**National Webinar on Higher Education of Women in Malabar**

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MALABAR AND THE IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Education is a vital measure of human progress and an effective tool for bringing about social and philosophical changes. This paper focuses the educational attainments of Malabar Muslim women in general, and the impact of their political activities on the educational landscape in particular. This article has been designed to go through the history of Malabar Muslim women’s political participation in order to clarify how it influenced on shaping the educational standings in the society and nation. It also highlights some of the misconceptions and fallacies held by Malabar Muslim scholars on women's higher education. The objective of this article is to show how women's political participation has a substantial impact on women's access to higher education. As a result of this study, society will have a better understanding of how women's political participation affects their educational empowerment.

**Key words: Political Activities, Higher Education, Educational Empowerment**

**1 - INTRODUCTION:**

The Islam is a religion which gives prime concern to education. It assures the verse of Quran “Read in the name of your lord”. Every Muslim male or female has the right, but also the responsibility to be educated. Nobody, not a society and certainly not a set of norms, may deny them from being educated. Education and upbringing are the best gifts a father can give to his kids. The government of Kerala also gives prime concern to education.

Political participation is a way of filling complete responsibility towards society. To participate in a political system varies from being head of state, to legislate the assembly, to voting in elections. Likewise, political participation of women, on equal terms with men, from the local to the global level, has been essential for the modern political system. The political status of women in Islam remains one of the most critical problems of national development in the 21st century. Qur’an put absolutely no restrictions on the participation of women in political activities, including the right for the vote, to legislate the assembly and to become head of a state. The Qur’an contains verses that seem to support the role of women in politics, such as its mention of the Queen of Sheba, who represented a ruler who consulted her people and made important decisions on her behalf.

Muslim women in the Malabar region should serve as a model for other Indian women, although comparing with other religions, their status in higher education and political participation is very poor. Although the literacy rate is rising[[1]](#footnote-2), rural and Muslim women's employment and political involvement remain at historically low levels. Muslim women in Malabar are likewise subject to distinct laws than other women.

In terms of education, even if they are well educated, finding a suitable bridegroom within the Muslim community is difficult. In many cases, Muslim women are barred from attending school because of the male-female imbalance can be rectified. Traditional constraints made it difficult for Muslim women to obtain the education in the past, but the scene has changed in recent years. Muslim authorities and organizations in Malabar began to consider the women’s educational backwardness, and many schools were established in Muslim communities. In recent years, as the number of private institutions in the private sector grows fast, Muslim women are expressing an interest in enrolling in various courses.

In the case of political participation, even the improvements in higher education and obligatory reservation in local body elections have resulted in beneficial changes and impacted more on the status of women, comparing with other communities their political participation need improvement.Muslim women’s participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) like Kudumbashree and Janashree is also very low, where only 30.3% of the women had membership in these and only 4.7% were employed[[2]](#footnote-3). Among all religious communities  in India, Muslims have the lowest percentage of working individuals, at around 33%. This is lower than the national average of 40% employment participation[[3]](#footnote-4).

An improvement in the higher education of Malabar Muslim women would directly influence in the socio-economic, educational and political status as citizens of India and the empowerment in the political participation would directly influence in the higher education of Malabar Muslim women accordingly[[4]](#footnote-5). Women's empowerment in higher education and political participation are linked each other. Higher education will assist them to participate in politics, and the political activities would directly influence in the socio-economic, educational and political status of Muslim women in Malabar.

* 1. **- Purpose of the Research:**

The research will trace the answer of following questions.

1. Why Malabar Muslim women being backward in higher study?
2. Why Muslim women were not participating actively in public and professional spaces?
3. How does higher education influence the political participation of women and vice versa?

The research intends to achieve the following objectives.

1. To explain the backwardness of Malabar Muslim women in higher study.
2. To carry out the careful analysis of political participation of Malabar Muslim women.
3. To make a conceptual understanding of political participation of Muslim women in Malabar and its impact on higher education.
   1. **– Scope of the Study:**

By this study, this researcher aims to make an analytical study on political participation and its impact in the higher education of Malabar Muslim women. It is emphatically an unendurable task to take a thematic analytical study on higher education of Muslim women in Kerala. So, higher education of Muslim women in four modern districts of Malabar region–Malappuram, Kannor, Kozikode and Waynad-, has been discussed. A special focus has been given to their political participation and its influence in the empowerment through higher education.

* 1. **– Methodology Of The Study:**

In this study, the researcher collected the data of Muslim women's educational backgrounds and political activities from reliable sources including books, articles, journals and other authentic sources. An explanatory study was conducted to examine how empowerment in political activities influences the higher education of Muslim women in Malabar. The researcher used a survey approach to analyse women's political engagement in four districts from selected local body political institutions, as well as an analytical approach in higher education by examine the selected educational edifices.

* 1. **– Literature Review:**

There are some academic commentaries and analytical researches have done on higher education and political Participation of Muslim women in Malabar. But as far as the researcher is concerned, the studies and the researches apropos on the empowerment in higher education through political participation are very rare and articles found in this regard confine only some particular subjects which are not worth to be referred.

1. **- MUSLIM WOMEN IN MALABAR: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Muslim women in Malabar in terms of social, political, economic, cultural, and other development activities are the most vulnerable groups. It is the social thinking scenario throughout the world, that women were inherently inferior to men and are a weaker group incapable of taking on political responsibilities and have to be blocked from having social responsibilities, taking job and from being highly educated. As a part of this world wide phenomena Muslim women in Malabar also facing many challenges and obstacles from society not from religion.Actually, only the 14.3 percent of all national parliamentarians were women as of February 2019.

Women's empowerment in various fields of development is hindered by patriarchal and feudal structures.  In fact, empowering women from all forms of societal evils has been a more difficult endeavor; they are still showing positive signs of empowerment in numerous domains of growth.Malabar Muslim women also face the feudal and patriarchal setup which restricts their political participation by the society not by religion.

Actually, Malabar Muslim women’s involvement in higher education and political activities needs to be improved. The key issues facing women in both categories are same. There are various obstacles faced by them. They have been kept away from politics and higher education. Lack of education, feudal setup, patriarchy, lack of family support, social biases, inability, lack of awareness are the main obstacles faced by them.

Women's empowerment in higher education and political participation are linked each other. Higher education will assist them to participate in politics, and the political activities would directly influence in the socio-economic, educational and political status of Muslim women in Malabar. An improvement in the higher education of Malabar Muslim women would directly influence in their socio-economic, educational and political status as citizens of India and the empowerment in the political participation would directly influence in their higher education[[5]](#footnote-6).

**2.1-** **Challenges in Higher Education.**

There are various factors which restrain the higher education of Muslim women in Malabar. Also, there are various myths and cultural bindings which restrain their higher education. The main reason behind this is lack of support from society, family, friends and leaders. The patriarchal and feudal culture that has governed society, with its social attitudes and role expectations, has kept women in the home sphere and limited their access to higher education.The lack of accompaniment from the family and friends, the age of marriage, Lack of job opportunities, social and cultural attitudes and the Lack of Freedom are the main stumbling blocks which restring Muslim women in Malabar from being highly educated[[6]](#footnote-7).

**2.1.1- *Lack of Accompaniment***

The lack of accompaniment from the family and friends is the main impediment for Muslim women in Malabar from having highly educated. Because of family pressures, they have been married after turning 18 and before completing their degree, and they have been barred from pursuing higher education. Also the community leaders in Malabar also, they are not supporting women from being highly educated without marriage. Almost of community leaders in Malabar, meanwhile, do not encourage women who are well educated without marriage. The familial impact appeared as a key factor for Muslim women in Malabar for being oppressed in higher education. As a result of the deeply rooted social expectation of their family roles, the Muslim women in Malabar may have internalized a sense of gender neutrality at higher education.[[7]](#footnote-8)

***2.1.2- Social & cultural Attitudes.***

One of the typical barriers for women moving up to higher education is the social and cultural attitudes of Malabar Muslim community. For years women kept oppressed from higher education in Malabar. In fact, this is the scenario of women’s higher education throughout the world. It will take more time to change the social and cultural attitudes of society towards higher education of women. Muslim women in Malabar endure feudal and patriarchal setup that inhibits their empowerment through higher education[[8]](#footnote-9). The most difficult and time-consuming elements to modify are societal and cultural attitudes, as they have an impact on many aspects of life and are difficult to manage. In Malabar, it was assumed that women would have to live as housewives and deal with family matters.

***2.1.3- The age of marriage.***

The age of marriage is also, obvious stumbling block facing Malabar Muslim women In Malabar. The majority of women will be married at 18 and after the marriage they have been blocked from higher education. There are many women has not faced any difficulties as a Muslim girl but as a married girl they faces difficulties in regard to their restrictive husband and his family. The wide spread misconceptions of majority of Muslim mothers is that a women cannot take the job and she has to care out children, also the women wants higher education before marriage will suffer a lot from having married.

**2.1.3- *Lack of Freedom and job opportunities***

Lack of job opportunities is another problem facing Malabar Muslim women in higher education. The reason is clear; the lack of support from the community and family admonishes them from having job, this lead to the backwardness of women in higher education. In Muslim society women are required to obtain permission of father, husband, or other male guardian, Freedom key demand whether in the family or in the workplace or in the higher education.

**2.2 – Challenges in Political Participation**

There are various factors which restrain the political participation of Muslim women in Malabar. Also, there are various myths and cultural bindings which restrain them from getting job and having the social worker. In this context, many Muslim women who are ready to participate in politics are always threatened by plenty of factors, were only few are successful in changing as political leaders. Most of the Muslim women are underrepresented in politics even if they win elections (whether it may be parliament or local body elections). Muslim women also face the feudal and patriarchal setup which restricts their political participation as dreams. There are various obstacles faced by Muslim women in Malabar, in which they have been kept away from politics lack of education, feudal setup, patriarchy, lack of family support, social biases, inability and lack of awareness are the main challenges that a Muslim woman in Malabar has to face[[9]](#footnote-10).

***2.2.1- Lack of support.***

As of political participation, Muslim women lack their support from family members, community, political party and others. Muslim women in Malabar are underrepresented in political activities excepting the reserved seats in local body elections. The main reason is that, they did not receive adequate assistance from society and their families. Women were treated to be inherently inferior to men as a natural phenomenon. Not just in Malabar, but all around the world. Family upbringing for men and women often involved determining the effectiveness of women to occupy leadership positions and in the participation in decision-making. In an analytical study contacted by Dr. B.E. George Dimitrov and Mrs. Noblelyne Nongkynrih, out of the 200 respondents, 93(46.5 percent) respondents do not have the support from the community, 65(32.5 percent) respondents do not have the support from family members and 42 (21percent) respondents do not have the support from the political party[[10]](#footnote-11).

***2.2.2 - Restrictions from society***

*Societal factored are the most difficult and time-taking factors to change as they have an effect on various dimensions of life and cannot be easily controlled.* Even the families encouraged them join in political activities, society and its cultures did not. These restrictions from the society obstructed them for years. Muslim women in Malabar are required to follow particular cultural traditions imposed by the society. Various factors in society attitude influence women leaders in their leadership journey which are: gender-role stereotypes, negative view of women as leaders, lack of confidence from others and lack of freedom[[11]](#footnote-12).

***2.2.3- Norms and cultures***

It was considered a natural phenomenon that women were inherently inferior to man and must be treated as a property of husband. For centuries women kept oppressed only because of norms and cultures. Historically women dominated by men or women became self introverted. There are so many social and political influences they attributed to lagging women far behind. It is a universal truth. But they have to overcome this backwardness throughout education and reformations.

***2.2.4 - The age of marriage***

The age of marriage is another obstacle facing Malabar Muslim women. In Malabar, the majority of women will be married at 18 and after the marriage because of the changing home land they become less able to participate in political activities. There are many women has not faced any difficulties as a Muslim girl but as a married girl they faces difficulties in regard to their restrictive husband and his family.

***2.2.5 - Lack of Freedom***

In Muslim society women are required to obtain permission of father, husband, or other male guardian. Freedom key, demand whether in the family or in the workplace or in the higher education. There is two types of lack of freedoms that they faced in their live. The first type is the lack of family freedom in the sense that leadership position needs to participate in a lot of activities and sometimes do not get permission from family. Another type is the lack of freedom from community.

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THE IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

Women's empowerment in higher education and political participation are linked each other. Higher education will assist them to participate in politics, and the political activities would directly influence in the socio-economic, educational and political status of Muslim women in Malabar. An improvement in the higher education of Malabar Muslim women would directly influence in their socio-economic, educational and political status as citizens of India and the empowerment in the political participation would directly influence in their higher education.[[12]](#footnote-13)

The goal of this study is to provide insight into the overall developments in the relationship between education and political participation. It has hosted a number of appropriate studies aimed at determining the causal effect of education on political engagement and the influence of political activities on higher education. The relationship between education and political engagement is still a strongly discussed topic among academics, raising several research questions that are still to be answered. Research into the relationship between education and political participation yields seemingly interchanging results.[[13]](#footnote-14)

As of Malabar Muslim women, the figure 1 shows the influence of higher education on political participation and impact of empowerment in political participation on higher education

**3.1-** **how does higher education impact on political participation?**

The way higher education can initiate social and political activities is very clear, study, research, and service to society through political institutions. Higher educational institutions are also playing an important role in making better political and social leaders as the history of political leaders clarifies that. The majority of political leaders of Malabar region is highly educated and can solve educational backwardness of community[[14]](#footnote-15).

**3.2-** **how does political participation impact on higher education?**

The way in which the political participation of Muslim women in Malabar directly influences the higher education is also very clear the social and political representatives from women can understand the weakness of women in higher education and they will try to help them to solve these problems.

**UPCOMING REFORMATIONS**

Muslim reformers' early socio-religious reforms, initiatives, and foundations for modern education in Malabar resulted in significant improvements in Muslim women's socio-political and educational standing. The vast network of educational and political activities that Muslim community leaders have established across the Malabar, lead them to be the role model for the rest of India. They began to educate women who had been not part of education, by focusing on modern education, these reformers revitalised religious education. [[15]](#footnote-16). Their goal was to integrate the Muslim community's superstitions and inadequacies into the framework of the Holy Qur'an and Hadith.

**4.1-** **In Higher Education.**

In fact, the social status and educational level of Muslim women in the Malabar region should serve as an example for the rest of India, despite the fact that it has to be changed more. Muslim women  in Malabar attained the highest credentials and signs in academic perspective and higher education as a result of initiatives  and commencements taken by Muslim reformers for modern education. Since the campuses in Kerala have increased participation of women were increased in many parts of the world today[[16]](#footnote-17).

The fact is that Muslim women increasingly attracted to education and parents provided support to them. Today they are going to attain new types of educational renaissance. The impact of the renaissance, movements, leaders and institutions has been influenced by a high range. Empowerment through education has been influential in all spheres and has distinguished them from the past. In recent years, many institutions and colleges lead by Muslim community leaders have changed a lot in the perspective of higher education[[17]](#footnote-18).

As the number of private institutions in the private sector grows fast, Muslim women are expressing an interest in enrolling in various courses. In past, education was not an easy task for Muslim women due to traditional restrictions but the scene has reverted in present days.

**4.1-** **In Political Participation**

The socio-economic and political status of Muslim women in Malabar during the last decades has faced excessive changes. They began to participate in politics and space in the public sphere. Number of Muslim women candidates participated in the elections to local self-government bodies has increased and many of them were elected. The Indian Union Muslim League, the major political party of Malabar from Muslim perspective, has started to make participation of women candidates as of the recent assembly election held on April 2021[[18]](#footnote-19) and created a women wing called as ‘vanitha league’[[19]](#footnote-20) **.**

A wide range of factors have influenced Muslim women in Malabar as a result of the Renaissance, movements, leaders, and institutions.. Empowerment through political participation has had an impact on all domains and has set them apart from previous generations’*.[[20]](#footnote-21).*

**CONLUSION**

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