

Disability in the Light of Islam

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Abstract: Those who are unable to perform certain activities due to their physical and mental impairments are known as disabled or autistic (individuals with special needs). For any nation, disability has been considered as a hazard. No man is perfect. To lead lives, almost everyone has to face difficulties in different stages of their lives. During childhood, people face one kind of difficulties while they have to go through another kind of difficulties at their old ages. According to the researchers, there are different kinds of disabled. Visual disability, speech disability, hearing disability, hearing-sight disability, clubfoot disorder, cleft lip disorder, cleft palate disorder are considered as physical disabilities. Intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, down syndrome, etc. are labeled as mental disabilities. Social disabilities include social prejudices or disabilities formed in individuals through different social disorders. Economic deficiency and imbalanced distribution among individuals are considered as financial disabilities. In the initial stage of Islamic era, there were also various types of difficulties regarding disability. Since Islam, It is a complete code of life measures, there are complementary perceptions about the disabled individuals ones in Islam. In the present article and findings about the disabled individuals in the Holy Quran have been illustrated.

Keywords: blind, mute, deaf, religion and sadaqah.

Introduction

Islam is a complete code of life. Islam firmly believes in ensuring equal rights and welfare for all human beings. Islam has taken different strict initiatives to reduce discrimination between the rich and the poor and to remove caste system and racism. By practicing this, Islam ensures policy of equality. And due to this very policy of Islam has been recognized as one of the well accepted religious in the World. Now-a-days, disability is a much talked issue for human being across the world. Islam treats the miserable and destitute as dignified human beings. Islam always speaks for those people As they have their rights. In this research, some relevant verses from the Qur'an have been taken for a comprehensive analysis of the issue.

Background of the Study

As of 2010, about 23.4% of the world population are Muslims.¹ The paper is an attempt to explore the attitude and position of disability in today's world. Therefore,

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the paper is about the disabled people of our society. According to the World Health Organization, about 15% of the World population lives with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. The global disability prevalence is higher than previous WHO estimates, which date from the 1970s and suggested a figure of around 10%. This global estimate for disability is on the rise due to population ageing and the rapid spread of chronic diseases, as well as improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability.² As of 1 January 2015, the population of Bangladesh was estimated to be 162077360 people.³

Bangladesh is a developing country located in South Asia and is home to approximately 162077360 people. It is a country of widespread poverty, with 44.3% of the population living below the poverty line, inadequate health, education, and social security services, low employment and at high risk from natural disasters, particularly flooding. Estimated indicate that 10% of the population i.e. 16 million people living with a disability and these are one of the most vulnerable groups as they receive little of no assistance.⁴

The main objective of this research is to unearth Islamic directions regarding disability. Simultaneously, that people may be inspired about disability and Islam by reading this article is another important objective of the research.

It is said the Qur'an: "Verily, We create man in the best conformation."⁵ But in the same breath (?) the verse continues, "And thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low-expecting only such as attain to faith and do good works."⁶

Research Methodology

To find a suitable standing point for my research, I have searched the Qur'an and Hadith. In my initial reading of the verses in which the terms regarding disability have both physical and social implications.

I have sought a firsthand (why have you repeatedly used the word first hand?) understanding of the Islamic attitude and position of disables. I also examine the original sources of Islamic teaching of disable, which are the Qur'an and the life Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as preserved in his sayings and teachings (Hadith). I examined the stories of the companions and contemporaries of the Prophet to seek an understanding of how people closest to the origin, both in time and place, comprehended and carried out the Islamic attitude towards people with disabilities.

I located the verses and traditions that contained all of these terms, and I sorted the verses and traditions out by term. I also consulted several classical and modern Qur'anic exegeses.

Aims & Objectives of the Study

1. To find Islamic discourse analysis of disability;
2. To find Islamic concept on disability during early age of Islam;
3. To find Islamic views on disability;
4. To find common people's view on disability;
5. To bring deprived & neglected people's to the mainstream; and
6. To raise awareness about disability in people of all classes and professionals.

Disability in the light of Islam

Central to a discussion on disability in the Qur'an is the concept of perfection from the perspective. Because of the natural variety of the life-phenomenon, the inborn qualities of human beings in each individual case. In Islam, humans' original nature is essentially good. The Islamic teaching holds that people are born pure and, in the sense explained above, potentially perfect.

It is said in the Qur'an, "Verily, we create man in the best conformation."⁷ But in the same breath the Ayah contains, "And thereafter we reduce him to the lowest of low-expecting only such as attain to faith and do good works."⁸

Thus, according to Islam, "evil is never essential or even original.....The Islamic teaching definitely asserts. We-every one of us-can reach a full of measure of perfection by developing the positive, already existing traits of which our individuals are composed."⁹

The concepts of perfection and imperfection in the physical sense, therefore, have little application in the Islamic view of human life. By extension, so too do the concepts of normalcy and abnormalcy.¹⁰

The Qur'an's attitude towards all human beings could be drawn from this verse: "O [people!] Behold, We have created you all out of a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware."¹¹

All people belong to one human family; every person is created out of the same father and mother- implying that this equality of all biological origin should be reflected in the equality of the human dignity common to all. This connects with exhortation, in the preceding two verses¹² to respect and safeguard each other's dignity. Human evolution into "nations and tribes" is meant to foster rather than to diminish their mutual desire to understand and appreciate the essential human oneness underlying their outward differentiations.

According to the verse, the noblest of human beings in the sight of God is the most deeply conscious of Him. Allah's measure of a human being's worth relies not on physical attributes or material achievements, but on spiritual maturity and ethical development. The Prophet most explicitly communicates this message when saying:

Abu Huraira (r.) narrated: Messenger of Allah (s.) said, "Allah does not look at your figure, not at your attire but He looks at your hearts (and deeds)."¹³

The Qur'an and the Hadith take an extra step to stress the necessity of applying the above stated attitude towards people with disabilities. For example, what could be seen as a minor act of discourtesy on the part of the Prophet towards a person who was blind caused a "sharp Qur'anic rebuke" to further stress lessons that beyond the verse's immediate cause.

As recorded in many well-authenticated traditions, some of the most influential chiefs of pagan of Mecca were sitting in the Prophet's assembly. The Prophet was earnestly engaged in trying to persuade them, and through them the community in Mecca at large, to accept Islam. At that very point, the Prophet was approached by

one of his followers, who was blind, to seek explanation on certain passages of the Qur'an. Annoyed by this interruption of what he considered a very important endeavor (i.e., spreading the message of Islam) the Prophet frowned and turned away from the blind man. Right then and there, the following ten verses of the Qur'an were revealed.¹⁴

He frowned and turned away because blind man approached him! Yet for all thou didst know, "[O, Muhammad,] he might perhaps have grown in purity, or have been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder, Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient-to him didst thou give thy whole attention, although thou art not accountable for his failure to attain to purity; but as for him who came unto thee full of eagerness and in awe [of God]-him didst thou disregard!"¹⁵

My initial discussion of these verses indicated that people with disabilities are to be treated with full regard and to have the same subject-to-subject relations that are granted to the non-disabled. A deeper analysis, however, revealed even more. Considering the timing of this incident (at a very early stage of the Prophet's mission) and Muhammad's apparent keenness to gain followers among the wealthy and powerful members of society, the verses indicate that the value of a sincere seeder of God, even though weak or disabled, is no more than that of one who is heedless of God, no matter how wealthy or powerful.

The above stated examples comprise Islam's position and attitude towards evaluating mankind: the real merit of people lies in the degree with which they seek the truth. Following are more specific findings of my research.

Blind (A'ma)

This research for the word blind and the derivatives of the root amiya. The passive voice of the verb amiya was used in at least nine verses to mean was not able to see the spiritual guidance. Only three times the word a'ma was used in the Qur'an to refer to a person who has lost his or her eyesight.¹⁶ Interestingly, when referring to this person, the Qur'an uses the word a'ma, but not the word dhareer, which is another word that was and is still used to mean blind in a physiological sense. The word a'ma has many usages, one of which is the person who is physiologically blind, whereas the word dhareer has a much more limited usage and was mainly used to refer to the person who has lost his or her eyesight. The word dhareer is derived from the root dha-ra-ra, which implies harm or disability, whereas the word a'ma is derived from the root amiya, which means not see. In other words, unlike dhareer, the word a'ma did not carry a negative connotation for the seventh century Arabs. It merely referred to the specific condition of not seeing.

The Qur'an clearly states: "Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind-but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts!"¹⁷

The following verse was revealed in conjunction with fighting in the cause of God-a duty on all Muslims: "No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the blame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for staying away from a war in God's cause]; but whoever heeds [the call of] God and His Apostle [in deed or in heart],

him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow; whereas him who turns away will He chastise with grievous chastisement.”¹⁸

The verse provides permission to people with physical conditions not to fight. The second part of this verse, “but whoever heeds [the call of] God and His Apostle [in deed or in heart], him will He will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow,” stresses that despite permission, it is still better for those exempted to participate within their power, that is, “heed [the call]” in whatever form they can, as by providing help and consultation.”¹⁹

The following tradition narrated by one of the Prophet’s companions helps illustrate what it means to participate within their power.

Abu Huraira reported: There came to the Prophet of Allah (s.) a blind man and said: Messenger of Allah, I have no one to guide me to the mosque.²⁰ He, therefore, asked Allah’s Messenger (s.) permission to say prayer in his house. He (the Prophet) granted him permission. Then when the man turned away he called him and said: Do you hear the call to prayer? He said: Yes. He (the Prophet then) said: Respond to it.²¹

The implication here is that if the man could hear the call to prayer, then he must be close enough to the mosque, in which case the permission to say prayer at home does not apply. All people are expected to constantly do the best they can within their powers, and people with certain conditions are no exception.

Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum was a companion of the Prophet and he was blind. Ibn Umm Maktum is the person about whom Allah revealed Suran Abasah²² admonishing Muhammad. Upon migrating from Mecca to Medina, Ibn Umm Maktum was given the important position of calling Muslims to prayer.²³ On more than ten occasions, the Prophet put him in charge of Medina when he, the Prophet, was out of town.²⁴ In spite of being excused from fighting, Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum was not content with staying among those who remained at home while others had to fight. He fixed a role for himself on the battlefield saying, “Place me between two rows and give me the standard. I will carry it for you and protect it, for I am blind and cannot run away.” He took part in several battles before he was killed on the battlefield clutching the flag of the Muslims.²⁵

Mute (Abkam)

This research for the word *abkam*²⁶ pointed to six occurrences in the Qur’an. The word *abkam* was used to refer to a person who can speak, but cannot speak well because of ignorance, cannot reason his answers, or cannot turn to his or her heart for guidance. Interestingly, we learned that, at the time the Qur’an was revealed, the word used to refer to a person who was born mute or who lost the physiological ability to speak was not *abkam*, but *akhras*. The word *akhras* is not mentioned in the Qur’an.

In all of the six verses,²⁷ the Qur’an uses the word *bukm*²⁸ in a parable to those who strayed from the way of God. The context in which the word *bukm* appears in these verses stresses that the parable is not intended to be with people who are physiologically mute. For example, the Qur’an describe those who stray from the

way of God in verse 2:18 as 'bukm' who "cannot turn back". In verses 2:171 and 8:22 they are described as 'bukm' who "do not use their reason", and in verses 6:39 and 17:97 they are 'bukm' who "do not go the straightway". Cross-referencing these verses leaves us with the conclusion that the word abkam in the Qur'an is intended to signify one who is spiritually, ethically, or morally bereft.

When asked by one of his companions: "From what do we give sadaqah if we do not possess poverty?"²⁹ Muhammad replied, "The doors of sadaqah are.....guiding the blind; listening to the deaf and mute until you understand them; guiding a person to his object of need if you know where it is; hurrying with the strength of your legs to one in sorrow who is appealing for help; and supporting the weak with the strength of your arms', thus laying down the responsibility of everyone to treat the deaf and mute with patience and courtesy.

Deaf (Assum)

We found that assum was not used to mean deaf in the physiological sense. To illustrate, the Qur'an says: "And there are among them such as [pretend to] listen to thee: but canst thou cause [summ] to hearken enough though they will not use their reason?"³⁰ If the word 'sum' were intended to mean deaf, then the verse would have read, "even though they will not hear" not "use their reason"

Lame (A'raj)

I found two verses containing the word lame. The Qur'an says: "[N]o blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the sick, and neither to yourselves for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food obtained] from your [children's] houses, or your fathers' house, or your mothers' houses, or your brother's houses, or your sisters' house, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or [houses] the keys whereof are in your charge, or [the house] of any of your friends; nor will you incur any sin by eating in company or separately. But whenever you enter [any of these] houses, greet one another with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoyed by God. In this way God makes clear unto you His message,, so that you might [learn to] use your reason."³¹

This verse explicitly mentions the lame, alongside the blind and the sick, and removes any superstitious notions that people might attach to people with disabilities, often leading to their exclusion. By doing that, the Qur'an reverses many of the prevailing customs, even to this day, towards people with disabilities and urges their inclusion in the society.

The following verse hints about the disability, "No blame or sin is there upon the blind, nor is there blame or sin upon the lame, nor is there blame or sin upon the sick (that they go not forth to war). And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad [peace be upon Him]), He will admit him to Gardens beneath which rivers flow (Paradise); and whosoever turns back, He will punish him with a painful torment."³²

This verse mentioned that removes any blame from, and grants permission to, the person who is lame for not going to war. As stated earlier, even though permission is

granted to certain people, they are still advised to heed and obey the call of God as much as they can.

Amr Ibn Al-Jamuh was already an old man when Islam reached in Medina. He was also partially lame in one leg. After adopting Islam, he felt strongly about joining his three sons who were preparing to fight in the Battle of Uhud. The sons were against their father's wish given that he was excused from the duty to fight because he was old, weak and lame. Amr took his case straight to the Prophet who told the sons to let their father have his wish. Amr and one of his sons were close to the Prophet during the battle, they defended the person of the Prophet when matters got really dangerous, and they fell on the battlefield and died within moments of each other.³³

Important & Results of the Study

In the present article titled "Disability in the light of Islam" has come up about the deprived and neglected populations of the society. In any Muslim country people with disabilities need to be resolved religiously. In this regard, the present research will play an effective role. According to Islamic rituals every human being is equal. Solving the problems of people with disabilities is fully part of Islamic rituals. If someone solves the problem of the handicapped, then this is a part of worship in Islam. One of the highlights of the present article is a conceptual review of the early age of Islam. At the same time, Islamic approach on disabled are highlighted. People have much negative views of people with disabilities. The Islamic solution to these negative views has been highlighted. There are different directions for the laws, policies and activities of the government from the current research. The general public and people with disabilities will get benefit from these guidelines.

Conclusion

Owing to the nature of the Qur'an, it would be presumptuous to claim that I have reached the intended meaning of the Qur'an since "but none save God knows its final meaning."³⁴ I also recognize that my research is limited by constraints of space and scope, and that, as is the case with any and all studies, this research is not found.

Notes & References

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 - 4 <http://www.cdd.org.bd/about-disability/disability-information> (Access Date-17-5-2015)
 - 5 Al-Quran, 95 : 4
 - 6 Al-Quran, 95 : 5-6
 - 7 Al-Qur'an, 95 : 4

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- 8 Al-Qur'an, 95 : 5-6
- 9 Disability in Islam: Insight into theology, Law, History and Practice, written by Isra Bhatti, Asad Ali Moten, MobinTawakkul,andMonaAmer,p..157 (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 10 Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein, Inclusion, Disability and Culture, Studies in inclusive Education, Sensew Publishers, Nederland, 2015 (<https://books.google.com.bd/books?id=ymt-BgAAQBAJ&pg=PA9&dq=Religion+and+Disability+by+Asad&hl=en&sa=X&ei=MDpYVcuGM4eRuAStpoLYAg&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>) (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 11 Al-Quran, 49 : 13
- 12 “O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former; nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former, nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. How bad is it, to insult one's brother after having Faith [i.e. to call your Muslim brother (a faithful believer) as: "O sinner", or "O wicked", etc.]. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed *Zalimun* (wrong-doers, etc.)” [Al-Quran, 49: 11]
- “O you who believe! Avoid much suspicions, indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting) . And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One Who accepts repentance, Most Merciful.” [Al-Quran, 49: 12]
- 13 Riyadh as-Saliheen Series – Hadith 2: He looks at your hearts, Chapter 1, Hadith 7: Sincerity and Significance of Intentions and all Actions, Apparent and Hidden, (<http://muslimmatters.org/2011/01/31/riyadh-as-saliheen-series-hadith-2he-looks-at-your-hearts/>) (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 14 Edited by John L. Esposito, The Oxford History of Islam, New York : Oxford University Press, First Edition: 1999, page. 8
- 15 Al-Quran, 80 : 1-10
- 16 There is no restriction on the blind, nor any restriction on the lame, nor any restriction on the sick, nor on yourselves, if you eat from your houses, or the houses of your fathers, or the houses of your mothers, or the houses of your brothers, or the houses of your sisters, or the houses of your father's brothers, or the houses of your father's sisters, or the houses of your mother's brothers, or the houses of your mother's sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold keys, or (from the house) of a friend. No sin on you whether you eat together or apart. But when you enter the houses, greet one another with a greeting from Allah (i.e. say: *As-Salamu 'Alaikum* - peace be on you) blessed and good. Thus Allah makes clear the *Ayat* (these Verses or your religious symbols and signs, etc.) to you that you may understand. [Al-Quran, 24: 61]
- “No blame or sin is there upon the blind, nor is there blame or sin upon the lame, nor is there blame or sin upon the sick (that they go not forth to war). And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him), He will admit him to Gardens beneath which rivers flow (Paradise); and whosoever turns back, He will punish him with a painful torment.” [Al-Quran, 48: 17]
- “Because there came to him the blind man (i.e. 'Abdullah bin Umm-Maktum, who came to the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) while he was preaching to one or some of the Quraish chiefs).” [Al-Quran, 80:2]

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- 17 Al-Quran, 22:46
- 18 Al-Quran, 48:17
- 19 Al-Quran, 9:91
- 20 Muslims are required to perform the five daily prayers in the Mosque
- 21 Sahih Muslim, The Book of Prayer, (Chapter: He who hears the call for prayer it is essential for Him to come to the Mosque, No 1374.) ([http://www.sahihmuslim.com/sps/smm/sahihmuslim.cfm?scn=dspchaptersfull & BookID=4&ChapterID=235](http://www.sahihmuslim.com/sps/smm/sahihmuslim.cfm?scn=dspchaptersfull&BookID=4&ChapterID=235)) (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 22 This Surah based on the rights and dignity for the disabled.
- 23 <http://www.islamforlife.co.uk/sahabah.htm> (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 24 Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum; "Companions of The Prophet", Vol.1, By: Abdul Wahid Hamid." http://religiousislamicworld.blogspot.com/2012/07/abdullah-ibn-umm-maktum-ra-sahaba_15.html (Access Date-17-5-2015)
- 25 Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum, "Companions of The Prophet", Vol. 1, By: Abdul Wahid Hamid." (<http://www.sunnah.org/history/Sahaba/maktum.html>) (Access Date-17-05-2015)
- 26 Conventionally known to mean mute
- 27 "Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire; then, when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness. (So) they could not see." [Al-Quran, 2:17]
- "They are deaf, dumb, and blind, so they return not (to the Right Path)." [Al-Quran, 2:18]
- "And the example of those who disbelieve, is as that of him who shouts to the (flock of sheep) that hears nothing but calls and cries. (They are) deaf, dumb and blind. So they do not understand." [Al-Quran, 2:171]
- "And Allah puts forward (another) example of two men, one of them dumb, who has no power over anything (disbeliever), and he is a burden to his master, whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal to one (believer in the Islamic Monotheism) who commands justice, and is himself on a Straight Path?" [Al-Quran, 16:76]
- "Those who reject Our *Ayat* (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) are deaf and dumb in darkness. Allah sends astray whom He wills and He guides on the Straight Path whom He wills." [Al-Quran, 6:39]
- "Verily! The worst of (moving) living creatures with Allah are the deaf and the dumb, those who understand not (i.e. the disbelievers)." [Al-Quran, 8:22]
- "And he whom Allah guides, he is led aright; but he whom He sends astray for such you will find no *Auliya'* (helpers and protectors, etc.), besides Him, and We shall gather them together on the Day of Resurrection on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf, their abode will

be Hell; whenever it abates, We shall increase for them the fierceness of the Fire.” [Al-Quran, 17:97]

28 the plural form of abkam

29 Sadaqah is a collective term that typically signifies giving of material possessions. It is something to be performed each Muslim everybody for her or his own good and reward in this life and the life hereafter

30 Al-Quran, 10:42

31 Al-Quran, 24:61

32 Al-Quran, 48:17

33 Edited by the Editorial Board, the Cambridge History of Islam (The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic times to the First World War), Volume 1A, Cambridge, page- 47. (Muhammad by Montgomery Watt, University of Edinburgh)

34 “It is He Who has sent down to you (Muhammad) the Book (this Qur'an). In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book [and those are the Verses of *Al-Ahkam* (commandments, etc.), *Al-Fara'id* (obligatory duties) and *Al-Hudud* (legal laws for the punishment of thieves, adulterers, etc.); and others not entirely clear. So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking *Al-Fitnah* (polytheism and trials, etc.), and seeking for its hidden meanings, but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in it; the whole of it (clear and unclear Verses) are from our Lord." And none receive admonition except men of understanding. (*Tafsir At-Tabari*).” [Al-Quran, 3:7] (<http://www.noblequran.com/translation/surah3.html>) (Access Dte-17-5-2015)