



Employment, Economic Independence and Autonomy Among Muslim Women

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing conscious about the gender equality all over the world especially after Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. Further, in reality, Islam allows equal rights in all aspects of life to both women and men. Still due to misinterpretation of traditional societies, Muslim women are not gained equal rights and privileges in society compared to other religions. Due to the impact of globalization, Muslim women are also getting education and participating in employment, especially in organized sector. As such, Muslim women are also getting equal participation in economic independence, but still they have less participation in family decision making on their own. The present paper described the status of Muslim women in employment, economic independence and autonomy among Muslim women.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction:

Women in Muslim societies and communities face gender-based inequalities associated with the so-called "patriarchal gender system." Aspects of this originally pre-capitalist system persist in rural areas across a wide swath of lands, both Muslim and non-Muslim, from East Asia to North Africa. The system, regardless of religion, features kin-based extended families, male domination, early marriage (and consequent high fertility), restrictive codes of female behavior, the linkage of family honour with female virtue, and occasionally, polygamous family structure. In Muslim areas, veiling and sex-segregation form part of the gender system.

Islamic family law, which addresses marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, has long been a target for reform. Many state elites have pressed for family law reform to further state interests by removing hindrances to women's full participation in the labor force and politics. The levels of Muslim women's participation in the paid labor force are best explained by a particular economy's development strategy and consequent need for female labor, rather than by, for example, religious ideology or cultural beliefs in male breadwinner/female-homemaker roles.

Globalization increased economic and job insecurity and thus the need for more than one breadwinner in a family. At the same time, in many national economies, globalization has reduced the proportion of formal sector employment, which was in any case out of reach for many Muslim women. Globalization also has prompted the withdrawal of the state from service provision, thereby increasing women's family burdens. The effect of globalization on Muslim women thus often has been increased hardship. At the same time, many women have reported an enhanced sense of empowerment as a result of their enlarged public role and earnings.

Islam has given men and women equal rights in every aspect of life and has also given them equality in the idea of creation of human beings (Engineer 1992), however; unfortunately, traditional societies could not apply its principles correctly. These societies, with erroneous interpretations have given men superiorities in every field, especially in the economic, social and political situations. Moreover, in a society or family that is dominated by men, men are considered to be the main decision-makers in the family structure. Women's role and their freedom depend mainly on men. In such a society, men decide upon women's education, their work outside home, their property rights, and so on. In other words, women's individual autonomy is limited. therefore, the majority of Muslim women have been pushed into seclusion and segregation, and it [Islam] restricts individual autonomy of Muslim women and girls (Sarikhani, 2012). Many of the studies disclose that Muslim women, like other women, are not homogeneous rather they are differentiated along the fault-lines of community,

class, caste and region. Their lives are similarly positioned at the crossroads of family, gender and community within the dynamic context of Indian society, economy and polity (Hasan and Menon, 2004).

Statistical studies on Muslim Women reiterate that the majority are among the most disadvantaged, economically impoverished and politically marginalized sections of Indian society today. These studies suggest that like other women, Muslim women too are not homogeneous, and are differentiated along the vitiated lines of class, caste, community and religion.

As stated by Fauzia Islam, et al (2014), work participation rates for Muslim women is much lower than even that for Women belonging to upper-caste Hindu households, where there may be socio-cultural constraints to women's work. Overall about 44 percent of women in the prime age group of 15-64 years in India participate in the workforce while about 85 percent of men do so. However, on an average the workforce participation rate among Muslim Women is only about 25 percent. In rural areas, while about 70 percent of the Hindu Women participate in the work force while only about 29 percent of the Muslim Women do so.

Muslim women have the smallest amount of work participation rate (WPR) with a huge gap between the WPRs for Muslim women and Hindu women or Christian women among all three categories of work. Muslim women in self-employed are 60% and the employment rate as regular workers in urban areas are 15.7 % for Muslim women as compared to 27.7 % for Hindu women and 51.5 % for Christian women and in rural regions there is also a more or less similar employment status for Hindu and Muslim women comprising 3.6 % and 3 % respectively. These statistics underline the marginal presence of Muslim women in salaried jobs. Muslim women's marginal presence as workers in the formal economy is pointed out through their high self-employment rates and the following low involvement in salaried job indicating their invisibility as informal employees. Again it is very difficult to pinpoint specific roots behind their skimpy employment position owing to lack of existing research and analysis in the sphere of employment of Muslim women while their educational status most apparently exercise a noteworthy pressure in both urban and rural areas on the type and ranks of their employment (Kazi, 1999).

Of course, modernization and development of Muslim communities, especially in India have brought about several changes in the status of Muslim women, but they are not sufficient. Observations have indicated that working women who have taken a job outside their home, their autonomy in the family structure were low and they are deprived of more social activities.

Though participating in employment, excessive dependence on men

has deprived them of enjoying many privileges like extending and continuing higher education, taking jobs, developing self-identity, etc. Meanwhile, the involvement of Muslim women in the decision-making process is seen to be minimal (Azim 1997). Sharma (2002) says that the greatest problems discerned by the Muslim women are that women lack proper knowledge of their faith, and that this is why Muslim men sometimes mistreat their women.

Conclusion:

From the published literature and surveyed conducted, it is revealed that, Muslim women are increasingly participating in education and employment in twenty-first century. As a result, their status is also higher in society. Even to a greater extent, they are getting autonomy and economic independence, but their participation in family decision making is lesser. Hence, it is suggested to empower Muslim women by increasing their awareness in family decision making and also increase awareness among Muslims about the gender equality in society.

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