

**A PROJECT FOR**  
**STUDIES ON MADRASAH EDUCATION, MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL,**  
**SPONSORED BY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MINORITY AFFAIRS & MADRASAH EDUCATION,**  
**GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA**  
**CONDUCTED AT**  
**ALIAH UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA**

**Topic 1: Madrasah Education and its Role in the Upliftment of Minority Communities**

Duration: 1 year

It is well known to us that Educational inspiration and models were derived from leading Islamic cultural centers in West Asia. The ancient college of Nizamia at Baghdad where philosopher Al-Ghazzali was at one time the Head Professor, offered a course widely known as Silsilai Niazamia. The main subjects taught according to that system included grammar, rhetoric, logic, dialectic literature, philosophy, mathematics, theology, and law. Philosophy embraced two branches of knowledge, e.g., physics and metaphysics, based upon Aristotelian principles, and mathematics included astronomy, besides algebra, geometry, and arithmetic. This system was adopted in Madrasahs and Maktabas in India in conformity with the general practice prevailing throughout the Islamic world. For general education, we meet with three broad types of institutions: i) private house for giving elementary knowledge or primary education, ii) mosques and religious places for imparting secondary education, and iii) maktabas and madrasahs for providing higher education.

The most notable ruler as promoter of education among the pre-Mughal emperors/sultans was Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1388) who patronized learning, established a large number of educational institutions, and surrounded his court with distinguished men of learning such as Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, Siraj Arif, Zia-ud-Din Barni, Maulana Khwajgi, Qazi Abdul Qadi, and Aziz-ud-Din Khalid Khani.

The Mughals maintained and extended the educational activities of the Sultanate period. Humayun was a bibliophile with a special interest in sciences. During Akbar's reign educational activities made such a headway that Abul Fazal unhesitatingly declared: "All civilized nations have schools for the education of youths; but Hindustan is particularly famous for his seminaries." Akbar's educational reforms benefitted all communities equally, and for the first time the Hindus and Muslims were seen studying in the same schools and colleges.

The then Madrasahs fulfilled both religious and secular needs and taught what was necessary for secular as well as religious life. These madrasahs can be, in a way, compared with Christian seminaries during medieval ages wherein too what was taught was to fulfill both religious as well as secular needs. These institutions served in those days vital scholarly needs.

A large number of Muslims in West Bengal, in fact a vast majority, is of poor and illiterate variety. Most of them are converts from low Hindu castes and still pursue their ancestral vocations. Very few have emerged successfully from their inherited professions to take up modern professions. These poor Muslims cannot afford, even if they want, to send their children to institutions of secular education.

Moreover they have religious needs and madrasahs can fulfill not only religious needs but also provide free education and what is more, are conveniently located. Furthermore, we should not homogenize all madrasahs. They need to be divided into different categories: i) primary level madrasahs, known as maktabas where only preliminary religious teaching is imparted, ii) middle level madrasahs where Arabic language, Qur'an, commentary on Qur'an, hadith, etc. are taught, and iii) higher madrasahs can be compared with graduate and post-graduate level studies where apart from Arabic literature, Islamic theology, Kalam, Philosophy, and Greek sciences are taught.

The syllabus, based on what is known as dars-e-Nizami devised by Mulla Nizami in eighteenth century, is taught in India including West Bengal. Today there is debate on this issue between orthodox and modernist Muslims whether Dars-e-Nizami should be continued. There is a movement for modernization of madrasahs and many madrasahs have gone for modernization.

The reasons for preference for madrasah education among Muslims are: i) paucity of modern schools in Muslim majority areas, ii) lack of separate girls' schools and even female teachers in common schools, iii) cost of modern education and the poor quality of government schools, iv) poor quality of education in government schools, and v) genuine grievance of orthodox Muslims that there is a Hindu bias in school text books. Though such biases have tendency to creep up even in supposedly objective statements, any such pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim bias is unfortunate and must be avoided with utmost sincerity as it would cause further resistance to modern education among a particular section of Muslims.

In this project, the objective is to have a systematic study of madrasahs and madrasah education in West Bengal vis-à-vis society, religion, education, and modernity.

## **Topic 2: A Critical Study of the Bengali Muslim Women in the Perspective of Modern Education and their Role.**

Duration: 1 year

Basic core of the Qur'anic message is that of justice, a comprehensive concept that included gender justice as well. Hence, injustice to women goes completely against the grain of the Qur'an's teachings.

After six decades of independence, the majority of Muslim women are among the most disadvantaged, least literate, economically impoverished, and politically marginalized sections of Indian society. This point cannot be overstated in a context where, in 1983, the Gopal Singh Committee instituted by the government of India, declared Muslims as a 'backward' community in India as well as West Bengal.

A central feature of this 'backwardness' of Muslims in West Bengal, particularly Muslim women is their appalling educational and socio-economic status. In modern-day West Bengal, the socio-economic status of women in Muslim communities, along with their political participation rates and the need for legal reform, are causes for concern and need attention. These social and economic issues confronting women in Muslim communities mandate attention as does the violation of their rights as citizens of India.

It is to be noted that while the 34.7 per cent of Hindu women were illiterate, the figure for Muslim women was 52.1 per cent. While only 2.7 per cent of Muslim women had studied beyond high school, the corresponding figures for Hindu, Christian, Sikh, and Jain women were 11.7 per cent, 16 per cent, 16.6 per cent, and 30.5 per cent, respectively. Muslims' share in public employment in All-India and Central Services is less than 3 per cent. Within this picture of poor overall employment statistics, it is a predictable certainty that the corresponding figures for Muslim women are lower still. The situation in West Bengal is no exception.

The impoverished status of a large number of Muslim women in West Bengal underlines the *urgency for further inquiry in this area* and also the *need for active intervention* by state agencies to implement policies to redress this imbalance and ensure Muslim women's full and equal participation as Indian citizens.

The politics of education has included Indian Muslim women within the gaze of education but has excluded from the practice of education. This is also true in science. Feminist critiques of science education have begun to focus on the ideologies, politics, epistemologies, economics, and metaphysics of traditional science.

The analysis of the Muslim women education has given rise to a number of difficult questions. "What kind / kinds of education is / are consistent with our critiques? "Are we asking for a feminist Muslim education?" Is there a feminist method or Muslim feminist method? Do Muslim women do education differently than Muslim man?

It is difficult to say the exact time when Bengali Muslim Women took up the study of Modern Science, Philosophy, and Religion. In the Modern Mathematics, Iqbal Unnisa was the first Indian Muslim woman to be awarded Ph.D. degree in Pure Mathematics from one of the Indian Universities. She was awarded Ph.D. degree from Madras University in 1964 for her thesis entitled "Studies in Abstract Algebra with Special Reference to types of lattices, ideals, and congruencies. The same thing can be found in other fields of Science, Philosophy, and Religion and in the state of West Bengal as well.

In this project, we are also going to study the development of Science, Philosophy, and Religion by the Bengali Muslim women, i.e., we are going to study critically and statistically the works of Bengali Muslim women in such areas.