

## MODERN EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

(A case study of Muslim women in Pune city, India)

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### ABSTRACT

Few issues have attracted greater interest among academicians and activists in India than those concerning women and Islam, but much of this interest is caught up in misconceptions that usually leave Muslim women invisible. It is a well known fact that the change is the law of nature so is the nature of human being. Similarly on the subject of development and change the Muslim women can not be ignored.

It is generally believed that Indian Muslim has failed to cope up with the change that is taking place in Indian society at large. But in spite of its unique nature because of its religious orientation of Muslim under the impact of multi directional global changes at large and in Indian situation in particular, we find an attitudinal change and generational awareness among Indian Muslim. Similarly when we focus our attention towards Muslim women in spite of widely accepted belief of the backwardness, we find that they are also not immune to the inevitable impact of the changing process at large. No doubt, large numbers of socio-economic, cultural and religious constraints hamper their progress but we find a slow and steady change in their attitude and overall conditions such as their role in family, status and Socio-economic profile of the sample population indicates that there is considerable change in the position of Muslim women.

Keeping the above in mind, we decided to conduct a sample survey of Muslim women in a progressive city like Pune, so that we get a first hand knowledge about the attitudinal changes among them.

Our survey proves that with the influence of considerably better educational background of the parents and other family members, awareness is emerging among Muslim women about the importance of higher education in different fields. They have clearly understood the magnitude of changes in social and economic order all over the globe and they are confident enough to meet the challenges. Attitudinal change is significant and encouraging, but with reference to empowerment we can say that they are in transitory stage.

**Keywords :** Muslim Women, Islam, Modern Education

## Introduction:

Few issues have attracted greater interest among academicians and activists in India than those concerning women and Islam, but much of this interest is caught up in misconceptions that usually leave Muslim women invisible. It is a well known fact that the change is the law of nature so is the nature of human being. Similarly on the subject of development and change the Muslim women can not be ignored.

It is generally believed that Indian Muslim has failed to cope up with the change that is taking place in Indian society at large. But in spite of its unique nature because of its religious orientation of Muslim under the impact of multi directional global changes at large and in Indian situation in particular, we find an attitudinal change and generational awareness among Indian Muslim. Similarly when we focus our attention towards Muslim women in spite of widely accepted belief of the backwardness, we find that they are also not immune to the inevitable impact of the changing process at large. No doubt, large numbers of socio-economic, cultural and religious constraints hamper their progress but we find a slow and steady change in their attitude and overall conditions such as their role in family, status and occupational mobility.

Since globalization, drastic changes in the social- economic order appeared. With the series of changes in beliefs, attitudes and values it has immensely affected human conditions and quality of life. In the process, with the changing realities and demands world over, globalisation has thrown a number of challenges affecting all facets of life.

India as an emerging super power has accepted the challenges and it is also undergoing rapid changes in keeping with the changing demands and global competition.

We cannot deny the importance of women's role in the process of economic development. With the increasing awareness of the changing situation, the attitudinal change in the outlook of the society in general and among women themselves, we find an encouraging change in the role and status of women in India.

The change in role and status of women in general, has influenced Muslim women also. Against the general belief of lack of awareness and desire to cope up with the changing realities, our assumption is that, Muslim women are not immune to these changes. In spite of pathetic socio-economic conditions of Muslims, as documented in the *Sachar Committee Report*, we find that Muslim women are aware of the changes and the demands of the time, and that they want to cope up with the progress and development achieved by their counterparts in other religious groups. They aspire to achieve equal status and empowerment by utilizing the opportunities of education and employment made available to them. They are struggling to overcome a number of socio-economic, cultural and religious constraints hampering their march towards progress and development.

Keeping the above in mind, we decided to conduct a sample survey of Muslim women in a progressive city like Pune, so that we get a first hand knowledge about the attitudinal changes among them.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In India Muslims constitute 138 million i.e. 13.4% of the total population, almost equal to the total Muslims population of Pakistan. They have been equal partners in the struggle for freedom of India but even after 63<sup>rd</sup> years of Independence they have remained backward in all walks of life. The fact is well documented in the Sachar Committee report which was appointed by the Government of India to study the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. Sachar Committee Report is the first systematic study of the Muslim in Independent India. It sought detailed

Presentation from 13 states across India about the perceptions about Muslims; the size and

distribution of the population, indices of the communities' income, health, education, poverty, standard of living act. After a careful and scientific investigation on the related issues the Committee has concluded that the socio-economics status of Muslims in India is worse than SCs and STs.

The above facts are more than sufficient to give an idea of dismal socio-economic Problems of Muslims in India at large. This scenario also helps us to deduce the condition of women among Muslims.

However viewing from an optimistic angle we can say that though Muslim women have remained backward in most of the areas of life and are slow in availing the benefits of the ongoing development process, in recent years there have been some signs of change. Indian Muslim women today, it seems, are standing on the cross roads and they have to find the much coveted status guaranteed by the society under the name of equality of opportunity. However this is not an easy task.

The present study is an attempt to find solutions to the problems posed. Against the popular belief among Muslims and others, that Muslim women is discouraged to participate in the mainstream and that they are reluctant to change. Our study attempts to examine this belief and also assess the degree and direction of changes that have taken place in the role and status of Muslim women.

The assumption is that Muslim women are aware of the rapid changes taking place all over the globe including India, and that they also aspire to participated in the process of development at large and acquire empowerment by availing the opportunities of education and employment thrown open by the fast changing society.

With the increasing awareness they are also gathering courage to meet the challenges of the modern world. They are aware that they have to fight at two fronts; First within the framework of Muslim society and also with the masculine domination at large.

### **Objectives:**

1. To assess attitudinal change among the present and past generations of Muslim women with regard to education, employment and status in the family.
2. To find out whether Muslim women have realized the importance of empowerment through education and employment.
3. To find out the extent of empowerment they have achieved with regard to decision making relating to marriage, education of themselves and their children.
4. To find out whether the institution of *Purdah* acts as a hindrance in their education, employment and overall personality development.
5. To make recommendations based on this study to promote the welfare of Muslim women.

The main objective of the study is to assess the extent of attitudinal change among the respondents and their parents with reference to the socio-economic change and empowerment. A number of factors influence these changes but we have focused only on three variables viz; Education, Employment and Status in the family by targeting young generation

### **Methodology:**

Keeping in mind the above objectives, hypotheses and the limitations of the study we have selected a target group of women into two big and famous Muslim areas i.e Camp , Mominpura and Kondhwa. of Pune city. In view of the limited time and resources available, the above places were considered to be ideal and suitable for the research. The sample population of 200 Muslim women will be drawn from the above places using random sampling method.

Structured questionnaire with multiple choices and Interview schedule were the main tools of data collection. However some open ended questions were also included in the questionnaire. The questions were based on the three variables mentioned above. Quantitative data can not of course measure crucial dimensions of equality such as human dignity, self-respect, and social and emotional

security but they are useful starting point for assessing trends, principally because very little known is about the impact of uneven development, education, employment status and income or social mobility by community.

The Muslim woman would be considered to be changing and achieving empowerment:

1. If she aspires for higher education.
2. If she has the freedom to decide attainment of higher education.
3. If she wants to acquire economic independence.
4. If she has the freedom to choose economic activity of her choice.
5. If she has the freedom and autonomy in case of marriage, observance of *Purdah*, management of income, decisions in family matters like education, employment, marriage of children and property matters etc.

### **Review of Literature**

Virtually nothing is known about the social and economic status of Muslim women have been undertaken with the result that there is little understanding of the specific factors that keep a large population in poverty and subordination. This gap is most evident in census. Disaggregated community data are collected by census enumerators. They are not accessible to the public, they remain unpublished thus outside the public domain. The National Council of Applied Economic Research's (NCAER) rural survey of 1999 is the significant exception but its scope is limited to the conventional census categories of literacy, educational level work and fertility and so on. The National family Health survey in their sampling of 90000 household extended their enquiry to include data on autonomy, contraception, exposure to media and violence. Similarly women's Research and Action group's study of 15000 Muslim women, eliciting information on their response to Muslim personal law is an important addition to our knowledge. They have really made a contribution to closing the information gap and demystifying widely held assumption about the conservatism and imagined backwardness of the community. Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon in their book *Unequal Citizen: A study of Muslim Women in India*, carried out a survey in 40 districts spread across 12 states on both Hindu and Muslim women (80% Muslim and 20% Hindu women) for a better understanding and comparative work available to us. But in the micro study of a city like Pune the present study assumes significance as possibly the first of its kind to address and assess the existential, lived reality of Muslim women's lives in all its diversity.

### **Socio-economic profile of the respondents:**

In the review of literature and statement of the problem, we have observed that in general the socio-economic position of Muslim women is unsatisfactory. There seems to be some improvement in the conditions of sample population. Only 18% families fall in the income group below Rs.5000/- per month. 37% falling in the income group of Rs.5000/- to Rs.10,000/- and 35% families falling in the income groups of Rs.10000/- to Rs.25000/- may be put in the category of lower middle and middle class respectively. Only 10% families may be called as well-off as they are earning more than Rs. 25,000/- per month. This conclusion gets added support when we find that only 42% families own their house and the rest 58% live in rented houses and old tenements. Though nobody has recorded that they live in slums but from the income level and the area of residence recorded by the respondents, it is easy to deduce that around 40% families of the respondents live in slum areas.

In the light of the above we can conclude that the economic background of the sample population is not very satisfactory. In spite of not having a sound economic background, the data on the educational level of respondents' family members and especially that of female members, show a very positive picture in case of both fathers and mothers (see table no.1). Only 8% mothers are illiterate whereas around 70% mothers have education ranging from SSC to post-graduate level and

there is a negligible difference in the level of fathers' education. The effect of majority of parents having considerable better level of education has reflection on the education of their children. We find that among both male and female children the level of education is almost same. Right from SSC to graduate and post-graduate level, the percentage of number of sisters and brother is almost same. In fact in case of post-graduate level, the number of sisters is 8% whereas in case of brothers it is only 5%. Similarly in case of professional degree the number of sisters is 8 %and in case of brothers it is 5% only. Thus, we find a healthy and optimistic trend in case of attainment of education by the population sample and their family members. This, we can conclude, is the indicator of positive attitude of parents towards education, and that, they have realized the importance of education as an essential tool of change and development and raising the status of individual and family.

**TABLE: 1**

**Level of Education of Respondents' Family Members**

	Illiterate	Primary	SSC	HSC	Graduate	Post-Graduate	Proffessional Degree
Mother	16	42	84	22	30	06	—
Father	03	38	57	40	40	12	10
Brothers							
1 <sup>st</sup>	—	36	40	28	32	08	10
2 <sup>nd</sup>	—	08	06	06	06	02	—
Sisters							
1 <sup>st</sup>	—	22	28	28	32	12	14
2 <sup>nd</sup>	—	08	06	06	18	04	02
Sister in law							
1 <sup>st</sup>	—	—	02	02	12	06	22
2 <sup>nd</sup>	—	—	02	—	—	—	—

Second significant change is the change in the pattern of socialization. Giving encouragement and equal opportunity of education to both girls and boys is a positive deviation from the traditional thinking of giving preference to boys in all spheres of life and confining the role of girls within the four walls of home as a dependent and obedient housewife, a caring mother and holding a subordinate position in the family.

The third indicator of the positive attitude of the mothers and fathers is that they have no objection in sending their daughters to a co-education college as the total sample population is studying in the co-education college.

After highlighting the findings on the changing attitude of parents with reference to the socio-economic background of the respondents, the next step is to discuss the findings of the study about the extent of change and the level of empowerment achieved by the respondents with reference to education, employment and status in the family.

### **Relation of the adopted variables with Change and Empowerment:**

Education, Employment and Status in family play decisive role in enabling women to achieve empowerment.

Now, let us briefly discuss the linkages among Education, Employment and Status of women in the family and, and as to how they lead to the change and empowerment of women. Education helps in skill development, resourcefulness and employment which in turn facilitate empowerment. Empowerment means assigning power which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Empowerment of women also means women's ability to understand, articulate and seek solutions for one's own problems. This includes the right to take decision, independence to do what they like, have control over their income, increased importance in the family and community, and ability to articulate their issues publicly. Empowerment also means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and to fulfill their potential as full and equal members of the society

In the light of the above we can say that education and the acquiring of various skills helps in getting employment and economic independence to women. Also status of women in the family improves. With economic independence women develop a sense of self-worth, belief in their ability to think and act freely and gather courage to challenge the existing social and economic order and demand their rights to have control over their income and right to have their say in the decision making about their own and major family matters and thereby attain equal status and empowerment in the family and society.

### **MAJOR FINDING:**

Major findings of the study are as follows:

#### ***Education, Change and Empowerment:***

With reference to the first hypotheses mentioned above and the analyses of data with reference to the indicators of change and empowerment adopted by us, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Mobility and change of status depends on the opportunity and access to education. Socio-economic background, status of the family and the attitude of parents affects educational opportunity. In this survey we have observed that though the economic background of the respondents' family is not very satisfactory yet the educational level of the respondents' family members is considerably better. 94% parents favoring higher education for their daughters and 96% respondents aspiring for higher education reflects influence of parents on the thinking of their children.

This is an indication of change in the attitude of both parents and the respondents. Personality development, career development and economic independence are on the top of the priority list of both respondents and their parents. Only for 8% parents, the aim of giving higher education to their daughters is, 'getting good husband' (see table no.2). Thus parents no more consider the role of women as 'housewives' and 'mothers'. Instead their aim is empowerment of women in the field of education. Our conclusion in this regard gets added support in view of the fact that around 68% respondents are granted freedom by their parents to decide about the stream of education and higher education to their daughters.



**TABLE: 2**

**Aims of Parents in Giving Education to the Respondents:**

Sr.no.	Aims	Response
1.	Helps in development of personality	54
2.	Helps in achieving economic independence	34
3.	Helps in career development	74
4.	Helps in improvement of family status	32
5.	Helps in getting good Husband	08
6.	All the above	45
	Total	247*

\* The total exceeding 200 because of multiple responses.

Similarly around 75% respondents favoring co-education and similar percentage demanding equal level of education with men shows not only liberal and modern attitude but their aspiration of attaining equality with men. More than 90% respondents considering education as a tool of raising their status and empowerment indicates the higher level of awareness about the demands of the changing social and economic order.

For the purpose of assessment of the extent of change and empowerment among our respondents we have adopted the indicators as mentioned above. With reference to education, we have stated that the woman would be considered to be changing and achieving empowerment if she aspires for higher education, if she has the freedom to decide attainment of higher education, and if she wants to acquire economic independence.

When we apply the above yardstick to the findings mentioned above, in no ambiguous terms, we come to the conclusion that Muslim women are changing and attaining empowerment with reference to education.

Thus the analysis of data and its critical evaluation with the help of indicators used above fully support our first hypothesis and lead us to conclude that Muslim women are aware of the importance and inevitability of education as a tool of change and development, and that they aspire for higher education and seek freedom to decide in the matters of education, personality development, career development, and economic independence with the aim of raising their status and achieving empowerment.

**Employment, Change and Empowerment:**

With reference to the second hypotheses and the indicators of change mentioned above, and the analyses of data, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Employment, in case of women, does not only give economic independence but plays an important role in boosting morale and confidence of claiming economic freedom, empowerment and equal status in the family and society as well.

Analysis of data in case of the sample population of our study shows that only 39% respondents knew that Islam does not prohibit employment of women and 35% recorded that it is not allowed and 26% were ignorant of the same. In spite of this fact we can point out that 90% respondents have stated that employment for women is necessary (see table no.3). This is a clear indication of changing attitude in case of employment.

**TABLE: 3**

**Respondents views on Employment of Women:**

Sr.no.	Views on Employment	Response
1.	It is a Necessity	180
2.	Not Necessary	12
3.	Women should not Work	08
	Total	200

Another significant point to be noted is that though only 31% mothers were employed, 83% parents were in favour of employment of their daughters. Similar percentages of respondents are given freedom to take up employment. This can be seen as a major change in the attitude of parents.

As already stated , we come to the conclusion that there is a positive change in the attitude of not only respondents but their parents also, and that realization of the necessity of being employed , proper utilization of talent , and growing sense of responsibility of not only improving the economic condition of family but contributing in economic growth and development of the society, reflect the maturity attained by the respondents . We can further conclude that with changing attitude, and enjoying the freedom of taking up employment, they are on the way of achieving empowerment.

**Impact of Purdah on education and employment:**

In order to find out the impact of *Purdah* on education and employment of women in Islam, we have clubbed additional variable of *Purdah* with the above variables. From the analysis of responses on the relevant issue our conclusion is that inspite of believing in the institution of *Purdah* and actually being practiced by around 70 % mothers and equal percentage of respondents, there is no negative impact on their thinking and attitude as far as attainment of education and taking up employment is concerned. The respondents have expressed that the *Shariah* or the institution of *Purdah* does not, in any way, stand in their way of acquiring higher education, attaining economic independence by working outside home and achieving empowerment.

The above findings and conclusions fully support our second hypothesis.

**Status in family, Change and Empowerment:**

With reference to the third hypothesis and the indicators of change mentioned above, and the analysis of the data, the following conclusions have been drawn. Muslim women have been granted clear rights in case of property, marriage, education, employment and status in the family where they are called as ‘queen of the family’. Undoubtedly they have been denied most of their rights in practice because of male domination, illiteracy and ignorance about the rules of *Shariah*. But with the increase in general awareness and education, their struggle for attaining the rightful place in family and society has gained momentum and the same has been reflected in the responses of the population sample of the present study.



Giving equal treatment to sons and daughters in all matters in the family, freedom of choice of life partner, visiting friends, freedom of managing routine household affairs, freedom in respect of education of children etc. are all the indicators of change in the attitude of parents. Also attainment of freedom in all the above matters by the respondents reflects change in status and empowerment. Around 70% respondents giving preference to settlement of marriage with their consent and also self-decided marriage, reveals self-confidence of the respondents and an urge to attain empowerment. Similarly freedom to operate bank account by 50% respondents of those holding separate account, is an indicator of economic empowerment. Influence of the changing and liberal attitude of parents is reflected in the thinking of the respondents which shows a keen desire and aspiration of attaining equal status, enjoying freedom in all matters of family and achieving empowerment.

We may further add that the above conclusions and the findings fully support our third hypothesis.

### **Emerging Trends:**

Based on the above findings we may submit that the data convincingly supports our hypotheses. A careful and critical perusal of the findings based on hypotheses and the indicators of change and empowerment adopted for the present study lead us to conclude that

- Socio-economic profile of the sample population indicates that there is considerable change in the position of Muslim women.
- With the influence of considerably better educational background of the parents and other family members, awareness is emerging among Muslim women about the importance of higher education in different fields. They have clearly understood the magnitude of changes in social and economic order all over the globe and they are confident enough to meet the challenges. Attitudinal change is significant and encouraging, but with reference to empowerment we can say that they are in transitory stage.
- Muslim women are aware of the importance and inevitability of education as a tool of change and development, and those they aspire for higher education and seek freedom to decide in the matters of education, personality development, career development, and economic independence with the aim of raising their status and achieving empowerment.
- With reference to employment also there is a positive change. Muslim women are inclined towards employment because they have realized that through economic independence only they can achieve economic freedom and empowerment. In the process of achieving these aims they are getting support from their parents.
- Muslim women have realized that Islam does not stop them from working outside home and that the practice of *Purdah* is not a hindrance in personality development and raising the economic status of women.
- Muslim women want freedom in case of choice of their life partner. They want to claim back the right of their consent in marriage which is guaranteed by Islam but denied to them in practice.
- In case of status in the family they are far from being meek and submissive and do not want to reconcile to their fate and male domination. They want total freedom in case of routine household affairs. They want to have their say and equal participation in decision making in important family matters like education, employment and marriage of their children. However, their progress in the direction of achieving equal status and empowerment in the family is slow and therefore, we can say that in this regard they are in a transitory stage

It is heartening to see that several encouraging changes are taking place in the attitude and status of Muslim women. They want to achieve higher education, be employed and have better status in family. Thus they would like to be empowered. However the fact remains that the rate of change is

slow because of a number of constraints and problems faced by them which hinder them from achieving empowerment. The prominent factors are illiteracy, economic backwardness, ignorance about various schemes of financial assistance and upliftment meant for women and weaker sections of the society.

### **Recommendations:**

In order to overcome the constraints, faced by Muslim women to achieve empowerment, a multidimensional approach and efforts at both governmental and NGO level are necessary. In general we recommend that:

1. Government should ensure that the fundamental rights guaranteed to every Indian citizen are enjoyed by Muslims in true letter and spirit.
2. 15 Point programme meant for upliftment of minorities, initiated by the Central Government, should be implemented rigorously.
3. The recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report for socio-economic upliftment of Muslims should be implemented rigorously
4. National Human Rights Commission, Minority Commission, and National Commission of Women should play effective role in dealing with the matters of violation of rights of minorities.

In particular we recommend the following for the empowerment of Muslim women:

1. NGOs with active participation of Muslim women should guide about availability of various schemes initiated by the government and various agencies for providing financial assistance to women, like loans for higher education, educated unemployed and self employment etc.
2. Effective steps at all levels should be taken to get rid of the curse of illiteracy which is the root cause of socio-economic backwardness among Muslim women at large.
3. The educated, employed and empowered Muslim women should come forward and establish NGOs in order to guide and create awareness among the deprived Muslim women about the opportunities available. They should take initiative in forming 'self help groups' by Muslim women and encourage self employment and savings. Employment outside home may be encouraged by providing the facilities of crèches wherever possible. Such NGOs should focus on the awareness of legal rights of Muslim women including property rights.
4. From religious point of view, religious scholars should ensure to create proper awareness among Muslims at large both men and women about the social and economic rights given to women in Islam.

Once these issues are addressed effectively, there is no doubt that the Muslim community at large will march ahead in the direction of progress and development and in turn Muslim women will realize the dream of equality of status and empowerment. Finally, it is recommended that further research needs to be undertaken on a larger scale on the above lines.

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