

## Issues and challenges of Muslim Women in the context of Islam: A Study of Kishanganj District

Shakil Haider  
Icssr Doctoral Fellow  
A.N.Sinha Institute of Social Studies Patna  
Division of Sociology and Social Anthropology  
E-mail-haider.shakil99@gmail.com

### Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to highlight Education Influenced on Muslim Women, I have used Secondary data collected from internet, Government documents, newspapers, published papers, books etc. Education is an important factor that holds a significant place in any study. Brown and Russek has written that education is a complete fabric of experience which influence the attitude of both child and adult and determines their behavior. Education also has an important place in the process of modernization. Substantial difference is seen in the knowledge and attitude of an educated person and a illiterate person. An educated person can solved problems generated in his limited means efficiently. Educated persons do not face any special difficulty in preparing specific programs to solve future problems. N. Prasad has written those if most of the people in a society become educated then it will generate different kinds of new desires and tendencies to invent, and the development of new means of fulfill then will also be possible. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and so on.

**Keywords:** Education, significant, important, modernization, future, Muslims

### I. INTRODUCTION

Education has always played a very important role in every society. It makes an individual to internalize the value and norm of the society and simultaneously offers the specific skilled persons to serve different functions in society. The role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is well accepted today. Improvement in education opens up opportunities leading to both individual and group entitlements. Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low level of education combined with low quality of education their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. In some instances, the relative share for Muslims is lower than that of schedule caste and schedule tribes who have been victim of long-standing caste system.

A heterogeneous but composite culture developed in Bihar as a result of a synthesis between Islamic and non-Islamic cultural systems and Muslims became an integral part of the social and political life of the region. A demographic watershed for the Muslims in Bihar was the phenomenon of partition of India along with its independence, when a number of Muslims from Bihar had migrated to Pakistan, either West or East. But even after that, the Muslims have continued to be a sizeable minority in Bihar. According to the 2001 census, the Muslim population in Bihar was 137.2 lakhs which was 16.5 percent of the state's total population and 9.9 percent of the country's total Muslim population.

The religion-based results of the Census 2001 have been published only for state-level aggregates covering some major demographic characteristics. Unfortunately, these religion-based figures are yet to be published for different districts, and one has therefore to depend upon the 1991 census data to analyse the regional distribution of Muslim population within Bihar. The majority of the Muslim population in Bihar lives in rural areas. In 1991, the rural areas accounted for 87.0 percent of the Muslim population, the remaining 13.0 percent residing in urban centres. As regards the distribution of the Muslim population among the districts of the state, it is far from uniform. In terms of absolute size of the Muslim population, it is the largest in Katihar, with a Muslim population of 7.28 lakhs.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study has been conducted primarily to address these requirements. The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the socio-economic and educational status of respondents,
2. To find out the hurdles and barriers who pace the education of Muslim Women,
3. To suggest remedial measures to improve the educational status of Muslim women.

A special feature of the educational practices among the Muslims in Bihar, and possibly elsewhere in northern India, is their tendency to go for Madarsa-based education, the traditional education system for the Muslims. In the rural areas, no less than 24.1 percent of the students opt for Madarsa-based education, for many of whom at least the inexpensive government school could have been an alternative choice. Even in urban areas, 9.0 percent of the students opt for Madarsa-based education where availability of other types of institutions is obviously wider. Although in some cases, the parents' decision to send their children to Madrasas may be guided by its religious appeal, the cost and other factor also play an important role in exercising preference for such a system of education.

## III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

There has always been confusion about Muslim women's status and rights. The confusion arises due to the significant differences about the status and rights of Muslim women in textual Islam, in Islamic history and tradition, and Islam in practice at present. The series of studies that have been published since 1970s on the social problems of Muslim women, begin with the premise that they are disadvantaged in particular ways because of their religious identity and gender and focus on issues related to Personal laws (Lateef, 1990, 1998; Hussain 1998; Kazi 1999; Hassan and Menon 2004). It has been rightly pointed out in Sachar Committee Report, "The obsessive focus on select cases of Muslim women passionately discussed in the media results in identifying the Muslim religion as the sole locus of gender injustice in the community.

Consequently, the civil society and the State locate Muslim women's deprivation not in terms of the 'objective' reality of societal discrimination and faulty development policies, but in the religious community space" (Government of India 2006: 12-13). However, there is nothing in the Islamic principles which lead to the low status of Muslim women rather Islam prescribes equality in the status of men and women. Some scholars argue that 'true Islam' means equality between the sexes and that Muslim women's oppression is due to patriarchal misinterpretations of Islam (Brijbhushan, 1980; Banamusa, 1995; Kazi, 1999). Islam emphasizes both that women differ from men and that they are equal to men. In Quran and in the Hadith literature, there are various statements concerning women in particular which makes clear pronouncement in favour of equal rights for both sexes (Jawad, 1998: 20-21).

## IV. STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA

A High-Power Panel under the chairmanship of Dr. Gopal Singh was set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs in the early 1980s to enquire into the condition of religious minorities, Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs). The committee's findings revealed that Muslims and Neo-Buddhists were the most educationally backward communities at the national level (Government of India, 1983:3-4). It was found that their economic condition was worse than those of Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs). They were deprived of the benefits of developmental schemes and were underrepresented in governmental services and decision-making bodies (Zakaria, 1995:163-166). Even after the submission of the report of Dr. Gopal Singh's Committee, there has been no significant improvement in the socio-economic conditions of Muslims which is evident from the census 2001. An analysis of census 2001 reveals that Muslims are behind other religious communities in the areas of literacy, industrial promotion and economic pursuits. They lack technical and vocational education as well as training in the trades in demand.

In March 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appointed a high-level committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar to prepare a report on the social, economic and educational status of Indian Muslims. The report highlighted the deplorable socio-economic plight of the Muslim community in India. It notes that the community exhibits "deficits and deprivation" in practically all dimensions of

development. "In fact, by and large, Muslims rank somewhat above SCs/STs but below Hindu OBCs, other Minorities and Hindu General (mostly upper castes) in almost all indicators considered" (Government of India 2006: 237).

The poor representation of Muslims in the employment market was also highlighted. Presently, in the changing Indian society the Muslim women try hard to get rid of the burden of gender, family and community by way of getting themselves educated (Menon, 1981:25). The amalgam between minority identity and stereotyped judgement on the issues of Muslim women can be easily broken if they receive proper education and become conscious of their rights as well as their duties. Education is therefore, their dire and essential need.

## **V. EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA**

The literacy rate among Muslims according to census 2001 was 59.1 per cent which is far below the national average of 65.1 per cent. Dropout rate among them is the highest at the level of Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary compared to all the socio-religious communities (SRC's). As many as 25 per cent Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 have either never attended school or have dropped out. Only 17 per cent Muslims above the age of 17 years have completed matriculation as compared to 26 per cent for all socio-religious communities. The gap between Muslims and other socio-religious communities increases as the level of education increases. According to Sachar Committee report the gap between education of Muslims and advantaged sections has widened since independence because Muslims have not been able to respond to the challenge of improving their educational status. Although the educational attainments of Muslims have improved over the years but it has been at a more gradual pace than other socio-religious communities (Government of India, 2006). It is to be noted that the literacy rates are much higher amongst other minorities, Jains lead, followed by Christians, Sikhs and even Buddhists.

After the findings of Sachar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Commission, now the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), a central government body, has reconfirmed the deplorable educational conditions of the Muslims in the country. The NSSO which is attached to the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, in its report titled "Education in India, 2007-08: Participation and Expenditure", says that of hundred Muslims in the education system, just ten are enrolled in the High School and above. Similar ratio for SC's is 11, ST's 12 and OBC's is 14. The report further says that Muslims' ratio in higher education is lower than even ST's, who are considered most backward. Various Sociological studies ( Siddiqui, 1984; Sharma, 1987; Kareem, 1988; Siddiqui, 2004) and different thinkers (Ahmad, 1981; Sarkar, 1983; Ahmad, 1987; Saxena, 1989; Jayaram, 1990; Ansari, 1992; Hasan, 1993; Khaldi, 1995) on the other hand have also pointed out the educational backwardness of Muslims in India and have highlighted various causes of their backwardness which include low perceived returns from education, poor access to schools, school based factors; issues relating to Madrassa education etc.

## **VI. EDUCATION AND CHANGING STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA**

There is a dearth of studies on Muslim women based on primary data both in quality as well as in quantity. Hanif (1983) remarks, "Even though there has been a great rise in the study of women in India, the Muslim women have been grossly neglected in this process." Few available studies on Muslim women are reviewed below.

Kidwai (1976) on the basis of a content analysis of religious scriptures, historical accounts and other relevant materials presented a comparative analysis of the role and status of women in different religious communities. As regards the role and status of Muslim women he has drawn a conclusion that the condition of Muslim women is not universally uniform, but a trend of decline in their status is found everywhere.

Menon (1981) in her study of Muslim women in Kerala tried to find out the role of education in upgrading the social position of Muslim women. For this purpose 450 women and 150 men were selected on the basis of simple random method from four districts of Kerala. The respondents represented both rural and urban settings of the four districts and were having comparatively higher educational background. She observed that the lack of meaningful role for educated women in the community and the practice of seclusion were the two main reasons for the low level of education among women. However, the author concludes that in spite of tradition bound social structure of Muslim community; higher education has been able to contribute significantly in the amelioration of

the lot of Muslim women. The higher the education of the respondents, the more modern were their attitudes and behaviour and higher was their status in the society.

Jain (1986) assessed the degree of modernization among Muslims in Jaipur. For the study four wards were selected which had Muslim population of ten thousand or more and three per cent households were taken from each of the four wards. The total number of cases to be studied from each ward was based on random sampling but the head of the family household was selected as the respondent from each ward and women head from each household was also been contacted in order to analyse the position of women in the society.

The study reveals that in the sphere of education, employment, household authority and in the family economy women were at the lower rungs of the social status. However, some changes have occurred as a result of exposure to education. She tried to find out whether the process of modernization in India has brought a change in the status of Muslim women. The trends show that Muslim women are favorably disposed towards economic independence. It was observed that 66.7 per cent women were of the opinion that employment of women is good in present day situation. This particular opinion gradually increased in frequency in the young age category respondents. The author found that educated and working women showed a high degree of political consciousness, freedom in maintaining independent bank accounts and confidence in their domestic dealings. She noted that only education of Muslim women can be instrumental in ameliorating their economic and socio-political condition.

Ashrafi (1992) in her study of urban Muslim women of the Patna municipal areas in Bihar examines the important aspects of determining the status of Muslim women i.e, marriage, family, education, purdah and family planning. The author concludes that it is a fallacy to assume that Muslim society is conservative in nature and argues that the changes are taking place in the life style, role, status and position of Muslim women in their families as well as in society.

Shafi (2002) in her study of Muslim married working women in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir state reveals that change has taken place in the status-role set of working women consequently she has attained greater decision-making power in the family. Some of the roles which are exclusively the domain of the male members of the family are now being shared with the housewife. The author concludes that in spite of traditional roles and statuses gainful employment constitutes an important source to raise the socio-economic status of women in the family.

Hasan and Menon (2004) in an attempt to study Muslim women in India carried out a survey in 40 districts spread across 12 States of the country with large Muslim population. A purposive sampling of the Muslim community was done and the universe of the study constituted Muslim and Hindu female population (aged 18+ years). A total of 9541 households were interviewed and within each area 80 per cent of the sample constituted Muslims and 20 percent Hindu households. The proportion of urban-rural households selected was 60:40. The data confirms the disadvantaged educational status of Muslim women. It was found that roughly 60 per cent of Muslim women reported themselves to be illiterate while the school enrolment rate for Muslim girls was 40-66 per cent. The proportion of illiterate Muslim women was substantially higher for the rural north than it was for the rest of India where more than 85 per cent women in the rural North reported themselves to be illiterate. The proportion of Muslim women in higher education was only 3.56 per cent, lower even than that of the SCs, which was 4.25 per cent.

Yet another study by Hasan and Menon (2005), look at the conditions of Muslim women's education in five cities in India: Delhi, Agra, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Calicut (Kozhikode). The authors reveal, Muslim girls' school enrolment rates continue to be low: 40.6 per cent as compared to 63.2 per cent in the case of 'upper' caste Hindus. In rural north India it was only 13.5 per cent, in urban north India 23.1 per cent and in rural and urban south India, above 70 per cent, which is above the all-India average of all girls. Only 16.1 per cent of Muslim girls from, poor families attend schools, while 70 per cent of Muslim girls from economically better-off families do so, thus clearly suggesting that low levels of education of Muslim girls owes not to religion but to poverty. 98 per cent of Muslim girls were studying in government or private schools and only 2 per cent in Madrasas, the majority being from poor families. The average number of years that Muslim girl's study was found a dismal 2.7 years, as compared to 3.8 years in the case of Hindu girls.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

The overall socio-economic status of the Muslims in Bihar is generally inferior to that of the other sections of the population, but the socio-economic distances between them are not the same on all counts. Both the extent of the distances and the reasons for their emergence and continuation vary, depending upon the nature of the indicator, the locale — rural or urban, and gender.

- Among the sections of the population which were bypassed by the post-independence development process in India, Muslims form a significant section, a majority of whom are afflicted by low income, widespread illiteracy and many other socio-economic disadvantages.
- Bihar is one of those ten states where the Muslims constitute at least 10 percent of the population. According to the 2001 census, the Muslim population in Bihar was 137.2 lakh, forming 16.5 percent of state's total population and 9.9 percent of the country's total Muslim population. Viewed from either perspective, the Muslims constitute a sizeable minority in Bihar. It is, therefore, not possible to visualize a vigorous development process in Bihar of which the Muslim population is not a beneficiary and in which it is not an equal and active participant.
- According to the 1991 census, 87.0 percent of the Muslims in Bihar live in the rural areas and the remaining 13.0 percent in the urban areas. Taking into account both the absolute size of the Muslim population in different districts and the share of that population in the district's total population (the two indicators of Muslim concentration in a district), it is found that the districts with a relatively higher Muslim concentration are all in north Bihar.
- The Islamic ethos is basically egalitarian and, in its religious texts, no division of the society ordained by birth is indicated. But because of long interactions with the Hindus, the Indian Muslims are also divided among castes as are the Hindus. The Muslim caste categories have appeared largely along occupational lines; but as among the Hindus, the caste-occupation relationship is losing strength. The present survey has identified 43 castes among the Muslims in Bihar. Of these, 4 belong to the 'upper castes', 11 to the 'backward castes' and 28 to the 'most backward castes'. In the rural areas, the shares of these three categories in the total population are 40.4, 25.0 and 34.6 percent respectively; in the urban areas, the distribution is very similar. This pattern is very different from that among the Hindus, among whom the upper castes account for a much smaller part of the population.
- Out of 137.2 lakh Muslims in Bihar, 87.0 percent live in rural areas where land and related resources form the main base of livelihood. But only 36 percent of the rural Muslim households have some land; among the general population, land-owning households constitute 58 percent. Further, the average land per land-owning Muslim household is only 1.91 acres, compared to 2.32 acres for the general population. To make the situation worse, there is also a slow trend of land



alienation from the Muslim households. However, relatively better irrigation facilities available to the Muslim cultivating households, partially compensate for their lower land endowment.

In the context of the above analysis, some suggestions can be made regarding the research “Impact of Education on Muslim women: A sociological study of Kishanganj district in Bihar.” It is given as follows:

### VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- The target of “education for all” is still a distant dream and the quality of education being imparted in schools needs to be improved as a priority. The gap in human capital formation in case of various communities as well as the females needs to be bridge through community and gender sensitive educational programmes and schemes.
- There is need to speed up the efforts of government in ensuring cent percent enrollment of children in the school going group with zero drop outs Hindu and Muslim communities. This could be possible if the quality of education is improved besides expanding the school infrastructure under SSA.
- In order to increase enrollment and retention of students, there is used to enhance the quantum of educational assistance in the district. The poor and deserving students must be provided with scholarships and uniform assistance.
- Gender disparities are noticeable across the communities in educational attainment at various levels, which needs to be plugged. Scholarships should be given to poor but deserving female students from rural areas.
- There is need to improve the income levels of rural households. Banks and financial institutions can play a major role by providing credit at cheaper rates without any collateral for undertaking productive self - employment.
- Modernization of Madrasa education has the main purpose of increasing the standard of education amongst the Muslims and there should be incorporation of vocational education with religious instruction in Madrasas. There is also a need to connect Madrasas with higher secondary school board.
- 1. Among the sections of the population which were bypassed by the post-independence development process in India, Muslims form a significant section, a majority of whom are afflicted by low income, widespread illiteracy and many other socio-economic disadvantages.
- 2. Bihar is one of those ten states where the Muslims constitute at least 10 percent of the population. According to the 2001 census, the Muslim population in Bihar was 137.2 lakh, forming 16.5 percent of state’s total population and 9.9 percent of the country’s total Muslim population. Viewed from either perspective, the Muslims constitute a sizeable minority in Bihar.

It is, therefore, not possible to visualize a vigorous development process in Bihar of which the Muslim population is not a beneficiary and in which it is not an equal and active participant.

- 3.Out of 137.2 lakh Muslims in Bihar, 87.0 percent live in rural areas where land and related resources form the main base of livelihood. But only 36 percent of the rural Muslim households have some land; among the general population, land-owning households constitute 58 percent. Further, the average land per land-owning Muslim household is only 1.91 acres, compared to 2.32 acres for the general population. To make the situation worse, there is also a slow trend of land alienation from the Muslim households. However, relatively better irrigation facilities available to the Muslim cultivating households, partially compensate for their lower land endowment.
- The average annual income of a Muslim household is about Rs. 31.55 thousand in the rural and Rs. 43.64 thousand in the urban areas. Assuming a 7-member household to be an average one, the survey estimates that about 49.5 percent of the rural Muslim households live below the poverty line, compared to 44.3 percent for the general population. In the urban areas, however, the poverty estimates for the Muslim and general population differ considerably - 44.8 percent for the Muslim households, but a much lower 32.9 percent for the general population. There is a sizeable economic 109 distance between the Muslims and general population. But the distance is much wider in urban than in rural areas, because of the combined effect of resource disadvantage and employment discrimination.

## IX. Reference

- Hameeda Naeem, 2005, "The Problem of Muslim Women in India Special Focus on Kashmiri Women" in Women and Gender Justice (ed) by Asghar Ali Engineer, New Delhi, Kalpaz Publishers. P. 345
- Nevidita Giri, 2006, "Laws Institution and Women Right in India" in Laws Institution and Women's Right in India (ed) by Tapan Biswal, New Delhi, Viva Book Pvt. Ltd. P. 301
- Janet Mancini Billson, Carolyn Fuehrer-Lob ban, 2005, "The Twentieth Century as a Transformative Time for Women", in Female Well-Being (ed) by Janet Mancini Billson and Carolyn Fuehrer-Lob ban. New York, Zed Books ltd. P. 3
- Archana Chaturvedi, 2003, Encyclopedia of Muslim Women, New Delhi, Common Wealth Publishers, P. 2
- Zanic Kandiyoti, 1991, Women Islam and State, London, MacMillan Press P. 15
- Nevidita Giri, 2006, "Laws Institution and Women's Right in India" in Laws Institution and Women's Right in India (ed) by Tapan Biswal, Opp. Cit page. 302
- Sushila Aggarwal, 1988, Status of Women, Jaipur, Printwell Publishers. P. 15

- Nevdita Giri, 2006, “Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India” in Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India (ed) by Tapan Biswal, Opp. Cit page. 30
- Ibid, P. 305
- A. S. Anand, 2003, Justice For Women, New Delhi, Universal Law Publishing Company P. 16
- Nevdita Giri, 2006, “Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India” in Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India (ed) by Tapan Biswal, Opp. Cit P. 302
- P.K. Tondon, 1988, Status of Women in Contemporary World, New Delhi, Commonwealth Publishers. P. 1
- Nevdita Giri, 2006, “Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India” in Laws Institution and Women’s Right in India (ed) by Tapan Biswal, Opp. Cit P. 307-308
- Sushila Aggarwal, 1988, Status of Women, Jaipur, Printwell Publishers. P. ix
- Nandini Upreti, 1988, “The Changing Status of Women in India Constitutional Provision and Social Reality” in Status of Women (ed) Sushila Aggarwal, Jaipur, Printwell Publishers, P. 13.
- Sushila Jain, 1988, “The Process of Modernization in India and the Status of Muslim Women” in Status of Women (ed) Sushila Aggarwal opp cit. p. 78.
- Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, 2005, In a Minority, London, Oxford University press, P. 3.
- <https://mhrd.gov.in/educational-development-minorities>
- Andra Beitle, 1975, “The Position of Women in Indian Society” in Indian Women (ed) Devki Jain, New Delhi, Publication Division Ministry of Information Broadcasting Government of India, P. 63.
- Asghar Ali Engineer, 2005, Islam Women and Gender Justice, New Delhi, Kalpaz Publishers. P. 348
- Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India; A Report, November, 2006, New Delhi, Prime Ministers High Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, P. 13.
- Safeeq-u-Zama, 2001, Problem of Minority Education in India, Hyderabad, Ramkrishnan Book Link, P. 1.
- Rashid Shaz, 1986, “The Cultural Problem of Muslim in India” in Muslim Minority Procedure of Sixth International Conference of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Riyadh. P. 412