebbles has caused an interruption.”

A *khatīb* is one who delivers a *Khutbah* to a group of people in the mosque, most especially, on Friday as part of the *Jum‘ah* activity while *Khutbah* (the sermon) precedes the *Jum‘ah* prayer on Friday when both women and men congregate.⁴⁷ *Khutbah*, thus, can be delivered either in Arabic language or in the local language of the community where it is being delivered.⁴⁸ Both the *Khutbah* and the leading of the prayer on Friday are predominantly delivered by the male folks irrespective of the population of either gender. The *Khutbah* can be based on topics ranging from *Tawhīd*, *Fiqh*, inheritance, *Salah*, *Zakah*, commanding what is good and forbidding evil and so on.

On this *Khutbah* deliverance, Wadud is of the view that women’s *tawhidic* humanity allows them to function in all roles for which they develop the prerequisite qualifications including the presentation of *Khutbah*. She proved her point when she gave a *Khutbah* at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, in Cape Town, South Africa, in August 1994. Even though in her book she made it clear that she was only invited to give the pre- *Khutbah*, she later ended up giving

⁴⁵ M. M. Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, 2 (Cairo: Daru’l-Fikr, 1997): Book 13, Hadith 33.

⁴⁶ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 162.

⁴⁷ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 178.

⁴⁸ R. Bankole, “A Study of Amina Wadud’s View on Women Leadership in Islam” (Long Essay, Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Al-Hikamah University Ilorin, 2015), 73.

the Friday *Khutbah* to a mixed-gender congregation where there was no traditional separation between the genders.⁴⁹

This action of hers generated lots of uproar and arguments not only in the Muslim Community where she delivered the sermon but also in the Muslim World. She thought she had broken the barrier and sentiments which had been put in place since time immemorial, against gender segregation, especially the womenfolk in the area of Muslim Public Ritual Leadership.

In furtherance of her position, Amina Wadud emphasises the fact that once the *Khutbah* delivered is good, the gender of the individual who delivered the *Khutbah* is irrelevant. She states,

For a genuine female inclusive reconstruction over the male hegemony in leadership, a woman must be present in both her particulars as a woman and her shared aspects with men as a Muslim person. Moreover, for a woman to contribute as a leader in the role of *khatibah*, she is required to present a substantive *Khutbah*.⁵⁰

This, she refers to as a means of fighting against the acclaimed Gender Jihad. She further the reason for delivering the *Khutbah* was that she was more qualified to be a *khatibah* due to her knowledge in the field of both Arabic and Islamic Studies.⁵¹ In her *Khutbah* at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, she noted:

So the perspective we have on marriage should be one of engaged surrender. And we should come forward with the consciousness and surrender in our hearts. At the end of the day, there is a possibility that this task will be a successful completion of what we know as our Islam. “I stand before you to remind you and to remind myself that the task of a Muslim is to continually engage in surrender. Sometimes we forget this task. Should we ever forget that we must consciously be engaged in surrender, surely Allah never forgets.

According to her, the *Khutbah* couldnot have been better if it were delivered by a man as it is normally done.

⁴⁹ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 43.

⁵⁰ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 180.

⁵¹ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 162.

Amina Wadud and Female Leadership

Throughout history, women have played an important role in promoting society and social goals. They, according to their positions in the family and their influence on family members, play an indirect role in the evolution of society. Even though women constitute half of the community's population, they play indirect roles in society. This is one major reason liberals like Amina Wadud began the campaign for women's leadership, which in her own terms, is known as 'Gender Inclusion.'

Amina Wadud, a Muslim scholar, feminist, and a 'Gender Inclusion Woman Activist', opines that women have equal rights to leadership as men. According to her, there is a close relationship between three major words as found in the Qur'an: *Tawḥīd* (the Unity of God), *Khalīfah* (moral agent), and *Taqwā* (moral consciousness). Explaining further, she believes that Islam is based on the concept of *Tawḥīd* and humans (male and female) who are created as *Khalīfah* on earth by Allah and their watchword is *Taqwa*.⁵² She based her accession on the verse of the Qur'an where Allah says

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know" (Suratul Baqarah: 30).

In explaining this verse, Amina states that no gender was mentioned as to which Allah is referring to as "a successive authority." Rather Allah has created humans, man or woman, and has placed them on earth as a vicegerent. Moreover, she points out that the English definition ascribed to *Khalīfah* and *Khilafah* as being a "vicegerent" does not fit the translation. The best translation is either a trustee or a moral agent.⁵³ The purpose of creating humans on earth is to serve as a "trustee" of Almighty Allah. She notes,

⁵² Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 32.

⁵³ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 33.

Human beings are created to be trustees on the earth. They are trustees of Allah. That is, human beings are charged with fulfilling a trust with Allah. Throughout the Qur'an, fulfilling the terms of this trust necessarily involves: (1) (voluntarily) obeying the will of Allah – alternatively interpreted as surrendering to the will of Allah, another term for “Islam”; and (2) participating in that obedience while here on earth. This implies responsibility: we are charged to manage our affairs on the earth in a fashion that demonstrates our surrender. Like the hadith (statement) of the Prophet, “Would you serve Allah? Serve your fellow creatures [first].”⁵⁴

Furthermore, she thinks that whoever places himself or herself above another in claiming superiority is suffering from the “egoism of Shirk”. She bases her argument on the fact that the only difference between a man and a woman is not based on biology in the sight of Allah; rather it is based on *Taqwa* which serves as the pillar of any form of leadership. All humankind is created with the purpose of trusteeship for Allah on earth. This purpose is the most significant feature of the moral agent. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, she explains that humanity is charged with a trust (*Amānah*) or a covenant (*Mithāq*) between themselves and Allah and humans accept this trust, or covenant, primordially,⁵⁵ “Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant” (*Sūratu 'l-Aḥzāb*: 72). Between human acceptance and the divine purpose for human creation rests the basic idea of Qur'anic guidance which is the cooperation between Allah, as Creator of all the world, and humankind, as creature and *khalifah* of Allah's creation on earth.⁵⁶

In furtherance of her argument for women's leadership, she cited the instance of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba and that the Qur'an uses no terms that imply that the position of a ruler is inappropriate for a woman. On the contrary, the Qur'anic story of Bilqis celebrates both her political and religious practices. Although the verse does point out (perhaps as peculiar) that she was a woman's ruling, this is nothing more than a statement quoted from one who had

⁵⁴ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 34.

⁵⁵ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 35.

⁵⁶ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 28.

observed her. Beyond this identification of her as a woman, no distinction, restriction, addition, limitation, or specification of her as a woman who leads is ever mentioned.⁵⁷ She goes further to point out that Bilqis was intelligent, ruled over people with her wisdom and followed the advice of her cabinet members.⁵⁸ She points out the wisdom of the Queen as deduced from *Suratul An Naml:33- 35*, which states,

“We are men of strength and great military might, but the command is yours, so see what you will command.” (33) She said, “Indeed kings - when they enter a city, they ruin it and render the honoured of its people humbled. And thus do they do(34) But indeed, I will send to them a gift and see with what [reply] the messengers will return.”⁵⁹

According to Wadud, the Queen in her wisdom decided to send King Sulaiman a gift as a test of whether he was after her Kingdom or he was truly preaching the words of Allah. After Prophet Sulaiman sent back her gifts, she decided to pay a personal visit at which she was mesmerised at the sight of a replica of her throne. Wadud thinks that the only deficiency in the leadership of Queen Bilqis was her religion and there was no mention of any lack of Judgement due to her gender.

From the preceding references, Wadud concluded that the Qur’an never adjudged that a woman should not hold a leadership position nor anywhere does it restrict it to the male gender alone.

Amina Wadud’s Views on Muslim Public Ritual Leadership

Amina Wadud based her discussion of the issue on the *Tawhidic* paradigm. She argues that no verse of the Qur’an prohibits the female Gender from leading *Salah* or giving *Khutbah*. Her position has generated different *Fatwa* by different scholars who either buttress or oppose her view. Among the scholars who support her view is Nevin Reda. Nevin examines the Qur’an and early sources to argue that gender segregation in prayer was not instituted in the

⁵⁷ Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*, 41.

⁵⁸ Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*, 41.

⁵⁹ Nevin Reda, “Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 2 (2004): 93.

earliest era and that it came about towards the end of the third Islamic century. After that time a “system of total segregation and seclusion of women had been instituted, and women no longer had the right to participate freely in public life.”⁶⁰

Another leading feminist, Fatima Mernissi, who supports Wadud’s view, argues that the pre-Islamic misogynistic tendencies that existed in Arabia during the Prophet’s lifetime and shortly thereafter could have helped shape the character of rulings that would later be adopted by Muslim society but they were not present in the Prophet’s teachings.⁶¹

Likewise, in line with the evidence of the Hadith of Ummu Waraqah, scholars hold different opinions. For example, Abū Thawr argues that a man’s prayer behind a woman is acceptable and valid. Qādi Abi Tayyib and al-'Abdari also support the validity of women’s leadership in prayer (*Imāmat al-Mar'ah*).⁶² Similarly, Muhammad b. Ismā'il al-San'āni argues that this Hadith is a foundation for the validity of a woman’s leadership in prayer (*Imāmat al-Mar'ah*) in her own house, even with the presence of a man. In addition, the Prophet’s permission included the fact that Umm Waraqa led the prayer with an old man, a young male slave, and a female slave as her *ma'mūm*.

However, as the supporters of women's leadership try to justify their views and opinions, the scholars against the idea also do the same. For instance, in direct response to Wadud leading Friday prayers in 2005, some scholars hold a contrary view. For example, the famous Egyptian scholar Yusuf Al-Qaradawi argues that rulings about leadership in prayer are established by the evidence of authentic hadiths as well as the scholarly unanimity of Muslims⁶³ and are based on religious teachings, not on social customs as it has been claimed.⁶⁴ Amani Lubis, a female lecturer and an expert

⁶⁰ Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 87.

⁶¹ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abi Dawūd*, 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Hadith, 1999): Hadith 592.

⁶² Etin Anwar, *Sexing the Prayer: The Politics of Ritual and Feminist Activism in Indonesia Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen and Elif Medeni (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 197-216.

⁶³ D. S. Jalajel, “Women & Leadership in Islam A Critical Analysis of Classical Islamic Legal Texts” (PhD, Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, 2013), 5.

⁶⁴ Etin Anwar, *Sexing the Prayer*, 202.

on Arabic literature, however, doubts that Umm Waraqa's example could be universally applicable to all Muslim women. She argues that while the chain of transmitters of Umm Waraqa's hadith is valid, the content is situational. A woman's leadership in prayer (*Imamat al-Mar'ah*) is not theologically and customarily acceptable because Muslims are obliged to observe the Prophet Muhammad's examples closely and firmly.⁶⁵

Moreover, there are a few *hadith* that report both Aisha and Ummu Salamah, the wives of the Prophet leading female companions in prayer. It was narrated that Aisha used to lead women in prayer during the month of Ramadan while standing in the same row. It can be deduced from this that it is acceptable for a woman to lead *Salah* of the same gender while standing in the same row. This view is also supported by the four schools of thought:

- a) *Al-Hanafiyah* – According to the school of law, it is not permissible for men to follow a lady in *Salah*.
- b) *Ash-Shafi'yyah* – In the opinion of the school a male following a lady in *Salah* is incorrect.
- c) *Al-Malikiyyah* – According to the school of law, *Salah* will not be correct behind a lady Imam.
- d) *Al-Hanabilah* – In the opinion of the school of law, it is not correct in the opinion of the general *Fuqahāu* for a man to follow a lady in *Salah*.⁶⁶

From the above, it may be deduced that supporters of women's leadership based their arguments mainly on analogical deduction without strong and valid evidence from either the Qur'an or the *Sunnah* which are the two major sources of Islamic Law.

A Caliph or *Khilāfah* is the leader of a Muslim community. This role, from time immemorial, has been played by the male folks. In recent times, feminist scholars have challenged this position and advocated for gender equality. Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, an Islamic scholar asserts,

⁶⁵ Bankole, "Amina Wadud's View," 93.

⁶⁶ M.O. Muhibbu-din, "Feminism and Modern Islamic Politics: The Fact and the Fallacy," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15 (June, 2019): 48.

There is nothing in the authentic sources of Islam that prevents women from running for political offices if they are confident of their expertise and credentials to make a positive difference – provided they are not doing so at the expense of their greater responsibilities of nurturing and caring for their families. Here, it must be stressed at all times that Islam considers a woman's role as a mother to be the noblest duty she can ever perform; nothing else can replace it. However, if her involvement in politics does not come in the way of this crucial role, there is nothing in Islam to dissuade her from it.⁶⁷

Amina in her argument on the conformity of women, and leadership in the political sphere gives an example of Bilqis the Queen of Sheba. She opines that her leadership was not condemned nor was it ignored, therefore it serves as a confirmation of female leadership. However, The Qur'ān has not talked to the rule of the Queen of Sheba with disapproval and condemnation. Rather her habit of consulting others before deciding on vital issues, her wisdom and sound judgment and her readiness to accept Islam at once rather than persisting in disbelief, have found special mention in the Qur'ān.

However, despite her stand concerning women's leadership, several scholars have made their submissions, in support of their views, they quote a verse from the glorious Qur'an, where Allah says:

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand (*Suratu 'l Nisaa: 34*).

The Shāfi'ī jurist al-Māwardī cites the first part of the verse in al-Ḥawī al-Kabīr to argue against women holding judicial authority. He is the only one to do so, saying, “Men are responsible (*qaw-wāmūn*) for women on account of what God has favoured some over others, meaning in intellect and opinion, so it is not

⁶⁷ Anwar, *Sexing the Prayer*, 202.

permissible for them [women] to be in positions of responsibility over men.”⁶⁸

The scholarly consensus from four main *madhāhib* (Islam’s schools of thought) states that a woman cannot be a leader. Although several scholars were not so strict and allowed women to be leaders but not political leaders. Besides using the Qur’añ to support their argument, they also quote the Hadith of the Prophet narrated by Abubakr:

Abubakr said; Allah restrained me with something that I heard from the Messenger of Allah. When Kisra was destroyed, he said: “Who did they have to succeed him?” They said: “His daughter.” So the Prophet said: “A people will never succeed who give their leadership to a woman.” He said: “So when 'Aishah arrived - meaning in Al-Basrah - I remembered the saying of Messenger of Allah, so Allah restrained me by it.”⁶⁹

Thus, the traditional interpretation by a majority of jurists, also largely precludes women from becoming judges (part of the function of a *khalifah*). With this evidence, it can be concluded that the basis for female leadership is a personal analogy when the textual evidence against it is ignored.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the view of a prominent Islamic feminist, Amina Wadud, an Arabic and Islamic scholar of African-American descent on women’s leadership role in Islam. Her family and education prepared her to become an activist in championing Islamic women’s fight for equality in the religious space of Islam. She has argued in her works that the woman as a *Khatibah* could be a leader of religious ritual.

The study has revealed that her position on women’s leadership in Islam is founded on the fact of non-definite Qur’anic proofs of the prohibition of women's leadership either politically or ritually.

⁶⁸ Jalajel, *Women & Leadership*, 24.

⁶⁹ Muhammad At-Tirmidhi, *Jami`u at-Tirmidhi*, 4 (Riyadh: Daru-s-Salam, 2014): Book 7, Hadith 2262.

Though her arguments are sound, majority of the Islamic scholars hold the contrary view, whose arguments the author finds much more tenable and convincing. For this reason, the paper recommends that the Muslim *Ummah* should hold onto the practices of the early Muslims in religious issues. However, a further study of Amina Wadud's view on 'Gender Inclusion' in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith should be encouraged.

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