Summary and Conclusion

**Introduction:** The foregoing analysis of gender inequality among Muslims is of an exploratory nature. In many societies around the world women are treated unequally. Comparatively less value is placed on their lives because of their gender. In developing countries poverty, lack of awareness and patriarchy system etc. strengthen their lower status. In these countries the status of women must be analyzed with in the framework of poverty, patriarchy and social disability. These factors are much more significant than religion in determining the status of Muslim women.

Even today in most of the societies, Muslim women continue to be victims of traditional social structure of the community. This is especially evident from the limited participation of women in economic and political spheres. Marriage codes and customs are uniformly unfavourable and discriminatory against women. Moreover the social customs and practices have been designed to ensure the spread of education among the Muslim females. The main objectives of this study is to explore factors affecting gender inequality in the status of women in Mashhad of Iran and Bangalore in India, particularly their position and role in the family regarding decision-making etc.

**Summary**

While reviewing the status of Muslim women in a cross-cultural perspective it has been observed that their status varied from one country to another. It differs largely due to the difference in the type of political system ranging from traditional to modern, liberal to conservative and religious to secular. The concepts of gender inequality and status of women are closely related to each other. The status of an individual cannot be understood
without understanding the role played by the individual. Operationally the status of women implies the conjunctions of rights and duties as reflected in their roles. Status of women also means a set of expectations regarding the attributes pertaining to the duties and responsibilities of women in various roles.

For the present study a set of indicators have been used to ascertain the role of women and their rights and responsibilities in different fields of life such as economy, education, marriage, and family and women empowerment. To highlight these dimensions the present study has collected primary data both from women and men in two cities viz. Mashhad in Iran, an Islamic country and Bangalore in India, a secular country.

**Education**

In any society education is the most effective vehicle for socializing its members both male and female. Education imparts values, moulds aspirations and inculcates skills and also encourages and facilitates performance of both familial and non-familial roles. In this context education of women is more important and meaningful as greater exposure of women to education generally results in an increased sharing of authority in the family, more employment opportunities, greater participation in social activities, so on and so forth.

Understanding the values of education Islam has very rightly emphasized its importance for both men and women. The Prophet preached that to be engaged in the quest for knowledge is more meritorious than attending the funerals of martyrs. After the Prophet, the Muslim rulers greatly emphasized the importance of education by opening new educational institutions and facilitating scientific researches.
But unlike Muslims in Iran, the Muslims of India did not progress much in terms of modern education. Women were especially discouraged from attending schools outside their immediate neighbourhood. Traditional outlook and poverty were the primary reasons for the apathy of Indian Muslims towards female education. The present study has attempted to explore the reasons for educational backwardness of Muslim women in India.

Literacy rate of Muslim women in India is just 40%. Few Muslim children go daily to school. About 60% drop out before completion of schooling. Out of the total number of children who have completed schooling only 9.4% are Muslims. Very few Muslims go to the university and only 4% graduate. Only 1% of the Indian graduates are Muslim females (Zoya Hassan, Ritu Menon, 2002). From the data it is observed that a number of factors are responsible for the educational backwardness of Muslim women.

Data and observation show that education among Muslim women in Bangalore is less than among women in Mashhad on account of poverty, and attitude of the community that manifests itself in language problems and co-education and various other ways. Lack of education among Muslim women is partially due to language problems that the Muslims face in Bangalore. Most of the Muslims speak Urdu and till secondary they go to Urdu schools. Girls do not have chances like boys to step out of the house or the neighbourhood. They have more problems if they want to continue their study after secondary examination in a distant school or college.

The existence of discrimination in educating boys and girls is also a social reality among the Muslims. The Muslim community by and large is not inclined to educate a girl as much as a boy, because Muslims have a utilitarian approach to education. Education is an investment. Investment on the education of a son yields much more than an investment on the education of a daughter. Daughters are considered “property” of others. The discrimination
is very glaring especially in respect of higher and professional studies. Most women prefer professional and higher education for sons. Although this approach is linked to the education of parents and the income of the family, people who belong to middle and upper class tend to give almost equal attention for the education of boys as well as girls.

Age of entering the school is an important factor. It was found that only those women continued higher education that entered school early. Education of respondent’s parents was also related. Most of the illiterate respondents have at least one parent who is illiterate. Education of women is also closely linked to the economic status of the family. A very high percentage of illiterate respondents belong to families of low economic status. Most of the educated women came from moderate or high-income families. Besides poor economy, other factors responsible for educational backwardness of Muslim women are: early marriage of girls, social opposition to sending girls to schools for higher education, purdah, non-availability of girl’s schools and preoccupation of girls with domestic chores, educational backwardness among Muslim women of the parental generation. The study finds that women with higher education believe education helps in better employment prospect and standard of living.

There are many reasons for the improvement of female education in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In 1990 the high Council of the Cultural Revolution also set up the women’s Social and Cultural Council, charged with studying the legal, social and economic problems of women especially education barriers. Developing programs after war focused on expand the education facilities and they spend a lot investment just for improve the education systems like schools, collages and universities even in rural areas.
Thus after 1979, as per the new dress code that was enforced, *hejab* became compulsory for women and most of the families felt that their daughters are well secure in educational premises. Co-education was abolished and educational institutions became separate. All these steps gained the confidence of the parents of girls and they began sending their daughters to schools and colleges. Moreover all the pre-collage teachers appointed since then are females.

**Family and women**

The human child, as a mammal and a primate, is totally dependent for its survival on its mother for the first few years of its life. The nursing mother, on her part, is incapable of looking after herself. Thus the very survival of the human species makes the existence of family organisation compulsory. For women family is the most important primary group. They not only spend most of their time in the family but also perform various functions and achieve motherhood. Like for any other women, family is also very important for Muslim women because they spend most of their time there. Women are mainly engaged in housekeeping jobs like cooking, washing, cleaning, etc. In matters like economic investments, family budgets, children’s higher education, etc., the male members of the family generally take decisions. Women are consulted only on petty things. Their role as decision-makers on important issues is insignificant. Only educated and employed women can influence some decisions. Therefore, the study collected information with regard to the type of family the respondent lives in, respondents’ relation with the husband, adoption of family planning and observance of *purdah*.

It has been observed from the present data that most of the respondents belong to nuclear family. It is therefore obvious that the joint family norm is giving way to nuclear family. In this type of family women can exercise a greater amount of autonomy. While analyzing the data on husband-wife relations, it was found that the relations were generally cordial. Nevertheless,
non-cordial relations also occur and nearly one-fifth of the women reported these. The strained relations of women with their husbands lead us to conclude that nuclear family may give greater autonomy but it can invite the greater risk of strained relations. The data also revealed that illiterate women are experiencing more non-cordial relations with their husbands. Interestingly, none has reported that illiteracy is the reason for bad relations with husband either from Iran or India. They specified poverty, polygamy, adultery, etc, as the reasons for strained relations.

**Health care and family planning**

Health care and family planning are two other criteria that can be used to measure the status of women anywhere. Average family size in Bangalore is more than in Mashhad due to poverty and lack of education. Most of the women of Iran today are likely to use temporary methods to prevent unwanted pregnancy. But in Bangalore most of the fecund ladies do not use temporary methods as their husbands do not approve of these. And the other hand ulamas agree that surgical methods like sterilization to permanently end fertility are forbidden by Islam.

As the case studies show after a number of children are born recourse is compulsorily taken to sterilization. But by then, generally, the family size has gone beyond the economic capability of the father and the health of the mother has been ruined by repeated pregnancy. To support the family the eldest child if it is a boy has to start earning and if it is a girl has to help the mother in household activities especially looking after the new born and the younger ones. Anyway, in both the cases, any further education is stopped. There is awareness about contraceptive methods among women in Bangalore as well as in Mashhad but only knowledge is not enough for using these methods.
Data have revealed that adoption of family planning is more in Mashhad than in Bangalore. However, attitudinally, Muslim women are highly favourable to the adoption of family planning methods. Those who have not adopted family planning mentioned that family planning is harmful for health; husband is against it; waiting for a son; etc. In Mashhad in particular the uses of temporary methods of family planning have become very popular resulting in the number of children being reduced to 2 or 3. In India on the other hand terminal methods seem to be more favourable because women take the initiative to use these methods only as a last resort and mostly under medical advice. However, it has also been observed from the data on women’s attitude to ideal family size that Muslim women are in favour of small family size. Perhaps the younger generation will shun the traditional beliefs and adopt small family norm.

**Employment**

Women all along have been a crucial part of the economy of any society. They constitute about half the population and nearly one-third of the labour force available to any society. They have also been the largest contributors to the survival of the family, particularly in non-measurable economic and non-economic ways. As in India the Muslims constitute the backward section their women are among the poorest sections of Indian society.

Being a good wife, good mother and a good organiser of the household well are the primary responsibilities of women both in Iran and India. They can not ignore these important duties and take up other paid jobs. After marriage they are expected to obey their husbands and focus all their attention on the family. This training comes from their tradition and religion.

Data pertaining to Bangalore shows very few Muslim women of Bangalore are working outside. Only women who belong to poor family are
engaged in petty services or home-based jobs. Most of Muslim women in Bangalore are housewives, even those who have high background and come from high-class families. However in Iran the position of women is somewhat different. But as in many other aspects, gender based division of labour is rampant here. While lack of income is the simplest way of measuring poverty, it also means lack of access to basic services, lack of opportunities, social and cultural subordination, and exclusion.

Usually families do not allow their women to work and earn because working outside the home by women indicates the un-ability of the men to meet the requirements of the household. It lowers the status of the men as well as their families in the eye of the community. Moreover it is thought by some people bolstered by the ulamas that religion forbids women to participate in labour market. Spread of modern education among Muslim men and women is establishing the futility of these archaic values, which forbid women to be employed.

Interestingly data revealed that males are positive about female employment. The data on ‘Women’s employment raises their status’, as perceived by respondents are also worth noting. There is an overwhelming belief that employment of women not only enhances their status in the family but also outside the family. It also enhances the status of the family. In support of this, the opinion of working women is also quite relevant. Nearly, half of the working women opined that their status has risen because of employment.

But observation and case studies show, that men as husbands, fathers or managers create barriers for women when they want to appear in the society as an employee or when they want to contribute in socio-economic activities. In mixed areas like work places women have to come in contact with men. The husbands or fathers, as the case may be, claim there is not
enough security for their wives or daughters in these places. Thus most of the women still work in girls’ school as teachers.

**Property ownership**

Property ownership is supposed to be an important indicator for determining the status of women. Islam has recognised property rights of women from the very early times. Our data show half of our respondents possess property in some form or other. But very few women have substantive income out of it. Whatever income is generated it is taken away by the male members of the family.

Questions were asked to women regarding getting property or assets through inheritance. Majority mentioned that they did not get any property from their ancestors. Only few said that they got house from their parents as their husbands did have house to live. However, most of the women reported that they got jewellery at the time of their marriage.

**Pattern of marriage**

Marriage is possibly the most important event in a woman’s life. Through marriage she not only enters into a new family but also assumes new roles as wife and mother as well as mother-in-law in due course. Islam has recognised marriage as one of the most important and sacred social institutions and made marriage incumbent on every Muslim. Marriage in Islam is known as *nikah*. Muslim marriage is considered as contractual and not sacramental. However, it is more appropriate to call a Muslim marriage as both contractual and sacramental. Islam has put certain restrictions on marriage relating to the number of wives a Muslim man can keep. There are also restrictions regarding relations with whom marriage should not take place.
Married Muslim women are even economically highly dependent on men in both Mashhad and Bangalore. Mostly they do not feel secure in their jobs and the earnings are spent through their husbands. Moreover their employment does not give them much freedom. Women enter into family life through marriages and assume a new role.

It has been observed from the data that early marriage is widespread among Muslim women. The mean age of marriage of women today is less in Bangalore than in Mashhad. Education has influenced the age at marriage in Mashhad to a great extent. The higher is the level of education the higher is the age at marriage. Family income is also related to the age of marriage. Families with low incomes marry their daughters early. Because these families feel that they will be relieved as soon as their daughters are married and their burden will be reduced. Lower age at marriage is also found more among the older generation. Because, keeping grown-up girls at fathers’ house was disapproved and invited social criticism.

The process through which the marriage of a girl is settled is also worth noting especially from the view-point of the relative roles of parent’s opinions and the opinion of girls in fixing the marriage. So far as the role of parents is concerned the data suggest that parents continue to be the primary decision-makers in settling marriages. Few marriages are settled by girls on their own although education has influenced their ability to choose their husband and at least interfere in their families’ decision.

Giving dowry in marriages is very common in India. Data reveal that in majority of marriages the parents of the girls gave dowry. Girls, whose parents were not able to arrange for dowry, remain unmarried. Amount of dowry matters a lot in getting suitable match. Dowry is transacted mainly in the form of cash or kind or both. It has been observed that dowry in the form of cash is operative more among educated females than uneducated ones thus
disproving the belief that spread of education will eliminate the evils of dowry.

Islamic system of divorce is the most controversial issue both in India and in Iran. It is controversial because on the one hand the protagonists of the Shariat do not want any change in the system laid down in the sacred texts; on the other hand, the secular forces of the society, irrespective of their religion and sex, want to bring about changes in the existing practice based on rational principles. In Muslim society, the traditional forces are still dominant. Data reveal that present system of divorce is still acceptable to a large percentage of Muslim women. The basis for this acceptance emanates mainly from the faith in religion. In practice women may not opt for second marriages. Circumstances like untimely death of husband may force women to go for second marriages. Some times women may become victims of poverty. It is indicated that as the economic condition of people improves number polygamous marriages increase. Men in Bangalore city as well in Mashhad belonging to higher income group have married more than once.

**Empowerment of Muslim women**

Empowerment process is difficult to measure quantitatively. Various authors have used education, work participation, and exposure to mass media as means by which women are expected to develop decision-making ability, greater freedom of movement, autonomy, and attitudinal changes in favour of gender equality, as indicators to measure empowerment. Education is an essential foundation for all social, economic and cultural development (Sen, 1994). It enhances the human capital and economic prospects of a country (UNFPA, 2005). Salary or cash earnings, autonomy or control over earnings, participation in decision making, women’s freedom of movements, attitude towards wife beating were factors used to measure empowerment of Muslim women in both cities.
Data and observation show that women do not have enough authority in family and they can only decide about petty things like daily purchases. Freedom of movement outside the home is an important aspect of women’s autonomy and empowerment. This is particularly true among Muslims because they are practicing patriarchy with a long tradition of purdah system. Thus although almost all women are allowed to go to the market alone but observation showed just educated and employed women have freedom to go outside the home easier. For many reasons they must ask permission from the husband or other relatives. It is true for women in both cities.

Violence against wife by their husbands is a common feature among Muslims in both the countries. Women who believe that the control of husbands over their wives can be enforced only through the use of physical force, may be considered as less empowered than Muslim women who think otherwise. Data shows that although men and women of Mashhad and Bangalore disagree about the justification for beating the wife there is a general agreement among men regarding reasons for beating of wife with which women folk disagree. From the case studies it is observed that violence exists in families in both Mashhad and Bangalore. Although violence against wife is more prevalent in families that lack educational and socio-economic status it is present in all strata of the society.

Dress code of Muslim women

Burqa has become a part of the dress code for Muslim women in India. Today burqa helps to identify Muslim women in India. It separates them from other communities although the pardah makes it difficult for Muslim girls to go to colleges or take up many jobs. Interestingly, old women were not strict to wear pardah but it is now becoming common in younger women in India. Sometimes hejab helps girls to going out of home easily, because family believes they have more safety in society when they wear pardah. But Iran is
an Islamic country and women can not decide about their dress code. The dress code for women has been determined for them by government in Iran.

Conclusion

In view of the data summarized above we may conclude that the position of Muslim women in Mashhad and in Bangalore is not very satisfactory. Economically Muslim women are highly dependent on men. Women are not allowed for the most part to take up jobs. The employed women are not in sound jobs. Most of them are engaged in petty services or home-based jobs. Besides, their employment does not give them much freedom. They are rather subjected to economic exploitation because Muslim women are found earning out of sheer necessity rather than for improving their standard of living or social status. After examining several factors for educational backwardness it was found that poverty is the most important reason for a Muslim women’s illiteracy.

Family is very important for Muslim women like any other women because they spend most of their time there. Women are mainly engaged in housekeeping jobs like cooking, washing, cleaning, etc. In matters like economic investments, family budgets, children’s higher education, etc., decisions are generally taken by the male members in the family. Women are consulted on petty things. Their role as decision-makers is insignificant. Only educated and employed women can influence some decisions.

We observe at the end of our analysis that the problem of the status of Muslim women in Bangalore and in Mashhad is a very complex one. The problem is complex because the solution is a problem and because the reasons of the problems are too nebulous. It is nebulous because there are no clear-cut reasons which can be attributed to the cause of the problem of Muslim women. More studies by other researchers perhaps will explore the problem further.