ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Gender inequality leads to the departure from equality in the representation of both genders in key dimensions of social life (Young et al, 1994). In the present study, it will be conceived of as a system that justifies, supports and perpetuates the domination of women by men in various areas of life. The most important conceptual point is that gender inequality is grounded in and maintained by patriarchal structures and ideologies (Stacey, 1997).

Attitudes, beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women are often deeply entrenched, and closely associated with cultural, social and religious norms. Thus surveys conducted through opinion polls and case studies provide a good indication of the prevalence of gender inequality in many countries (Dervis and Kamel, 1998).

Position of women in Islamic society is simplistic and is based on a historical approach. The importance accorded to texts in Islam, by contemporary Islamic movements, revolves around interpretations of statements on women's spiritual and, more particularly, social roles. Moreover, questions of sexual morality, marriage and family life, divorce, custody, inheritance have a prominent place in the texts. Muslim feminists have played a significant role in these debates, often attempting to give an egalitarian interpretation of the texts, as well as showing the prominent role of women in early Islam (Mernissi, 1991).

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.
**Statement of problem:**

Islam is often praised for its historical role of liberating women. But today, among the scholars and analysts of Islamic societies, gender equality or the lack of it is a controversial issue. Debate on this issue has become highly acrimonious and is often not placed in its proper context (Abukhalil, 1993).

The problem is attitudinal and based on beliefs and values and legal doctrines concerned with the prevalence in Islamic societies of patriarchal values, learned through the socialization from childhood (Ahmed, 1992).

The present thesis aims to study the effects of gender inequality on the status of women in Iran and India. Iran was adjacent to the Arabian desert where Islam was born in the 6th century and it spread to India when the traders started their mercantile ventures in India through the Arabian Sea or were conquered by invading armies from the North-West. Today, however, due to socio-political and economic reasons the conditions of the people of these two countries in general and that of the women in particular are different. The study tried to find out reasons behind this difference.

The main focus of this study is to understand gender inequality among Muslims and its effects on the status of women in Iran and India. For this purpose a set of sample is drawn from Mashhad of Iran, an Islamic country and another from Bangalore in India – a metropolis in a secular country. The specific objectives are as follows:

(i) To study and analyze gender inequality existing in Iranian society in general and Muslims of India in particular.

(ii) To understand how gender inequality affects women’s role in the family regarding decision-making.

(iii) To examine how gender inequality affects health conditions of women in both the countries.

(iv) To highlight how gender inequality affects women’s education especially higher education and job opportunity in the society.
Research Methodology

The present study has been conducted in Bangalore of Karnataka State in India and Mashhad in Iran.

Bangalore City-a brief account: British made Bangalore a part of the then princely state of Mysore, which Krishnaraja Wodeyar III got from them in 1799. The former Bangalore district created in 1863, was until then a part of the Bangalore Faujdari in which Kolar district was also included by the Mysore administration in 1799. The area continued under Mysore until Independence. The British took Bangalore Cantonment area in 1809 and it was under their direct rule until 1947. Bangalore district became part of Karnataka State when it was formed in 1956.

Being the capital of the Karnataka State, Bangalore City is the chief administrative centre and has a number of state and divisional level government offices associated with the legislative, executive and judiciary wings of administration. A heavy concentration of state as well as central government employees is characteristic feature of Bangalore. Bangalore City is the headquarters of both Bangalore rural and Bangalore Urban districts. Many manufacturing units are also located in and around.

Mashhad City-a brief account: Mashhad is the second largest city in Iran and one of the holiest cities in Iran. It is located 850 kilometers (500 miles) east of Tehran, at the center of the Razavi Khorasan Province close to the borders of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. The total population of Mashhad was 2,427,316 persons (1,223,840 male 1,203,476 female) in 2006. It is located 36.20º north latitude and 59.35º east longitude, in the valley of Kashaf River near Turkmenistan, between the mountain ranges of Binalood and Hezar-masjed. The city benefits from the proximity of the mountains, having very cold winters, pleasant springs, mild summers, and beautiful autumns. Mashhad is considered as one of the prime pilgrim’s centers in Iran and over 20 million pilgrims visit the city every year.

The universe of the present study consists of married women of more than 15 years of age and married men of more than 25 years of age working and living in Bangalore and Mashhad.
Bangalore has 100 wards with Muslims living in all. Two wards were selected for this study, one with a high percentage of Muslims and another with a low percentage of Muslims. According to the data available from Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP, 2008) Shivajinagar has a high concentration of Muslims and Malleswaram has a low concentration of Muslims.

Similarly, in Mashhad town there are 13 wards. Of these wards two wards viz Dr. Beheshtee and Ghasemabad have been selected. These areas in Mashhad were selected because the areas were mixed with people who belong to different classes.

It was decided to interview 100 men and 100 women of both wards of Bangalore and Mashhad. Muslim households were selected using simple random technique from each area. The total number of people interviewed in Bangalore was 104 women and 106 men. The sample women were 109 and men were 103 in Mashhad town. In all, 213 women and 209 men were interviewed in both the cities.

In addition to collecting data from the women and men through structured interviews some detailed information was also collected through 15 case studies each from Bangalore and Mashhad. Focus group discussions were also held separately with men and women to elicit more reliable information and also cross check the information collected through questionnaires. In all, 8 each Focus Group Discussions were held in Bangalore and Mashhad.

Conclusion

In view of the data summarized, 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. 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.

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 which can be attributed to the cause of the problem of Muslim women. More studies by other researchers perhaps will explore the problem further.