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## **Prophet Muhammad as a Catalyst for Social Change : Insights from Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines Prophet Muhammad's role as a transformative agent of social change through the perspectives of Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel, two prominent non-Muslim scholars. Beyond his religious leadership, Prophet Muhammad revolutionized 7th-century Arabian society by addressing social inequities, fostering inclusivity, and instituting enduring values of justice, equality, and compassion. In his work *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1983), Lings portrays the Prophet as a charismatic reformer who advocated for social justice, dismantling tribal divisions and advancing human rights. Lings emphasizes the Prophet's role in unifying a fragmented society through the ummah—a community bound by faith and equality—and promoting economic equity through zakat and the prohibition of usury. Schimmel, in *And Muhammad Is His Messenger* (1985), adopts a phenomenological approach, highlighting the Prophet's integration of spiritual leadership with practical governance. She underscores his role in advancing women's rights, eradicating systemic oppression, and establishing a moral framework based on divine values. The Constitution of Medina, she argues, was a groundbreaking socio-political contract that promoted a pluralistic and harmonious society. By examining Lings' historical narrative alongside Schimmel's

spiritual and cultural insights, this study provides a nuanced understanding of Prophet Muhammad's multidimensional legacy. It positions him as an exemplar of justice and unity, offering valuable lessons for contemporary societies struggling with inequality and division. This interdisciplinary exploration reveals the lasting impact of Prophet Muhammad's leadership as a unifier and model for ethical governance, transcending both time and cultural boundaries.

**Keyword**

Electoral, political identity, political preference, politicization of religion, religion

**Introduction**

Prophet Muhammad is widely recognized not only as a spiritual leader but also as a significant agent of social change (Siddique et al., 2023). In various aspects of 7th-century Arabian society, he initiated transformative changes encompassing religious, social, economic, and political dimensions. The changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad had a profound impact not only on the Muslim community of his time but also on future generations, with enduring influence to this day. This perspective warrants further examination, particularly through the lens of "outsiders" such as Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel, who are known as non-Muslim scholars with profound and appreciative views of Prophet Muhammad's role.

The study of Prophet Muhammad's role as an agent of social change, particularly through the perspectives of Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel, presents a profound contribution to understanding the transformative impact of his leadership, both on his contemporaries and across the centuries. By examining Prophet Muhammad through the lens of "outsider" scholars such as Lings and Schimmel, this research offers a multifaceted approach that enriches our comprehension of his socio-political, spiritual, and cultural legacy, particularly from non-Muslim scholars whose perspectives offer unique insights. This multidimensional analysis, blending history, sociology, and religious studies, allows for a deeper appreciation of Prophet Muhammad's far-reaching influence, not only within Islamic civilization but also in broader global contexts. The nuanced understanding presented by these scholars enables a more balanced and holistic examination of the Prophet's role in societal transformation, especially in modern times, where the values he embodied—justice, equality, and inclusivity—remain strikingly relevant.

Martin Lings, a British scholar, is particularly notable for his humanistic and scholarly approach to Islamic studies, with a focus on Prophet Muhammad. Lings' journey toward Islam is a significant chapter in understanding his perspective on the Prophet, as he embraced Islam later in life. His conversion in 1947 was deeply influenced by his study of Islamic mysticism and his engagement with the spiritual teachings of Sufism. This shift in faith was not merely a personal transformation but a scholarly awakening that led Lings to produce one of the most respected

biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1983). Through this work, Lings presented the Prophet as a charismatic leader who not only brought religious revelations but also instigated profound social reforms. His portrayal of Prophet Muhammad as a visionary social reformer highlights how the Prophet's leadership transcended the traditional boundaries of tribalism, advancing notions of social justice and human rights (Lings, 1983). The reverence Lings felt for the Prophet significantly influenced Western perceptions of Islam, particularly in the mid-20th century. His balanced approach, deeply empathetic to Islamic teachings, contributed to a shift in the Western understanding of the Prophet Muhammad as a multifaceted leader, enriching the global narrative surrounding Islam and its founder (Lings, 1983).

Annemarie Schimmel, a German scholar, offers another pivotal perspective on Prophet Muhammad's impact, particularly through her expertise in Islamic mysticism and her phenomenological approach to religious studies. Schimmel's research on the Prophet emphasized the integration of spiritual and cultural dimensions in his role as a leader. As a phenomenologist, Schimmel's work often sought to understand the lived experiences of individuals and their spiritual connections, which allowed her to explore how Prophet Muhammad's teachings were not only a divine revelation but also a profound guide for personal transformation and societal harmony. Schimmel's approach to studying Prophet Muhammad was deeply influenced by her understanding of the Prophet's ability to integrate divine values into everyday life, demonstrating how his teachings provided a moral framework that was both spiritually enriching and practically applicable. Her work, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger* (1985), highlights the importance of Muhammad as a figure who connected the transcendent with the mundane, creating a blueprint for ethical living that crossed cultural and geographical divides (Schimmel, 1985). Schimmel's influence, particularly in Germany, was profound, as her work provided a bridge for deeper academic and interfaith dialogues between the West and the Muslim world. She helped to humanize the Prophet, emphasizing his role as an agent of social cohesion, unity, and moral regeneration, challenging many preconceived Western notions of Islam as a foreign or alien system.

Both Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel played instrumental roles in reshaping the Western academic and public discourse on Islam and Prophet Muhammad. Their scholarly approaches opened the door for deeper appreciation and understanding of the Prophet as a historical and spiritual figure. Lings, with his humanistic approach, shifted the Western perception of Prophet Muhammad from a mere religious figure to a transformative social leader, while Schimmel, through her phenomenological lens, offered an understanding of the Prophet that transcended doctrinal boundaries, emphasizing his spiritual and cultural significance. Together, their works not only impacted academia but also provided a more nuanced approach to interfaith dialogue, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of Islam and its central figure, Prophet Muhammad.

Martin Lings, in his monumental work *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1983), presents a biography of Prophet Muhammad based on traditional Islamic sources with a humanistic and universal approach. This book

is often regarded as one of the finest works on Prophet Muhammad written by a Western scholar. Lings highlights how Prophet Muhammad functioned not only as a religious leader but also as a visionary social reformer who brought justice, equality, and respect for human rights to a society polarized by tribal systems and injustices.

Meanwhile, Annemarie Schimmel, in works such as *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (1985), offers a different yet complementary perspective. She delves into the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Prophet Muhammad's role, emphasizing how he served as a source of inspiration and transformation that transcended geographical and cultural boundaries. Schimmel also underscores the importance of understanding Prophet Muhammad as a figure who integrated divine values with everyday practices.

This study focuses on how these two thinkers, with their unique academic backgrounds and approaches, perceive Prophet Muhammad as an agent of social change. Outsider perspectives, as represented by Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel, provide a rich viewpoint for analyzing Prophet Muhammad's role in creating a new social order. This is especially significant in the modern context, where the values of social justice, equality, and inclusivity championed by Prophet Muhammad remain relevant for global application.

In this study, the author will explore how the social changes brought about by Prophet Muhammad can be analyzed through two main approaches: first, through Martin Lings' narrative analysis, which emphasizes the historical aspects and Prophet Muhammad's role in building a new societal structure; and second, through Annemarie Schimmel's perspective, which examines the spiritual dimensions and cultural influence of Prophet Muhammad in shaping the mindset of the Muslim community. This research also aims to provide deep insights into the relevance of these scholars' views in understanding the significance of the social transformation initiated by Prophet Muhammad.

## Methods

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach that integrates historical studies, sociology, and religious studies. Referring to concepts of social change in sociology, such as those proposed by Anthony Giddens in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), the social transformation initiated by Prophet Muhammad can be analyzed as an effort to build a new societal structure based on the values of justice and equality. Additionally, the study utilizes a hermeneutic approach to analyze the texts forming the basis of Martin Lings' and Annemarie Schimmel's perspectives. Hermeneutics enables the researcher to delve deeper into the meanings of the historical and spiritual narratives presented by these scholars. For instance, this approach is applied to examine how Lings interprets Prophet Muhammad's role in fostering social solidarity through the concept of *ummah*, an inclusive Muslim community.

On the other hand, Annemarie Schimmel's views are analyzed using a phenomenological approach to religion, emphasizing spiritual experiences and symbolism associated with Prophet Muhammad. This perspective is crucial for understanding how Prophet Muhammad serves as an exemplary figure in creating

social harmony rooted in divine values. As Schimmel asserts, "The Prophet Muhammad represents the synthesis of the divine and human virtues, which is a unique phenomenon in the history of spirituality."

The analytical framework of this research consists of several main sections. The first section reviews Martin Lings' views on Prophet Muhammad's role as an agent of social change, focusing on historical narrative analysis. The second section discusses Annemarie Schimmel's perspective, which emphasizes the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Prophet Muhammad's role. The third section compares these two approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social transformation initiated by Prophet Muhammad. By adopting this approach, it is hoped that this study can provide meaningful contributions to understanding Prophet Muhammad's role as a social change agent from an outsider's perspective while also highlighting its relevance in the current global context.

## Results and Discussion

### *Martin Lings: An Outsider's Journey to Islam and His Biography of Prophet Muhammad*

Martin Lings was an English scholar widely known for his monumental work, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, first published in 1983. Lings, who was not born a Muslim, had a broad academic background with a primary focus on English literature, art, and Middle Eastern culture. Although he did not grow up in an Islamic environment, his profound interest in Arab history and Islamic spiritual teachings led him to study Prophet Muhammad in greater depth and eventually write an influential and comprehensive biography of the Prophet (Lings, 1983; Schimmel, 1985). In this work, Lings successfully portrayed Prophet Muhammad not only as a religious leader but also as a social leader who brought significant changes to the social, political, and economic structures of Arab society during his time.

Lings' interest in Prophet Muhammad stemmed from his deeper quest for spiritual understanding. As an intellectual who spent considerable time studying religious texts from various traditions, Lings felt that the teachings of Prophet Muhammad possessed universal qualities that were not only relevant to Muslims but also offered moral insights for all humanity (Lings, 1983). This motivated him to delve into the life of Prophet Muhammad and write a biography that not only recounts the Prophet's life story but also highlights the social and spiritual impact of his teachings. In his writing process, Lings incorporated authentic and authoritative sources within Islamic tradition, including hadiths recognized by Muslims, to construct a truthful and accurate narrative of Prophet Muhammad's life (Waines, 2003).

Lings was not merely an external observer interested in Islamic teachings; he also immersed himself in the realm of Islamic thought in a highly respectful and profound manner. As an academic, he endeavored to avoid prejudice and the biased judgments that often arise toward different religions. Thus, Lings wrote the biography of Prophet Muhammad with a deeply academic approach, respecting Islamic culture and teachings while maintaining rational and objective analysis (Saeed, 2011). This approach made Lings' work one of the primary references in the



study of Prophet Muhammad's biography, offering not only a spiritual perspective but also social and political dimensions.

One of the main reasons that motivated Lings to write the biography of Prophet Muhammad was his view of the Prophet as a social change agent who transformed the fragmented structure of Arab society. As a spiritual leader, Muhammad not only introduced divine revelations but also taught social principles that brought significant changes to the social, political, and economic life of 7th-century Arab society. Lings argued that the teachings of Prophet Muhammad provided a critical moral foundation for building a more just and egalitarian society. According to him, Prophet Muhammad's teachings offered solutions to social injustices and inequalities that were present at the time and remain relevant today in addressing modern social challenges (Lings, 1983).

Additionally, Lings believed that the biography of Prophet Muhammad he authored could serve as a medium to introduce Islamic teachings to a broader audience, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Lings recognized that there were many misconceptions about Islam, especially in the Western world, which often viewed Islam solely as a religion of rituals or violence. Therefore, by writing Prophet Muhammad's biography, Lings sought to provide a more comprehensive picture of Islam, encompassing not only its spiritual aspects but also its social dimensions, which prioritize justice, peace, and equality among humankind (Esposito, 2002). Lings believed that by understanding the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, societies could discover moral principles that could be applied to create a better and more harmonious world.

In his work, Lings focused on Prophet Muhammad's role in leading significant social change in Arabia. For instance, he highlighted how Prophet Muhammad succeeded in creating a more just society that emphasized principles such as gender equality, women's empowerment, and fair treatment of the oppressed (Lings, 1983). Prophet Muhammad taught that every individual deserved respect and fair treatment, regardless of social status or gender. This was revolutionary at the time, as Arab society was deeply patriarchal and hierarchical (Waines, 2003).

A central theme in Lings' biography of Prophet Muhammad was the Prophet's role as a social change agent. Lings saw Prophet Muhammad not only as a prophet delivering divine revelations but also as a social leader with a vision for creating a more just and equal society. Lings noted that Prophet Muhammad brought profound changes to the social structure of Arabia by introducing principles such as social justice, brotherhood, and equality. The Prophet emphasized the importance of treating others well, granting fair rights to the less fortunate, and maintaining peace among people (Lings, 1983; Esposito, 2002).

Furthermore, Lings pointed out that Prophet Muhammad led by example, not merely through words or revelations. As a leader, Prophet Muhammad demonstrated through his actions how society should live in harmony and mutual respect. This was evident in the way the Prophet treated his followers, whether rich or poor, and how he treated women, who were previously treated unequally in Arab society (Waines, 2003). The Prophet's teachings, which emphasized gender equality and the abolition of oppression against marginalized groups such as slaves, provided an

example of how social change could occur by adhering to profound human values (Nasr, 2002).

Lings' work is not only significant in understanding Prophet Muhammad's life but also serves as a cultural bridge. Lings considered it important to introduce Islamic teachings to the Western world, which at the time often had misconceptions or limited views about Islam and Muslims. Lings sought to demonstrate that Prophet Muhammad's teachings were not only relevant to Muslims but could also be embraced by humanity as a whole as a guide for better moral and social standards. In his view, Islamic teachings contain universal principles that can address social injustices and inequalities worldwide (Saeed, 2011; Nasr, 2002).

Overall, Martin Lings' work on Prophet Muhammad offers profound and comprehensive insights into the life of a prophet who was also a social change agent. With an academic approach that honors Islamic traditions and teachings, Lings succeeded in crafting a biography that not only reveals the spiritual aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life but also provides a depiction of the social impact of the Prophet's teachings. Lings' work is not only significant for followers of Islam but also for readers from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, who can view Prophet Muhammad's teachings as a guide to creating a more just and equal society (Lings, 1983; Waines, 2003; Esposito, 2002).

#### *Understanding Annemarie Schimmel and Her Study of the Prophet's Biography*

Annemarie Schimmel was one of the most prominent scholars in Islamic studies and Middle Eastern thought, known for her deep work on Islamic literature, history, and philosophy. She was born on April 7, 1922, in Germany and spent most of her life in academia, focusing on Islamic studies, Arabic language, and Islamic culture and spirituality. Although she was not a Muslim, Schimmel had a profound connection with the Islamic world, and her works were highly regarded by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. One of her significant contributions was her biography of Prophet Muhammad, which is considered a major addition to the study of religious and socio-cultural biographies in Islam.

Schimmel dedicated much of her time to studying and understanding the Islamic world, emphasizing its literature, theology, and culture. She believed that Islamic studies were not just about understanding religious teachings but also about recognizing the social and cultural roles brought by Islamic teachings to the Muslim world. In this regard, Schimmel saw the biography of Prophet Muhammad as a critical tool for understanding how his teachings influenced the Islamic world and provided a foundation for the development of Islamic culture and society (Schimmel, 1985). Her biography of Prophet Muhammad explores his life not only as a great spiritual figure but also as a social and cultural leader with an extraordinary impact on shaping the social order in the Arab world and the Muslim world at large.

Several reasons motivated Annemarie Schimmel to write about Prophet Muhammad, despite her non-Muslim background. First, she had a profound interest in the spiritual aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life. Schimmel regarded Prophet Muhammad as an extraordinary figure in the spiritual history of humanity, as he conveyed divine revelations and established a civilization based on high moral principles. For Schimmel, the biography of Prophet Muhammad was a way

to understand how one individual could bring about such transformative changes, not only in religious dimensions but also in social and political aspects (Schimmel, 1985).

Additionally, Schimmel felt there was a need to clarify many misconceptions about Prophet Muhammad, especially in Western societies. Many in the West perceived Prophet Muhammad solely as a military leader or a stern figure. Schimmel sought to highlight another side of Prophet Muhammad's character: a deeply spiritual and compassionate leader. She argued that Prophet Muhammad was not just a religious founder but also a figure who embodied love and care for humanity. For this reason, she believed it was essential to present an honest and profound biography of Prophet Muhammad that could help reduce stereotypes and misunderstandings about Islam (Schimmel, 1985).

Schimmel also believed that the biography of Prophet Muhammad offered crucial insights into the historical context in which he lived. She observed that Prophet Muhammad's life could not be fully understood solely from a religious perspective. Instead, it had to be viewed within the social, political, and cultural contexts of his time. In her work, Schimmel examined how the changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad extended beyond the spiritual realm and impacted all dimensions of Arab society during that era (Schimmel, 1985).

The approach taken by Schimmel in writing the biography of Prophet Muhammad was significantly different from that of many other Western writers. As a scholar deeply immersed in Islamic studies, Schimmel did not rely solely on Western sources or historical accounts outside the Islamic tradition. Instead, she incorporated various authentic sources from within the Islamic tradition, such as hadith, sirah, and tafsir, which discuss the life of Prophet Muhammad. This allowed Schimmel to present a more comprehensive depiction of Prophet Muhammad that aligned with the understanding within the Islamic tradition itself, rather than an external perspective often tainted with biases (Schimmel, 1985).

As an outsider studying Islam, Schimmel believed it was crucial to present the biography of Prophet Muhammad with fidelity to authoritative sources within the Islamic tradition. At the same time, she strove to maintain objectivity and avoid sectarian or ideological biases. This made her work one of the most respected references among both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Schimmel's biography of Prophet Muhammad provided a platform for readers from diverse backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Prophet Muhammad, both as a religious figure and as a significant social change agent (Schimmel, 1985).

The biography of Prophet Muhammad written by Annemarie Schimmel has had a significant impact on Islamic studies and the Western understanding of Prophet Muhammad's life. This biography not only revealed the spiritual dimensions of Prophet Muhammad but also encouraged readers to understand the social and historical contexts behind his teachings. This is crucial, given the many misunderstandings about Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad in the Western world. By writing this work, Schimmel not only made a major contribution to biographical studies but also sought to break down prejudices against Islam in the West (Esposito, 2002).



For many readers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, Schimmel's work became a starting point for viewing Prophet Muhammad in a more holistic light. In the Western world, where Islam is often seen through stereotypical lenses, this work opened new insights into how Islamic teachings can be understood as a value system prioritizing peace, justice, and brotherhood. Therefore, Schimmel's biography of Prophet Muhammad is not only significant in the academic context but also in the socio-political context as a tool for promoting better understanding of Islam and its teachings in the West (Nasr, 2002).

Overall, Annemarie Schimmel made a profound contribution to introducing the figure of Prophet Muhammad, both as a spiritual leader and as a social change agent. Through her deeply respectful and scholarly engagement with Islamic sources, Schimmel provided a more comprehensive perspective on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. By combining objective academic approaches with an acknowledgment of the moral and social excellence within Islamic teachings, Schimmel was able to reveal the humanistic side of Prophet Muhammad, which remains highly relevant to this day. Her biography offers fresh insights into how one individual can bring immense societal change and demonstrates that Islamic teachings can serve as a guide for lives filled with compassion, justice, and brotherhood.

#### *Martin Lings' Perspective on Prophet Muhammad as a Social Change Agent in Mecca*

In his work *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Martin Lings provides a comprehensive understanding of Prophet Muhammad's role as a social change agent in Mecca, transcending the dimension of religiosity alone. Lings portrays Prophet Muhammad as a figure who was not only sent to deliver divine revelation but also to transform the deeply ingrained social order of the Arab society at that time. His success in introducing social change was closely tied to the teachings of Islam, which emphasize values of justice, equality, and liberation from oppression.

One of the fundamental aspects of the social change introduced by Prophet Muhammad was the doctrine of *tawhid*, the belief in the oneness of God. This teaching encompassed not only theological dimensions but also social and political implications. The Meccan society of the time lived under a polytheistic system that placed numerous gods at the center of their social life. The practice of idol worship around the Kaaba, the religious hub of Mecca, served as a source of income for religious leaders and local authorities, while marginalized groups—especially slaves and women—were often denied equal status. By advocating *tawhid*, Prophet Muhammad called on society to free itself from dependence on idols, which symbolized social injustice. Through the belief in one God, he instilled the message of equality for all humanity before Allah, a revolutionary step in the social context of that era.

Additionally, Prophet Muhammad introduced significant changes to the social system of Mecca, particularly regarding the treatment of oppressed groups. In a highly patriarchal and exploitative society, his teachings granted greater rights to women and slaves. He emphasized that women—who had previously been treated as property or even killed discreetly—had equal rights in inheritance, education, and participation in social and political life. The liberation of slaves was also a crucial

part of this social transformation. Lings explains that Prophet Muhammad's actions in emancipating slaves such as Bilal ibn Rabah, who became an important symbol in Islamic history, demonstrated his commitment to supporting marginalized groups and advocating for their basic human rights.

The social reforms introduced by Prophet Muhammad extended beyond religious and individual matters to include political and socio-economic dimensions. Lings highlights that Prophet Muhammad successfully unified tribes that were previously divided by inter-tribal conflicts. In a society fractured by prolonged tribal disputes, his ability to bring them together into a community based on faith and solidarity was a monumental political achievement. Prophet Muhammad employed diplomacy, peace treaties, and strategic approaches to build political alliances with different tribes. Through his humanitarian outreach and firm adherence to moral principles, he established a Muslim community that eventually formed the foundation of a broader Islamic state.

In the economic realm, Prophet Muhammad's teachings opposed usurious practices that exploited the weak and advocated for a more equitable trade system. Lings reveals that Prophet Muhammad introduced changes to Mecca's economic system by promoting Islamic economic principles focused on justice, transparency, and the elimination of exploitation. These principles aimed to reduce economic disparities and provide opportunities for the underprivileged to participate in a fairer economy.

Equally significant was the implementation of a new legal system developed by Prophet Muhammad. The laws revealed through divine inspiration provided moral and social guidelines governing relationships among individuals, communities, and the state. In this context, Prophet Muhammad initiated remarkable social reforms by creating a legal system that was more just and humane compared to the traditional legal systems, which tended to be biased and discriminatory.

The overall thoughts and actions of Prophet Muhammad in leading this social change, as depicted by Martin Lings, demonstrate that he was not only a prophet in a religious sense but also a social and political leader who successfully transformed a deeply entrenched social structure. The Islamic teachings he brought paved the way for a more just and equitable society, where individual rights were respected, and exploitative systems were replaced with fairer ones. From Lings' perspective, Prophet Muhammad was a social change agent who introduced values that remain relevant not only in his era but also continue to inspire modern societies striving for social justice and equality.

#### *Annemarie Schimmel's Interpretation of Prophet Muhammad's Role in Meccan Society*

Annemarie Schimmel, a German scholar specializing in Islamic studies, is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on the study of religion and Middle Eastern culture. As an expert in Arabic language and Islamic literature, Schimmel possessed profound insights into the life of Prophet Muhammad and the social changes instigated by his teachings. Schimmel viewed Prophet Muhammad not only as a religious figure guiding his followers toward spiritual salvation but also as a social change agent who brought significant transformations to the social, economic, and political structures of 7th-century Arab society. In Schimmel's understanding,

Prophet Muhammad served as a leader who utilized divine revelations to establish a system emphasizing justice, equality, and solidarity amidst a society riddled with inequality.

In her works, Schimmel depicted the life of Prophet Muhammad as a narrative of great importance, understood within the social and cultural context of his time. Before the advent of Islam, Arab society was highly stratified. Mecca, where Prophet Muhammad was born, was divided based on a dominant tribal system in which social status often depended on bloodlines and ancestry. Social inequality, the oppression of women, widespread poverty, and reliance on slavery were among the major issues leading to social injustice within that society (Schimmel, 1985).

However, through divine revelations from Allah, Prophet Muhammad began delivering teachings that addressed not only spiritual matters but also more socially and economically just ways of living. One of the initial principles emphasized by Prophet Muhammad was the equality of all human beings. According to Schimmel, this teaching was revolutionary for its time, as Islam underscored that in the eyes of Allah, all humans are equal, regardless of social status, race, or origin. In a famous hadith, Prophet Muhammad stated: "No one is superior to another except by piety." (Qur'an, 49:13). This concept formed the basis for broader social changes, creating a more just and egalitarian society (Schimmel, 1985).

In a society that was closed and exclusive, Prophet Muhammad introduced teachings emphasizing the importance of social justice and human rights. One of the most significant social changes brought about by Prophet Muhammad was granting greater rights to women. Before Islam, women in Arab society were often treated as inferior and denied basic rights. In some regions, female infants were even buried alive because they were considered a disgrace. According to Schimmel, one of the most important innovations introduced by Prophet Muhammad was granting greater rights to women. Islamic teachings provided women with the right to inheritance, the right to own property, and the right to choose their spouses (Schimmel, 1985).

The concept of zakat, taught by Prophet Muhammad, also constituted a crucial part of social reform. Zakat is an obligation for every capable Muslim to give a portion of their wealth to those in need. In Schimmel's view, zakat is not merely an act of worship or charity but also a wealth redistribution system aimed at reducing social inequalities and ensuring the welfare of all members of society. In the highly hierarchical social context of that time, the teaching of zakat became an important instrument for bringing about significant economic and social changes (Schimmel, 1985).

An essential aspect highlighted by Schimmel in Prophet Muhammad's role as a social change agent was the establishment of the Islamic community (*ummah*), united by faith rather than social status or tribal affiliation. In Arab society, which was deeply divided, particularly in social and political aspects, Prophet Muhammad succeeded in forming a strong community based on equality of rights and responsibilities before Allah. This was in stark contrast to the pre-existing social structure, where divisions were heavily influenced by ancestry and tribal affiliations (Schimmel, 1985).

According to Schimmel, by teaching the concept of *ummah*, Prophet Muhammad introduced not only a new religious system but also a social system capable of uniting people from vastly different backgrounds. The *ummah* became the foundation for forming social solidarity that extended beyond ties of blood or lineage, focusing instead on spiritual bonds that connected all Muslims. This principle of brotherhood is reflected in Prophet Muhammad's statement: "A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2564). Through this teaching, Prophet Muhammad successfully initiated social changes that unified society beyond the traditional boundaries of the time (Schimmel, 1985).

In Schimmel's analysis, the aspect of social justice in Prophet Muhammad's teachings is crucial to understanding the broader social changes he introduced. Prophet Muhammad taught that every individual has a moral obligation to maintain social balance, not only in spiritual terms but also in economic domains. This concept was introduced through principles such as the prohibition of usury (interest) and the need for fair wealth distribution within society. In Islamic teachings, Prophet Muhammad prohibited economic practices that harmed the vulnerable, such as the exploitation of usury, which was deemed detrimental to the poor and marginalized. These teachings paved the way for the creation of a fairer economic system that provided protection for the disadvantaged (Schimmel, 1985).

Zakat, mandated in Islam, became one of the most tangible pillars of social justice. Under Prophet Muhammad's leadership, zakat was not merely viewed as a religious obligation but as a means to ensure wealth distribution and support the welfare of the community. Schimmel regarded this as a significant step toward establishing a social system that prioritized justice for all societal levels (Schimmel, 1985).

Although Prophet Muhammad's teachings brought about significant social changes, Schimmel also acknowledged the substantial challenges in implementing these teachings after his death. One of the main challenges was maintaining and continuing the social transformations initiated by Prophet Muhammad, especially as the Islamic community began expanding beyond the Arabian Peninsula. In her view, while many changes were achieved during Prophet Muhammad's time, the application of these teachings in broader societies faced various political, economic, and cultural challenges (Schimmel, 1985).

After Prophet Muhammad's era, numerous challenges emerged in preserving the egalitarian teachings, particularly when political power was held by elites striving to maintain the existing social system. However, despite these challenges, Schimmel emphasized that the social changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad remained the foundation of an advanced and thriving Islamic civilization (Schimmel, 1985).

From Annemarie Schimmel's perspective, Prophet Muhammad was a social change agent who brought profound transformations to the social, political, and economic structures of 7th-century Arab society. The social changes brought by Prophet Muhammad included granting greater rights to women, establishing a system of social justice through zakat, and forming a united Islamic community based on faith. Through his teachings, Prophet Muhammad not only transformed the

social structure but also created the foundation for a more inclusive and egalitarian social system. Despite challenges in preserving these teachings, the influence of Prophet Muhammad as a social change agent continues to be felt in the history of Islam to this day.

### *Prophet Muhammad's Social Transformation in Medina: Martin Lings' Analysis*

Martin Lings, a renowned Islamic scholar noted for his biography of Prophet Muhammad, offers profound insights into the Prophet's role as a social change agent, particularly in Medina. In his monumental work, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1983), Lings illustrates how Prophet Muhammad, as a leader functioning not only as a spiritual guide but also as a social and political reformer, transformed the structure of Arab society through Islamic teachings that touched every aspect of social, economic, and political life. In the context of Medina, the post-Hijrah period marked a significant manifestation of social change as the Prophet successfully created a society oriented around the values of equality, justice, and social solidarity.

Before delving further into the social changes that occurred in Medina, it is crucial to understand the social background of Arab society in Medina before the Prophet's arrival. Medina's society at the time consisted of two main groups: the Aus and Khazraj tribes, both of which were engaged in prolonged conflicts that caused social and political instability. These two groups were locked in struggles for power and dominance over the city of Medina. The inter-tribal conflicts resulted in social tensions that affected daily life, created social stratification, and exacerbated the inequalities prevalent in the community.

Although Medina was considered more developed than Mecca in certain aspects, such as fertile lands and trade activities, its society still faced various inequalities. A social system that favored certain groups while marginalizing others—including women, children, and the poor—created imbalances in Medina's social life. Amidst this condition, Prophet Muhammad arrived in Medina after his Hijrah in 622 CE, bringing Islamic teachings that not only addressed the spiritual needs of his followers but also served as a tool to transform the existing social order.

One of the most profound aspects of the social change introduced by Prophet Muhammad in Medina was the establishment of the *ummah*, or Muslim community, united by the bond of faith rather than by blood ties, tribal affiliation, or social status. From Martin Lings' perspective, the formation of the *ummah* was a revolutionary step that not only altered the social structure of Medina but also had far-reaching impacts on the future of Islamic civilization. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad successfully resolved inter-tribal conflicts by shifting the societal focus toward the principles of justice, equality, and social solidarity.

A key symbol of this *ummah* formation was the Constitution of Medina, drafted by Prophet Muhammad as the foundational framework for social and political organization in the city. The Constitution governed not only relations among Muslims but also those between Muslims and non-Muslims, including the Jewish community and other groups residing in Medina. In this constitution, Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of peaceful coexistence and



mutual respect among different groups, thereby creating a society founded on universal brotherhood and justice (Lings, 1983).

The principle of brotherhood emphasized in the *ummah* is reflected in many hadiths, one of which famously states, “A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim.” Through this teaching, Prophet Muhammad established a society not bound by nationality or race but rather by equality of faith and mutual social obligations. Martin Lings notes that Prophet Muhammad’s success in forming the *ummah* in Medina is one of the greatest social achievements in Islamic history (Lings, 1983).

The social changes brought about by Prophet Muhammad in Medina extended beyond the spiritual realm to encompass significant economic dimensions. One of the most important reforms was the institution of *zakat*, an obligatory almsgiving for every capable Muslim. *Zakat* is not merely a form of worship but also serves as a crucial instrument for creating a more equitable distribution of wealth in society. Through the system of *zakat*, the wealth of the affluent is channeled to the poor, orphans, and the underprivileged, aiming to reduce social disparities and promote collective welfare (Lings, 1983).

*Zakat* is an integral part of the Islamic economic system introduced by Prophet Muhammad to ensure that wealth circulates not only among the wealthy but also reaches all layers of society. From Martin Lings’ perspective, *zakat* serves as a means to eliminate the social injustices that existed in Medina’s society prior to the advent of Islam. Prophet Muhammad firmly taught that wealth owned by individuals is not solely their personal property but also belongs to others in need, thereby imposing a moral obligation to share wealth (Lings, 1983).

In addition to *zakat*, Prophet Muhammad introduced a prohibition on *riba* (usury), which at the time was an economic practice that disadvantaged the poor. The practice of *riba* benefited those who were already wealthy, while debtors—especially the poor—became trapped in unending cycles of debt. By prohibiting *riba*, Prophet Muhammad sought to create a more equitable economic system and prevent the exploitation of the less fortunate (Lings, 1983).

Another major achievement of Prophet Muhammad as a social change agent in Medina was the development of a legal system emphasizing the principle of justice. With divine revelations, Prophet Muhammad introduced laws that governed every aspect of Muslim life, from worship to social and economic relations. In the Islamic legal system introduced by Prophet Muhammad, every individual, regardless of gender, wealth, or social status, was granted equal rights before the law.

Lings highlights that one of the key innovations introduced by Prophet Muhammad was a more equitable inheritance law, granting women the right to inherit property from their families. Previously, in pre-Islamic Arab society, women had no inheritance rights. However, under Islamic teachings, women were granted fair inheritance rights, although the portions differed from those of men, considering their roles in society. This demonstrates Prophet Muhammad’s efforts to create a more just society that respects women’s rights in the social order (Lings, 1983).

Prophet Muhammad’s role in transforming the status of women in Medina’s society was one of the most significant social changes. Before Islam, women in Arab society were treated as inferior, often regarded as commodities to be bought or

inherited. In many cases, women had no right to choose their spouses or access proper education. However, through the Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad, the status of women was significantly elevated. Women were granted the right to choose their husbands, receive a dowry in marriage, inherit property, and participate in social and economic activities (Lings, 1983).

Prophet Muhammad also emphasized respect for women as individuals with equal rights and dignity to men. In numerous hadiths, Prophet Muhammad stressed the importance of treating women kindly, respecting them, and providing them with protection. Lings notes that this social change was one of the revolutionary aspects of Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad, which starkly contrasted with the prevailing social practices of the time (Lings, 1983).

From Martin Lings' perspective, Prophet Muhammad's role as a social change agent in Medina was immense. Through Islamic teachings, Prophet Muhammad transformed a fragmented and unjust social structure into a more unified and just society. The formation of the *ummah* emphasizing brotherhood, social justice through *zakat* and the prohibition of *riba*, and the development of a legal system based on the principle of justice serve as clear evidence of Prophet Muhammad's extraordinary role as a social change agent. Through the social reforms he introduced, Prophet Muhammad laid the foundation for an Islamic civilization that is more inclusive, just, and oriented toward the welfare of humanity.

#### *Prophet Muhammad's Social Transformation in Medina: Annemarie Schimmel's Analysis*

Annemarie Schimmel, a German scholar renowned as one of the leading experts in Islamic studies, has made significant contributions to understanding the social and spiritual dimensions of Prophet Muhammad's teachings, particularly in the context of social change in Medina. In her renowned work *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* (1977), Schimmel emphasizes the Prophet Muhammad's role as an agent of change, not only influencing the religious dimensions of Muslim communities but also reshaping the social and cultural structures of Arab society at the time. Schimmel's perspective on the role of Prophet Muhammad as a social change agent in Medina provides deep insights into how Islamic teachings permeated the social and cultural lives of Medina's society, creating profound transformations in the political, economic, and social realms.

The society of Medina before Prophet Muhammad's arrival was composed of various groups, including the Aws and Khazraj tribes, which were embroiled in a prolonged rivalry. These two major tribes competed in multiple aspects of life, including politics and economics, leading to significant social tensions. In addition to the conflict between these tribes, Medina faced sharp social inequalities, particularly regarding women's roles, economic disparities, and the pervasive influence of unjust and exploitative pre-Islamic practices that disadvantaged the lower classes, including slaves and women. The presence of Jewish groups in Medina further added to the social complexities, creating a divided and tension-filled society.

In this context, Prophet Muhammad's migration (*hijrah*) to Medina was not merely a relocation but also a revolutionary moment that brought significant changes to Medina's social order. Annemarie Schimmel, in her works, views this

moment as a turning point for Prophet Muhammad in playing his profound role as a social change agent. For Schimmel, *hijrah* symbolizes the beginning of change initiated through Islamic teachings, which united diverse groups into a universal *ummah* bond, not based on tribal, class, or ethnic affiliations but rather on faith in the One Almighty God.

One of the most significant social changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad in Medina was the formation of the *ummah*—a Muslim community united by faith and equality. In Schimmel's view, this *ummah* formation was not merely the establishment of a religious community but also a profound social renewal. Prophet Muhammad dismantled the tribal and class boundaries that had long served as divisive factors in Arab society. Through his teachings, Prophet Muhammad asserted that everyone, regardless of social or economic background, was a part of the *ummah* with equal rights and obligations.

Schimmel regards this principle as one of the revolutionary aspects of Islamic teachings implemented by Prophet Muhammad in Medina. From her perspective, the establishment of the *ummah* directly contradicted the Arab social structure dominated by rigid hierarchies and inequalities. For example, the *Constitution of Medina*, the first political and social document created by Prophet Muhammad after the *hijrah*, emphasized that every resident of Medina, both Muslims and non-Muslims, had equal rights and obligations to maintain peace and justice in society. In this regard, Schimmel highlights that Prophet Muhammad brought not only spiritual but also profound social changes in forming a more inclusive and justice-based society (Schimmel, 1977).

Schimmel also observed the social reforms introduced by Prophet Muhammad in the economic realm, particularly through the regulations of *zakat* and the prohibition of *riba* (usury). In Medina, Prophet Muhammad introduced *zakat* as an obligatory duty for every capable Muslim to assist those in need. *Zakat* functioned as an effective wealth redistribution tool, channeling a portion of wealth from the rich to the poor, orphans, and other marginalized groups.

Annemarie Schimmel considers the implementation of *zakat* one of Prophet Muhammad's most crucial efforts in creating social equality in Medina. This reflects the Islamic principle that wealth is not solely the property of the individual but also carries rights to be shared with others. The *zakat* system demonstrates that Islam is not only a spiritual religion but also one with a clear social vision for wealth distribution and poverty alleviation (Schimmel, 1977).

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad prohibited *riba* (interest), which at the time greatly disadvantaged the vulnerable members of society. *Riba* trapped the poor in prolonged debt, while the wealthy continued to thrive. Schimmel views the prohibition of *riba* as part of Prophet Muhammad's effort to establish a fairer economic system where every individual had an equal opportunity to achieve well-being without being exploited by existing systems. Prophet Muhammad promoted fair trade and avoided all forms of exploitation in economic transactions (Schimmel, 1977).

Another critical aspect of the social changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad was the development of the Islamic legal system, which emphasized

justice and equality. According to Schimmel, one of the greatest strengths of Prophet Muhammad's teachings is that Islamic law does not recognize differences in status or caste when upholding justice. In Medina, every individual, whether male or female, poor or wealthy, had equal rights before the law.

Prophet Muhammad formulated laws governing social life with clearly articulated principles of equality and justice. In this regard, the Islamic legal system implemented by Prophet Muhammad in Medina introduced revolutionary social changes, granting women, for example, rights they previously did not possess in pre-Islamic Arab society, such as inheritance rights and the right to choose their spouse. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad did not merely establish a spiritual community but also a society grounded in practical and implementable principles of social justice (Schimmel, 1977).

One of the most important social changes from Annemarie Schimmel's perspective is the recognition of women's rights in Medina's society. Before Islam, women in Arab society were often treated with great disdain. They had no inheritance rights, were frequently regarded as objects, and had no voice in social or political matters. However, with the Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad, women were granted the right to inherit, the right to choose their husbands, and the right to participate in social life.

Schimmel emphasizes that this represents one of the most profound social changes, positively impacting the social status of women in Medina and the broader history of Islam. Prophet Muhammad taught that women have equal dignity to men in the sight of God and, therefore, equal rights in society. In many of his sayings (*hadith*), Prophet Muhammad declared that the best people are those who treat women most kindly. According to Schimmel, this demonstrates that Prophet Muhammad led not only in a spiritual capacity but also as a change agent introducing revolutionary gender justice values for his time (Schimmel, 1977).

Annemarie Schimmel perceives Prophet Muhammad as a social change agent who not only transformed the spiritual dimensions of Muslims but also brought profound changes to Medina's social structure. Through the Islamic teachings he conveyed, Prophet Muhammad created an inclusive *ummah* founded on values of justice and social solidarity. The *zakat* system, the prohibition of *riba*, and the implementation of just laws are tangible examples of the social changes he brought, leading to a more equitable and justice-oriented society in Medina. Furthermore, the recognition of more equal women's rights was also part of the social changes introduced by Prophet Muhammad, significantly impacting the social life of Muslims.

Thus, Annemarie Schimmel's perspective reveals that Prophet Muhammad's role in Medina was not only to introduce religious teachings but also to enact social changes encompassing many aspects of life, including economics, law, and individual rights within society. As a social change agent, Prophet Muhammad transformed Medina into a more just, inclusive, and respectful society for all its members.

## Conclusion

The role of Prophet Muhammad as an agent of social change, when viewed through the lens of Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel's thoughts, reveals broader and more

complex dimensions beyond merely religious aspects. These two thinkers, with their careful and profound approaches, portray Prophet Muhammad as a figure who not only conveyed divine revelation but also initiated significant social transformation within the context of Arabian society of his time, subsequently impacting the development of global civilization. From Lings' perspective, Prophet Muhammad is seen as a figure who introduced the concept of social harmony encompassing spiritual, moral, and social aspects. This highlights how the changes he initiated covered all facets of human life, from social structures to ethical systems. On the other hand, Schimmel emphasizes the humanistic and spiritual aspects of Prophet Muhammad, which played a vital role in bridging the gap between individuals and society, as well as influencing interactions between cultures and global civilizations. This study, through an objective and multidimensional approach, not only enriches understanding of the figure of Prophet Muhammad but also demonstrates the relevance of his thoughts in the context of global social change. The contributions of Martin Lings and Annemarie Schimmel in exploring Prophet Muhammad's role as an agent of social change from an outsider's perspective enrich interdisciplinary studies in history, sociology, and religion. In this context, this research provides a significant contribution to the development of academic studies, with the potential to foster further discussions in international academic literature, by showcasing in-depth analysis regarding the dynamics of social change driven by this historical figure.

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