

CONCLUSION

For centuries Tamil Nadu has had Muslim rule and rulers-yet, with the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, Muslim history and the Muslim contribution is being obscured and downplayed. Against this background, the opportunities for Muslim women to raise their concern over access to education rights, work opportunities, including marriage, divorce and personal freedoms-are severely restricted. This study concludes with an outlook for Muslim women in Tuticorin District and with a set of recommendations and suggestions on some of the priority issues to be addressed. This also locates the political, socio-economic and legal position of Muslim women in Tuticorin District within a historical framework beginning with the evolution of Islam in Tamil Nadu and its subsequent interaction with Hindu society. It emphasizes the complex diversity of women in Muslim communities and the range of factors influencing their status.

As Arabs came and settled in Tuticorin they contracted some sort of marital unions, temporary or permanent with the Indian women. The descendants of these Arab traders and the refugees who had already settled in the region and married Indian women are the Tuticorin Muslims. The members of the new society retained the native culture of their mothers, but had a new religion, that of their Arab fathers.

Consequently, the mixed communities (of Indo-Arab origin) formed in this place adopted the local language and Non-Muslim culture of their mothers

and evolved into district cultural groups. Influence of Hindu culture of these groups was dominant. They were carrying their Arab fathers identity but born to native women. These Muslims were determined to maintain their separate religious identity.

The social organization, manners, customs and practices and religious life of the Muslims of Tuticorin district are dealt with in this thesis.

The Divine Commands as well as the five pillars of Islam are 1. Confession of the Faith (Kalima, that there is no other God but Allah and Muhammed is His Prophet) 2. Five times prayer a day. 3. Fasting for thirty days during the month of Ramalan. 4. Zakath or alms giving. 5. Haj or Pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are capable enough. In Islam the sacred law is one for all. There is no distinction of caste or class. There is no priesthood in Islam. Islamic brotherhood is an institution. The prayer in the mosque is on equal terms without any difference of color creed, rank or social superiority. When Islam stepped into India some of these principles of Islam clashed with Indian culture but the assimilative power of India, particularly that of the quiet Tamil society, fusing the new culture into unity, made Islam a product of assimilation, as it stands today.

The Hadith and the Canon law of the Holy Qur'an are the basic laws governing the Muslim society. Among the people adhering to various sub-sects (of Sunnis) the basic concept and principles are same and there are some minor differences in celebrations, customs and practices.

There is no place for caste or class in Islam. Social incompatibility with regard to either intermarriage or interlining whether due to difference of race or occupation is the essential elements of caste. There are sects and sub sects in Islam. The appellations like Marakkayar, Rawthar, Labbai and Deccani are not castes, but the Muslims of Coromandel region will look as if affected by the caste system (Jathi) as in the Hindu society, but socially all subjects of Muslims are equally ranked. The Tamil speaking Muslims of the Coromandel identity resemble closely with Hindu culture in many respects.

Marriage in Islam is a social contract entered into by the parties of a footing of equality and free consent. Islamic marriage is a simple process. The consent of the bride, a man to give in marriage the girl (usually father of the bride), payment of dowry (Mahr) by the groom to the bride, two witnesses and a Khazi to recite holy verse are essential and with these the solemnization of the marriage can be complete, but very elaborate celebrations and rituals are followed in the marriage of the Tamil Muslims due to the influence of Hindu manners and customs.

The position of women in Islamic society is always made a subject of interesting debate by some people this is also one of the most misunderstood concepts. Islamic law more than any other religious laws, protects the rights of women. A genuine portrayal on the position of women as emphasized in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith their rights, privileges soon and so forth has been given in this thesis. It is a fact that the law of divorce is misused on occasions but such misuse is not universal. A women can also divorce her husband if she

so desires. Polygamy is not an institution of Islam and it is an allowance made to accommodate human needs. Polygamy and divorce are met in low percentage. Veiling or the purdha system is an accepted custom among the women in Islamic society. The origin, practice and scriptural message on the system are outlined in this thesis. In spite of all these laws, the position of the women during the period of study does not seem to be enviable. Except the right of property, other rights and privileges were granted only minimally. They were ignorant and illiterate. But they were trained to read Arabic thereby to read the Holy Qur'an and other religious books. They were also trained to read and write Arabic Tamil (Tamil in Arabic character). This helped them to manage their household accounts. There were even a few women Sufi saints.

The aim of present study was to examine the status and role of Muslim women in Tuticorin District. The specific objectives were to find out the position of women in Islam (text) and in Muslim society (context) with particular reference to their socio - economic roles, gender relations, rights, privileges, restrictions and contributions to society and culture in the context of Tuticorin District. These issues are empirically examined and analyses in the foregoing sections on the basis of data collected from a village of the district. This section recapitulates the main findings of the study and examines their significance in the context of problems and prospects of women in Muslim society in general and Tuticorin district in specific (or) in particular.

Main Findings

The position of Muslim women is difficult to analyze without making reference to the status given to them by their religion, i.e., Islam. The major sources in this regard are the Islamic great traditions manifested through the Holy Books like the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith.

The position of women in Muslim Society is not of uniform pattern. Their position differs from society to society. While reviewing the position of women in cross - cultural perspective it was observed that the status varies from one country to another for various reasons. It differs largely due to differences in political system ranging from religious to secular, conservative to liberal and traditional to modern perspectives. In the contemporary world, the Muslims living in Islamic and other countries are divided into three different categories viz., traditional, transitional and modern.

In the traditional Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia the rights and privileges of women are those which are sanctioned by religion but superimposed by traditional medieval practices, which are in most cases the elements of pre-Islamic past. While modernized Muslim countries like Turkey has recognized the equality of sexes based on liberal outlook but superimposed by western values and practices, but the transitional Muslim countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia etc, are trying to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity thus, giving importance on women's rights as sanctioned in religion and translated into practice through modern codes.

This is mainly attempted through the introduction of reforms in traditional practices owing to demand of the situation. The Muslim women of secular Indian and some other south Asian countries are also passing through a transitional phase so far their rights and privileges are concerned.

It has been observed that different Muslim countries/societies assigned different roles to their women and attached different rights and responsibilities to them. However, the Muslim women irrespective of nationalities and societal affiliations are foraging for a new identity by playing diverse roles, ascribed as well as achieved, owing to the change in contemporary global scenario. This change of identity of women is more marked in modernized countries and less in transitional countries and least in traditional Muslim countries.

Muslim women are discouraged to take up any gainful employment. They are only allowed to do home based works. Only some educated women of middle class families have taken up outside jobs. The economic backwardness of Muslim families in rural and urban India has compelled some Muslim women to earn a livelihood by participating in home based industries belonging to the unorganized sector. Because of their engagement in the unorganized sector most women do not have stable and good income. Education is considered to be the vehicle of social development of contemporary times. Understanding the values of education, Islam has very rightly emphasized the importance of education and knowledge for both men and women. Unfortunately, the Muslims in India do not progress much in the field of modern education, women are discouraged from attending schools outside their

homes. Traditional outlook and poverty are the primary reasons for the apathy of the Muslims towards female education. Muslim girls are made attached much importance to religious, i.e. Madrasa education. Elude in the community make Muslim girls more defecated to Religious Education. i.e., Madrasa Education.

Family is the most important group where women spends maximum time and perform various functions. The traditional joint family structure of the Indian Muslims and the women's role therein have been changing and giving way to the nuclear family structure. In nuclear family structure women enjoy some autonomy but suffer from increasing work load. For poverty, illiteracy and many other associated reasons the fertility rate of Muslim women is high. Frequent conception leads to poor nutrition, feeble health, less mobility and confinement within the home. Attitudinally the Indian Muslim women are in favour of family welfare but the pressing situation does not allow them to adopt the family welfare but the pressing situation does not allow them to adopt the family welfare measures. The veiling and seclusion of women is commonly noticed among the Indian women. However, to Muslim women it has been sanctioned by their religious tradition. Veiling of Muslim women is popularly known as purdah. Purdah is observed by the Muslim women throughout the country, but the practice of purdah varies from place to place and from group to group in the Muslim Society. The groups belonging to higher strata of the Muslim Society practice purdah more strictly as a mark of social /family

honour. Some think that the rigid custom of purdah has affected the development of Muslim women in the country.

Tuticorin District in the state of Tamil Nadu is significantly populated with Muslims. The Kayalpattanam village is not very advanced in the sphere of education. Only 50 percent of village population is literate, which is lower than the national average. Females are educationally backward. Only 43 percent of them are literate. The higher education among women is almost absent. The Illiteracy level is very high particularly among the higher age group women. There are several factors responsible for educational backwardness of the Muslim women. Age of entering the school is a very important factor. Education of parents is also found to be highly related. Most illiterate girls and women have illiterate parents. Women's education is also associated with the economic status of the family. The illiterate girls and women are found to be from poor families.

Marriage is an important social institution and status of women which is very much associated with the several aspects of marriage institution of the Muslim society. Early marriage is quite widespread among the Muslim women. The mean age of marriage of females in the village is 17 years, which is still lower than the desired age of girls marriage i.e., 18 years.

Education and family economy are found to be playing rates at the time of marriage. The higher is the level of education the later is the marriage. Families with low income arrange their daughter's marriage at an early age,

because they feel relieved as soon as their daughters are married. Retaining grown up girls in parent's house invites social criticism. Opinion of girls in fixing the marriage is considered to be very important, but our data reveals that parents continue to be the primary decision makers in fixing the girls marriage. Selecting the life Partner of their choice is almost unacceptable in marriage. Taking approval of a girl in her marriage as per Islamic rule is just a ritualistic one.

Women in this area remain marginalized due to deprivation and poor implementation of government measuring including laws. This society is mostly male dominant: women are found to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to marginalization. Lack of proper religious knowledge and misinterpretation of the Islamic law of Shari'at and Hadith are playing a vital hindrance in empowering women. The Islamic clerics are away from the proper interpretation of rule of shari'at as well as some of them (clerics) divide the society into sectional division resulting in social chaos.

Social evils like early child marriage hinders to the empowerment of women. Excessive birth is one of the major problems for the maintaining good health among the Muslim women. Maintenance of health status is very poor among the rural Muslim women. Communication and transport problem, death of sufficient health centre and lack of primary health training, malnutrition are the causes of not accessing the maternal and other health facilities of women.

Gender inequality and discriminations are highly existing factors among the women mostly in rural areas surrounding Tuticorin district. The access of financial assistance from bank and other government institutions are very low among the Muslim women in Tuticorin. The low participation in politics, public policy and decision making process have led to the marginalization of the women. They cast their votes only but not aware of the philosophy and ideology of the political parties. The accesses of the ICT facilities among the Muslim women are poor.

Considering the above findings if we examine Muslim women's position on the basis of their economic, educational, organizational and personality attributes we may say that they do not have much higher social status, but if we consider their role in family management and retention of culture and heritage we cannot ignore their important social position. In Muslim society men dominate in public and community affairs and continue to play role as the head of the household. While women enjoy greater freedom and stay in family. This public and domestic dichotomy on the basis of gender difference is the reflection of patriarchy in Muslim society.

On one hand, the Muslim women enjoy respectable position in domestic sector and also enjoy some privilege given by their religion. While on the other hand, there is evidence of discrimination. Therefore, the Muslim women provide an anomalous social position. They enjoy some degree of autonomy in the sphere of ascribed role and status, but at the level of achieved role and status they are still in disadvantageous position.

Recommendations

As followers of the Islamic faith, it is the duty of all Muslims to develop a forward looking mentality by accepting the true dynamic spirit of their religion and its value system. They must assess what Islam says about the role and status of women and how the women lead their life in Muslim society.

The problem of Muslim women as like as other women of the country is national problem. Since Muslim women's problem is something unique, so at first, the Muslim should make conscious endeavour to remove the problems of their women and should try to improve the women's position by changing their attitude towards gender role and gender discrimination. The responsibility of awakening Muslims for enhancing women's social position should be shared by government, non-government and community organization.

The most pertinent lesson that emerges from this study is the need of formulation of realistic programmes that can truly meet the real needs of the Muslim women. Programmes to support self employment, education, technical training and empowerment may help Muslim women to improve their livelihood system and social status. If women's influence on decision making of household, community life and policy formation increase, the Muslim society as a whole will move forward. Therefore, the most urgent need is the inclusion of women's voices in policy making for their self development.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made to have a better “Life Style of Muslim Women in Tuticorin District -A Historical Study” and sustainable human development.

I. Economic Dimension

1. Different skill development programs for the women can make empower in economic sectors.
2. Ensure parallel participation of every woman with her male counterpart and financial autonomy.
3. Provide loan or other facilities for women entrepreneurs.
4. More reservation facilities for women in government services.

II. Political Dimension

1. Women should allow to practice their democratic privileges without interfere from their family or other.
2. Women’s right based agendas have to be incorporated in the political process.
3. Information dissemination legal safeguards, rights, support services, health accommodation etc.
4. Free and fair participation in decision making process.

5. Government should take appropriate measures to reduce difficulties in the process of implementation of various schemes related to women empowerment.

III. Social Dimension

1. Need to reduce the violence against the women.
2. Equal importance to the girl child with boy and create the awareness of 1 : 1 sex ratio.
3. Safe and secure Environment for developing the potentialities of women.
4. Adopt the concept of sustainable human development.
5. Need to remove and reduce superstitious belief, religious suppression from the society.

IV. Educational Dimension

1. Head of the families should not discourage their daughter for education.
2. Government should ensure free and compulsory girl's education up to graduation level.
3. Reservation facilities in higher education for backward rural girls.
4. Establishment of more and more educational institutions in remote backward areas for women.

5. Gear up the Women Adult Education program among the rural women.

V. Cultural Dimension

1. No excessive religious burden should be imposed towards the practice of cultural aspects of women.

VI. Health status

1. Ensure proper nutrition for women.
2. Proper execution of government health policy for women.
3. Ensure proper hospitality to the every mother and new born child.

VII. Religious Dimension

1. To impart proper religious knowledge of the Islamic of Shari'at and Hadith.

For empowerment of Muslim women in every society must change their attitude, behavior is positive trend and essential to create congenial environment towards the women and to recognize their rightful place in the decision - making process. Muslim women should have greater autonomy in decision - making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed by prevailing customs, beliefs and practices. They should become active members in development process rather than mere beneficiaries of programs and services. Muslim women must be provided opportunities to

have control over production resources that would lead to better life for their families and their children. Muslim women should organize many women's societies to boost the community. Both the State and Central government have to play a vital role in the process of policy frame and execution. If these are followed, the "Life Style of Muslim Women in Tuticorin District" will have its mark in the history.

The main course of action that will ensure progress and success for the Muslim women's community is to follow in the footsteps of its first generations, to hold fast, with all our strength, to God's book and the Prophet's sayings and practices. It will take courage to scale and ascent that may impede our way towards the activation of the role of the Muslim women as it was practiced during the time of the Prophet and the rightly guided Caliphs. It is to such a goal that the efforts of the Islamic community should be dedicated to attain success in our lives.

As an outcome of my labour, this is an indispensable resource which will prove of great value and as a successful outlook for a Muslim women's success in life. I conclude with this stirring words of Malala Yousafzai, speech at the UN General Assembly on 12th July 2013, "So here I stand, one girl among many. I speak not for myself, but so those without a voice can be heard. Those who have fought for their rights. Their right to live in peace. Their right to be treated with dignity. Their right to equality of opportunity. Their right to be educated...we call upon all communities to be tolerant to reject prejudice based on caste, creed, sect, color, religion or agenda to ensure freedom and

equality for women so they can flourish. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave, to embrace the strength within themselves and realize their full potential.”

By analyzing the overall facts, it may be said that the problem of the Muslim women is very complex, which is more socio-economic rather than religious one. There is no specific reason behind their unequal status and problem. The reasons are electric, as these are historical, situational, cultural and a combination of them.