

**EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF  
MUSLIM WOMEN:  
A STUDY OF MUSLIM WOMEN ORGANISATIONS IN KERALA**

*Thesis submitted to the University of Kerala  
for the award of the Degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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**2016**

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Empowerment is not about power over others, but power to achieve goals and ends. The process of empowerment involves not only changes in access to resources, but also an understanding of one's rights and entitlements and the social realisation that gender roles can be changed and gender equity is possible. In almost every sphere of human functioning, the roles defined for women are subordinated to those defined for men, the rights for women are fewer or less emancipating than those that men have, and the obligations women have are more limiting than those defined for men. Unequal gender relations imply that men not only have and can exercise greater power than women in almost all spheres of functioning; they also have culturally and often legally sanctioned power over women and have greater control of and access to resources and information. This inequality in gender relations is embodied in various societal institutions, but is reproduced daily in the household.

Leadership Development is a relatively new concept and is considered as an extension of empowerment by NGO leadership study centres. The task of any LDP is to mobilise existing talent and to develop and motivate new leaders – in part by helping ordinary members or administrators to become effective leaders. So LDPs prepare people to play roles beyond their normal experience or frame of reference. One measure of the success of any LDP is to what degree it helps transform personal behaviour and change attitudes. Such personal transformation is dependent on increased self-awareness and willingness to engage in new ways of working or thinking. Improving effective awareness and promoting personal change is therefore a crucial component of any successful LDP. Though scholarly literature is extensively generated in this topic it is mostly in private organisational set up. Leadership Development is an important area of scholarly research and application with myriad unanswered questions to pursue according to the David. V. Day, a leading authority on the topic.

India is a subcontinent known for its cultural diversity. The constitution of India guarantees equal rights to women. But the patriarchal culture has the effect of diluting freedom and equality in the political sphere that there are few women in public life. A look at the women's movement for empowerment in India can be divided into four phases. The first phase initiated by the social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who tried to make the dominant patriarchal system a bit humane. The second phase was launched by the leaders of national movement like M.K. Gandhi who made women an integral part of freedom struggle. This was the time when modern education and International women's movement influenced women of India and many a women organisations including All India Muslim Women's Conference, Women India Association (WIA) 1917, the National Council of Women Women of India (NCWI), 1925 and the All India Women's conference (AIWC), 1926 was established. All these organisations pleaded for the welfare of women and took up some concrete programs for the upliftment of women.

The third phase of women's movement in India emerged after Independence. Women organisations became politicised and women became vote banks. Every other party floated women's wings not to empower her but to campaign for party. The fourth phase started with the mid seventies when the International women's year was followed by International women's decade. Autonomous organisations like Saheli, Kali for women and NGOs like SEWA and Kudumbasree emerged. Women research centres and institutions were established at various places and Universities. There are many cultural and religious barriers to women's equality that are outside the realm of governmental action. Thus "transforming women's consciousness and building power at the grassroots is essential". (Colman 1989). This calls for Empowerment at individual level where awareness and action with local strategies from related socio-cultural political and religious agencies plays the crucial role. Leadership development provides the extended empowerment that gives women the courage to mentor her fellow beings to social upliftment.

Women empowerment is one of the key elements in Islamic teachings. When Muhammed the Prophet of Muslims introduced the religion of Islam during the dark age the condition of women was pathetic. History records that women were considered as instruments for men's pleasure and their birth a shame to the family. Female children were buried alive and polygamy was widely practiced without restrictions. She had no self respect or rights. Islam changed this situation by legally sanctioning rights to women. She was conferred social political legal rights to self respect and inheritance. Her birth was declared by the holy book of Islam as a good tiding and thereafter her social status was raised during the Islamic rule by Prophet Muhammed and his immediate successors. However, with the passage of time the male interpretations of Islam changed, best suiting male interests. These interpretations varied from one place to another with disagreements among them, each one using Islam to legitimise its view. The common factor can be attributed to the subordination of Muslim women to suit male role expectations. (Sharif 1987).

Kerala is a state looked upon as a model for development as well as women welfare. The advent of Islam in Kerala dates back to the time of the origin of Islam through Arab traders of the time. Muslim community in Kerala stood apart from the general community in their dress code, conduct and cultural habits with a lot of imbibed native characters. They had an independent script for communication in local language and unique literature flourished. Social reform movements, freedom struggle and changes in the international politics changed the social and cultural settings in Kerala to new dimensions. Independence and English education opened up new avenues for women's growth. But Muslim community in India, specifically in Kerala, stood back from this social upheaval due to their aversion to British language and were ultimately left behind. In a society where women in general were confined to their homes, Muslim women had double setback with no education and restricted social mobility.

Social reformers in Muslim community of Kerala especially Vakkom Abdul Kahder Moulavi tried to reach the community through enlightening articles in Arabi Malayalam script and various publications. He brought to light the

pathetic social condition of Muslims in Kerala to the notice of authorities and was successful in convincing them to find ways to attract Muslim men and women to education. Thus Arabis Munshis were appointed in schools and Local committees were set up to encourage parents to encourage children to send to school. Later, organisations like Jamaat-e- Islami, Mujahid and the orthodox Sunni groups also supported the community to come forward in education and societal activities.

Few institutions under Muslim management like Noorul Islam Madrasa, Madeenathul Uloom Arabic College and Aliya Arabic College were established over a period of time. Even though in the post independence period witnessed visible social transformation in Kerala society as a whole, the Muslim women were not a part of it. The community leadership namely Jamaat Islami, and Mujahid organisations during 1970s started focussing on bringing up women from their social and educational backwardness. Women focussed activities of encouraging girls' education, inclusion of women members in religious organisations though in nominal representation was remarkable. In between, there were few individual success stories of educated women like Justice Fathima Beevi, Nafeesath Beevi, K.O. Aisha Beevi, Haleema Beevi, Dr Abusha Maraikar, Dr Arifa Beevi and Professor Nabeesa Ummal who wrote history of the victory of Muslim women of Kerala.

Indira Gandhi Government's family planning initiatives and related awareness had positive impact on Muslim women in Kerala. The number of children gradually decreased in families. In 1982 Mujahid Girls movement (MGM) was started as an independent women's wing of Itihad Subbanill Mujahiddin (ISM). Jamaat-e- Islami started its independent women's wing, Girls Islamic Organisation (GIO) in 1984. The major political party representing Muslims started their women's wing in 1997 after the 33% reservation for women in local self governments was made compulsory. The Gulf boom during the 1970s posed new challenges to the male dependent family settings. Economical upsurge of the Muslim community overpowered orthodoxy. The change in international market scenario post globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation also influenced the community. Muslim League became a major political player in Kerala in the

post independence period. The activities of religious organisations, Muslim Educational Society (MES), and the efforts from the Government through the influence of Muslim League changed the educational picture of Kerala Muslim women.

The changes in the social arena internationally, nationally, and at local level were very rapid. With the advent of technological revolution education and knowledge acquirement crossed traditional boundaries. At this juncture an evaluation of the achievements and milestones becomes crucial to track the future course of action and also to take corrective and developmental steps so that the community in general and women folk in particular are not left behind. Thus this study was conducted with the objective of taking stock of the developments so far made by the Muslim women in Kerala with special emphasis on the activities of Muslim women organisations and their influence in empowering and developing leadership among Muslim women in Kerala.

### **Validation of Hypotheses**

#### **1) Muslim women in Kerala have started actively involving in social life as a result of the positive influence of Muslim women organizations.**

The observations made in the study and the survey data as discussed in the analysis section proves that there is an active presence of Muslim women organisations among Muslim women in Kerala. The activities of these organisations have created a sense of unity and belongingness among the womenfolk who were otherwise closed behind the four walls of their homes. The conduct of regular periodical meetings and organised successful efforts in mobilising women to creative social activities like building houses for the poor, palliative medical care and initiatives in the model of 'Kudumbasree' shows the genuineness and effectiveness of these programs. The success of Muslim women contesting and winning election can be attributed to the campaign and awareness created through the organised effort of Muslim women organisations. The various publications like 'Prabodhanam'(JI), 'Mahila Chandrika'(ML), 'Pudava' (KNM) exclusively to educate Muslim women establishes the organisational effort behind

educating and empowering women in the community. The fact that 'Aaraamam' is a magazine run exclusively by women from reporting, editing to production proves that Muslim women organisations contribute to the active involvement of Muslim women in social life. The responses recorded by respondents in the survey as discussed in analysis proves the fact that Muslim women have started actively involving in social life. The opportunities provided by the organisational hierarchical structure in developing managerial and leadership capabilities among members of the organisation also prove the positive effect of organisations in empowering Muslim women. Hence, this hypothesis is proved valid.

**2) Male domination, economic dependence, poor education and religious myths are among the main factors that hinder Muslim Women's social life**

The Study attempted to analyse the factors that affect Muslim women from being socially active. Male domination was proved to be one among the major factors. It was observed that among the respondents who participated in the survey only 27% replied that their husbands would permit them to take up employment opportunities. Nearly 40% of the respondents said that there was very poor or no support from their husband in performing household responsibilities like cleaning, dishwashing, tidying etc. Majority of the respondents reported that women sacrifice their dreams and aspirations for better prospects of their family while performing their roles as mothers and wife. Even though Muslim League is a prominent political party in Kerala, it has never had a female MLA nor fielded a female candidate to contest assembly elections. Women are encouraged to contest those constituencies in LSGs that are exclusively reserved for them. These facts prove the hypothesis that male domination is a serious issue that prevents Muslim women from being socially active members of the society. It was observed in the survey analysis that 90% of the Muslim women were unemployed and 83% had no source of income what so ever. This establishes the fact that they are totally dependent for all financial needs of their family on the male member. Among the respondents only a minor 5% had the independence to control financial management in their homes. The percentage of Muslim women pursuing higher education is very minimal, and the

employment levels of those educated are also very low. Education level up to higher secondary is happening across Kerala but the fact that marriages of 70% Muslim women happen between 15 to 19 years of age as reflected in survey data hints at an obstruction in pursuing professional education. Mobility and choice of work among Muslim women in Kerala are guided by religious constraints as observed in the survey. As such, it can be held that the hypothesis is valid.

### **3) South Kerala Muslim women enjoy a more socially active life as compared to north Kerala Muslim women due to better educational and regional factors**

It is an evident that the social reformers and early leaders among women were mostly from the southern part of Kerala. Prominent Muslim women identities like Justice Fathima Beevi, A.O.Aisha, Nafesath Beagom, Haleema Beevi as discussed in previous chapters were all from southern and central part of Kerala. This can be attributed to the fact that south Kerala culture provides a progressive environment due to the strong presence of mixed communities. This has influenced south Kerala women to be more career oriented and more socially active. North Kerala women are not career oriented though educated as male members are the bread winners in general and finds it less inspiring and has to express more social strength to overcome the social taboos to pursue higher education or regular employment. South Kerala women move out more freely and are comfortable travelling alone than their northern counterparts which are again influence of the general population in which they live. Also the survey data analysis proves that there is a significant difference in the various parameters that indicate social involvement between north Kerala women and south Kerala women, favouring southern Muslim women being more socially active. These parameters included decision making in family matters, response of respondents to atrocities and injustice in day to day life and in public places. It also included the self confidence, social involvement, mobility financial independence, information on political awareness, bargaining and their inquisitiveness to knowledge acquirement. It was seen that except in mobility, political related thinking and knowledge acquiring habits there was a significant difference



between Muslim women in north and south regions of Kerala. Thus the Hypothesis stands validated.

**4) Muslim Women organisations attempt to address the issues of religious taboos, which hinder Muslim women from being socially active. As such, status of Muslim women improved as a result of the positive role of these organisations**

Practice of religious taboos like purdah, polygamy, early marriage and other related aspects were covered in the survey. It was observed during the survey and evident in the analysis that Muslim women organisations have attempted to address these taboos. The responses from the sample establish the fact that these organisations have contributed to the women becoming better house wives, mothers, neighbours, and better citizens. The acceptance of women education and empowerment as found in the survey data also reflects the changing attitude of the society. The fact that 60% of the respondents replied positively to the suggestion of abolishing polygamy which is religiously authentic is evidently the effect of the efforts of Muslim women organisations. Purdah is not made compulsory by any of the Muslim women organisations to its members. Thus the hypothesis can be proved to be valid

**Major Findings of the Study**

- The marriage of 71% of Muslim girls happen between 15 to 19 years
- More than 70% of respondents feel that marriage hinders their higher education prospects and career aspirations
- 90% of the Muslim women in Kerala are unemployed and 83% has no source of income.
- The number of women pursuing higher education is very low. Graduation 10% and post graduation 2%
- 81% of respondents had more than four years of Madrasa education
- Mixed education in schools and colleges are preferred by more than 50% of the respondents
- Education is seen as a way for career by 29% of respondents

- Adolescent marriage is strongly condemned by 66% of respondents
- Arranged marriage was preferred by 91% of the respondents
- Only 5% of the sample reported polygamy in any of their known relations
- Majority of women strongly supported abolishing polygamy which is commonly read as religiously sanctioned
- Respondents were divided on their opinion on Dowry. (45%) report dowry as customary and acceptable, while 448% strongly condemned its practice
- Divorcee has a lower status in society
- Close to 40% of respondents support family planning
- 60% of respondents strongly agreed that women should contribute to family income
- 57% felt that economic stability increase women's status in society
- Only 5% of the respondents were independently controlling finance at home
- 49% depend on their husbands for all outdoor needs
- 35% never travel alone under any circumstances
- Only 5% actually practiced driving either two wheeler or four wheelers
- 55% responded that they would confront physical harassment in public places in some way
- 51% responded that they would react to denial of rights in day to day social life
- Women sacrifice their dreams to satisfy husbands desire
- Women mostly do not officially report physical harassment by husband
- 42% always wear Purdah as their dress
- 51% use it for convenience and security, only 11% wear it to get the Islamic identity
- 20% of the respondents have been formally associated with Women's organisations
- 41% of those associated observed that these organisations helped them in either becoming better home makers, citizens neighbour or social workers
- 28% have participated in some type of outdoor group based social/political/religious meeting

- 40% of women discussed issues like pulse polio immunisation, voting, child marriage, girls education, corruption, consumer rights and female foeticide
- 62% has bank account, 60 % has mobile connections
- 18% were ready to take up any leadership responsibilities that may be given to them by family or society and 24% said they need to think. 48% had self confidence as capable women in society
- Among the various choices given to empower women 64% chose employment opportunities up to 45 years as very useful strategy and 23% supported this view as useful
- 31.4% regularly read news papers, 40% regularly watch TV news
- 90% of respondents vote and 83% are not influenced by any one in their decision to vote
- The respondents choice between political party, candidate and both of these, while deciding to vote were equally divided.
- 78% supported women's active involvement in politics
- The husbands support to women in dispensing house hold chores like dishwashing, laundry cleaning cooking and teaching was rated very poor by 90% of the respondents
- In matters of family planning and children's education 65% responded that their opinion is duly considered, while in family matters only 3% responded that their opinion is heeded to
- In decisions related to purchase of property, children's marriage family budgeting, furniture, picnic destinations etc more than 50% respondents that their opinion is duly considered in decision making

### **Major Suggestions**

An analysis of the responses of the respondents read together with the observations made in the field reveals that the status of Muslim women in Kerala has become far better than what it was a few decades back. Education in school levels have considerably increased and have become a normal practice to send children to school. In higher education there is a significant absence of Muslim women which tapers down as the level of education goes up. Among those who

complete higher education and professional education even in socially forward southern Kerala the common scenario is the absence of women in the professional front. Educational empowerment is not complementing economic empowerment among Kerala Muslim women. Age of marriage and age to acquire public service jobs becoming limiting factors for women as their responsibilities at family front hinder their professional ambitions. The increasing self confidence among Muslim women, their acceptability of women as equal economic partners, and their acceptance of women's active involvement in politics are promising signs. In order to facilitate empowerment and leadership among Muslim women few suggestions are listed here:

1. Women should be given free education till 12th standard in government schools
2. Appointment in public services should be made open to women up to 45 years of age in state and central governments.
3. There should be policy regulations and promotional measures from government to restart studies even for those above 30 years
4. Financial support without interest should be given to entrepreneurs along with technical and managerial support, and the same has to be genuinely promoted
5. Free modern employment training should be given to women in areas like hardware repair, mechanical works, driving and male dominate areas where skills are well applicable. Restriction of training to tailoring, and ornament making, limits women's mobility in career world.
6. Leadership training to build confidence should be give to girl child from high school so that she is capable of taking up her career even at a later age
7. Monthly unemployment wage for those who complete graduation should be implemented.
8. Reservation for women in political parties and representative bodies will ensure compulsory entry of women which will later diffuse to common man
9. Reservation for women in all carriers not less than 50% will definitely pull women to opt for passionate choices.
10. Free or concession in transportation for women would help increase their mobility and independence.

The status of Muslim women in Kerala is far from empowerment. There is a growing confidence and awareness among them on the importance of female education, economic independence and democracy. Their knowledge inquisitiveness and social involvement are showing positive trends. The respondents' views on polygamy child marriage and reactions to social evils are promising towards empowerment. However, their unemployment economic dependence, restricted mobility and social participation are highly limited. The influence of women organisations are definitely influencing them positively which is further complemented by the social changes in the general world. This study is a humble attempt to present the social economic status of Muslim women in Kerala as of date. The study has been done in a genuine and unbiased manner so that it can act as a starting point for any future comparison. In conclusion, it can be said that Muslim women of Kerala has the potential to progress but it depends on the will power of the policy makers, religious bodies and male counterparts to foster women empowerment.