

Empowerment of Muslim Women in Islam

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Abstract: *Modernization has brought about series of changes in social organisation, in human behaviour, in religious beliefs, attitudes, values and customs of people. Considerable achievements have been reported in the field of women's education, employment, social and political participations. Many changes have also occurred in the traditional conception of role and status of women through new avenues of opportunities. Regarding the process of modernization unfortunately for various reasons, women in Muslim community are lagging behind from the women of other communities. The purpose of the study is to examine the role of education influencing the status of Muslim women in Trivandrum district of Kerala.*

I. Status of Women in the Ancient Period

In the most ancient period of human history, women had always been kept in subordination and always been treated as inferior to men in rights and privileges. **In ancient Rome**, "An unmarried girl was under the perpetual tutelage of her father during his life, and after his death, of her agnates by blood or adoption, when married, her whole property passed in to the power and possession of her husband. In effect, her status was that of purchased women". **The old Athenians**, "treated women as property. She was not only marketable but also transferable and can be willed away. An Athenian could have any number of wives. **In Persia**, "Men were notoriously voluptuous and to them women was nothing more than an object to gratify their base passions. Every wealthy man kept crowds of females in his house". **In Japan**, in olden times, "Women were not allowed to pray or take part in religious exercises." **In China**, women were forbidden from entering the temples. **In ancient Greece**, the position of the women was simply that of a domestic drudge. **The Spartan** women played equal role with men not only in the arts of peace but also in the sinews of war, though they were specially trained for maternity.

II. Status of Women in the Vedic Period

In India, during the Vedic period, women enjoyed a high position in family, society and the state. In her absence, the 'homam' or 'the yagna' were not considered to be complete. There were no restrictions to her of water so ever kind. The benefits of education reached the women. The girls were taught language and literature, fine arts and even military science. Girls enjoyed full freedom to choose their life partners is 'swayam Varams'. Widow remarriage was absolutely unknown. Perhaps, this period was the brightest period in the annals of the status of women. **Manu**, the Hindu law maker held a different view, for the society of his time. According to him, "The women are under the subjection of her father when a child under the agnate relations when there are no son." In Mahabharata, a woman was made a wife of five brothers. She was pawned in gambling. As a Hindu widow, she has no right to adopt a son in the absence of a will of her deceased husband. Once married is always married whether husband is sick, impotent or dead.

Women in Islam

In Islam, there is no sex based distinction in spiritual matters. The paradise and its blessings are meant the same for both. The five tenants of Islam- belief, prayer, fasting, poor due, and the pilgrimage-do not differentiate men and women. Islam permits the education of girls on a par with boys. The holy Quran condemned the per-Islamic practice of female infanticide. Women have right to property and justice, she has the right to maintenance. Widowed or divorced, the women are eligible for remarriage.

In Iraq, and United Arab Emirates, the number of working women is increasing and the women are holding jobs as directors of big commercial concerns. There are also professional women journalists. In Arab countries, a strong women movement is growing, asserting the rights of the women on a par with men. In Turkey, the high position of women is an accepted reality. In Afghanistan women still have traditional role with a low rate of literacy. Marriages are arranged by the parents. Polygamy and unilateral divorce are widely practiced. In Pakistan, purdah system is still prevalent. The women now enjoy full political rights. The economic participation of women is significantly improved. In Bangladesh girls are married at a very early age and the literacy rate amongst them is increasing steadily.

After India attained Independence women's education made considerable progress. The number of girls schools and colleges increased. Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily. Muslim parents who are anxious to educate their sons and also anxious to provide their daughters with education. Village girls are attending schools in large numbers while in towns more women seek college education. Educated Muslim women everywhere show the tendency towards increasing economic independence and to supplement family income, forces Muslim women to accept jobs outside home. But their number of employed Muslim women is smaller than Hindu women. In rural areas the women do most certainly work on farms and perform other economic activities of the villages. Consequently, they are treated with more respect and given more freedom, though still subordinated to men.

Muslims constitute 13.4% of Indian population .India has the third largest Muslim population in the world. Most of the Indian Muslims are converts from Hinduism and as such have very much influenced by the Hindu culture. Strict purdah system was prevalent till the British rule. Presently pardha is vanished by the spread of women education. The educated section of the Muslims feels that polygamy is an evil practice. Muslim women enjoy political rights along with Hindu women. The traditional joint family system is paving way to nucleus families.

I. Objectives

1. To examine educational status of Muslim women in the particular locality.
2. To study the socio-economic background of Muslim women in the study area.
3. To find out the socio cultural practices of Muslim women in the study area.

II. Methodology

The present study was conducted in the Trivandrum district of Kerala state. They are contagious and together account for 14 percent of the Muslim population of the state. The religion of Islam was first introduced in Kerala in the 8th century AD though the Mohammedan Arabs first settled in Malabar only about the beginning of the 9th century. The early Muslims came as traders and settled down mostly on the coastal regions. They built mosques in different parts of the state and gradually made convert to their religion. The present study is descriptive in nature. It is of some chosen independent variables along with dependent variables. The present study has been conducted in five villages Pallickal, Madavoor, Alamcode, Navaikulam and Karavaram in Chirayinkil Taluk. Totally 450 women respondents (married and working women) were selected by using the stratified random sampling method, interview schedule have been used for data collection. The data collection was carried out during December 2013. The collected information was coded, tabulated, Chi-square values and co-efficient of contingency were calculated to interpret the data.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Education and Age of the Respondent

Education	Age						Total
	Below 25	26-30	31-35	35-40	41-45	46-50	
Illiterate	35 (15.47%)	21 (23.81%)	26 (27.66%)	30 (41.67%)	34 (57.63%)	34 (68%)	158
Secondary	21 (25%)	34 (37.36%)	31 (32.98%)	20 (27.78%)	5 (8.47%)	13 (26.1%)	124
Higher Secondary	20 (23.8%)	24 (26.37%)	31 (32.98%)	13 (18.05%)	13 (22.04%)	1 (2%)	102
College & Professionals	30 (35.72%)	12 (13.19%)	6 (6.38%)	9 (12.50%)	7 (11.86%)	2 (4%)	66
Total	84 (18.67%)	91 (20.22%)	94 (20.88%)	72 (16%)	59 (13.11%)	50 (11.11%)	450

$\chi^2 = 100.805$; Df = 15; Table value 0.01 = 30.578

The table 1 shows that when only 15.47 percent of the respondents who belong to the age group 25 and below were illiterate, 35.72 percent of them are college and professionals. So also when 68 percent of the women belonging the age group of 46 and above were illiterate only 4 percent of them had college and professional education. It is evident that age of the respondents and their educational level are related to each other, i.e., as age increases education decreases.

Table 2
Education and Attitude Towards Education as a Factor in Raising Social Status

Education	Attitude		Total
	Agree	Disagree	
Illiterate	132 (83.54%)	26 (16.46%)	158
Primary	115 (92.74%)	9 (7.26%)	124
Higher Secondary	79 (77.45%)	23 (22.55%)	102
College & Professionals	64 (96.97%)	2 (3.03%)	66
Total	390 (86.67%)	60 (13.33%)	450

The data in above table 2 represent education as a factor in raising social status 86.67 percent of the respondents agreed that education was a status improving factor for women. In this 84 percent of the illiterate also agreed education indicate the social status. However, it is also to be noted that of those who disagreed 26 out of 60 belonged to the illiterate respondents. The respondents attitude in the respect largely correspond with their actual behaviour. The comparatively higher educated women in the neighbourhood were respected. They were given different treatment in social gatherings and their advice was sought on several matters. The income place of residence or age of the respondents has not influenced them in their opinion that education raises the status.

Table 3
Education and Role in Decision Making Concerning Childrens – Schooling, Career and Marriage

Education	Consultation by Husband				Total
	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	
Illiterate	20 (12.65%)	37 (23.52%)	58 (36.71%)	43 (27.22%)	158
Primary	9 (7.26%)	44 (35.48%)	46 (37.10%)	25 (20.16%)	124
Higher Secondary	11 (10.79%)	50 (49.02%)	24 (23.52%)	17 (16.67%)	102
College & Professionals	11 (16.67%)	30 (45.45%)	16 (24.24%)	9 (13.64%)	66
Total	51 (11.33%)	161 (35.78%)	144 (32%)	94 (20.89%)	450

$\chi^2 = 28.309$; Df = 9; Table value 0.01 = 21.666; C = 0.2432

The table 3 reveals decision making role in the family 27 percent of illiterate respondents were never consulted in the above mentioned matters by their husbands, only 13 percent of the college and professionals were never consulted. Only about 13 percent of the illiterate women were always consulted, about 17 percent of the college and professionals were consulted always. So, it is quite evident that as the education level of the respondents increases, their consultation by their husbands in decision making process regarding children's schooling, career and marriage also increases. In other words, the higher the education of the respondents, the more they will be consulted in the decision-making process.

IV. Conclusion And Implications

Modernity has not brought a great change in the Muslim women. They are; by and large tradition bound and adhere to the Quranic instruction and the age old customs and practices like the practice of early marriage prevented Muslim women from continuing their education after marriage. The traditional value system of subordination of women is still enforced by men. They do not participate in decision making process with regards to family budget acquisition and disposal of property. Lack of education is a stumbling block for status mobility. Better education and economic conditions have indeed raised the status of Muslim women, but not to the desired extent. More vigorous efforts have to be put in if Muslim women are to be transformed from their traditional conservative and backward state of affairs to a modern, progressive and forward position. The duty of the Muslim peoples of every country to keep an eye upon the education and bringing up of their daughters, who will be the mothers of the next generation, they will progress, it might be slowly, yet certainty and steadily.

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