INTRODUCTION

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is the departure from parity in the representation of women and men in key dimensions of social life (Young et al., 1994). Although there is no consensus concerning the key dimensions of gender inequality, most scholars agree that it is a multidimensional concept composed by several spheres: economic, educational, political, legal, health and family systems (Dijkstra, 2002, Harvey et al., 1990). For present purposes, gender inequality can be conceived of as a system that justifies and perpetuates the domination of women by men in all areas of private and public life (Stacey, 1997). This structural system of domination has existed throughout history and has been labeled patriarchy (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, Segal, 1993). The most important conceptual point is that gender inequality is grounded in and is maintained by patriarchal structures and ideologies.

Gender inequality has been a serious concern in the world and gender differences have some repercussion in relation between men and women. Gender in common usage refers to differences between men and women. Although gender is often used interchangeably with sex and with in a social setup it often refers to sexual difference, it is important to understand gender is different from sex. Sex concerns physical and biological differences that distinguish male from the female (Kane, 1998). Culture constructs social differences in gender. These social constructions attach themselves to behaviors, expectations, roles, and representations and sometimes to values and beliefs that are specific to either men or women (Joseph suad, 1996). Gender differences included do not necessarily have biological component but have socially agreed upon differences meaning those cultures assign that. These constitute the area of gender difference and some times these differences create inequality. It means social disparity or disparity of distribution of opportunity.
The factors that are usually thought of influencing inequality of opportunity include family background, education and race (Bayes, 2007). In the present study attention is focused mainly on i.e. gender inequality disparities among individuals based on gender. Role of females develop through identification during childhood itself. Unfortunately women are discriminated against through various stages of life from childhood. Elderly women face double inequality on the basis of both gender and age (Rosald, 1980).

Secondly, attitudes, beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women are often deeply entrenched, and in many instances closely associated with cultural, social and religious norms. For instance, surveys conducted on gender inequality, opinion polls and case studies provide a good indication of the prevalence of gender inequality in many countries especially of the third world because women in these countries suffer from discrimination, poverty and patriarchy (Dervis and kamel, 1998).

**Gender Inequality in Islamic Society**

Gender in Islam is a controversial issue for scholars and analysts of Islamic Societies. Unfortunately, debate on this issue has become highly acrimonious and is not always placed in its proper historical or sociological context (Abukhalil, 1993). Islam is praised for its historically liberating role for women. Islamist perspective holds either the religious practitioners accountable for the lower status and inferior legal rights of women in Islamic countries. Still other views fall somewhere in the middle of these two positions in relation to gender issues. The problem is both attitudinal and based on beliefs and values and legal doctrines. The attitudinal component concerns the prevalence in much of Islamic societies of certain patriarchal values, learned through the socialization experience on women and gender roles (Ahmed, 1992).
The legal dimension pertains to the essentially discriminatory nature of Islamic Personal laws and the criminal code applied to women. The combination of these two factors – patriarchal attitudes and legal strictures place women in a highly disadvantageous position in the social order. Clearly, many Islamic countries do not apply either the full Islamic criminal code or the complete version of personal law to their citizens. The intensity of patriarchal values also varies both within one country and from one Islamic society to another. None the less, the two themes of patriarchy and legal discrimination continue to remain central debate on Islam and gender (Abukhalil, 1993; Ahmed, 1992).

**Muslin Women and the Islam (Quran)**

The position of women in Islamic society is a simplistic and a historical approach. The importance accorded to texts in Islam, particularly by contemporary Islamist movements, still revolves around interpretations of statements on women's spiritual and, more particularly, social role. Moreover, questions of sexual morality, marriage and family life, divorce, custody, inheritance and so on have a prominent place in the main texts of Islam. 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.

Studies have tried interpreting the Quran and highlighted the spiritual equality of men and women, and the duty of both men and women to meet the religious obligations (al-Faruqi, 1988). The Quran ascribes different social roles to men and women, as a consequence of their different natures (Glasse, 1989). Within marriage, women's role in domestic sphere is emphasized, and other activities are permissible only as much as they do not clash with family obligations. Men are cast as providers for and protectors of the family, including children and wives but also female relatives. Men are protectors and
maintainers of women, because God has given them more strength. Unlike in Christian doctrine (where celibacy is seen as a virtue), in Islam, sexuality is viewed as a necessary but potentially destructive force, which must therefore be controlled and channeled by social institutions to prevent social breakdown. From this follow Quranic injunctions encouraging universal marriage, prohibiting adultery for both men and women, on the obligation of the wife to meet the Quranic view of men's and women's respective roles and the need to regulate sexuality extends into different rights and obligations in marriage, divorce and inheritance.

In Islamic society marriage is a contract between two consenting partners, made in the presence of an official (qadi). Women as well as men can stipulate specific conditions in the marriage contract (although this varies with different schools and different countries) (al-Faruqi, 1988). Men's higher share of inheritance (a woman generally gets half of what the man of the same relation with the deceased gets) is justified on the basis of men's obligation to support women before and during marriage and upon divorce. The Quran gives women rights to independent ownership of property and independent incomes (al-Faruqi, 1988). In Islamic marriage; however, women owe obedience to their husband (Keddie, 1991). This means that many rights, especially rights to economic, political and social participation, become conditional on male approval in most interpretations of Islam.

In many Muslim countries, there is also a minimum age of marriage. However, it is economic pressures rather than the effectiveness of legislation which have resulted in later marriages and falling incidence of polygyny. These things vary across different countries.

Islamic law also gives the husband the unilateral right to divorce his wife for any reason simply by declaring his repudiation of her three times (talaq) and his maintenance obligations after divorce are then be extremely
minimal. The wife, on the other hand, is generally entitled to divorce her husband in a court of law and only upon proof of the particular grounds specified by statute. During marriage, the wife can, theoretically, sue for payment of maintenance, but in some schools of Islamic law, the husband’s failure to provide it for whatever reason is not sufficient ground for divorce and she is left with no avenue for escape (Freedman, 1991). The above accounts suggest that there may be some trade off, in different legal systems, between more (less) freedom for the woman in stipulating conditions of marriage, and more (less) restricted possibilities for divorce.

Regarding inheritance rights of women Islamic doctrine postulates that males receive twice what women get. The justification for this is normally presented in terms of their obligations to support women within and outside marriage (al-Faruqi, 1988). There is some scope for flexibility, which is mainly used to endow descendants in the male line, but has sometimes benefited women both as recipients and guardians (Keddie, 1991). Inheritance rules are, however, not strictly adhered in practice.

**Position of Women in Iran:**

Islamic culture is practiced in Iran. Patriarchal beliefs have been part and parcel of Iranian society. Iran follows the patriarchal system and it is clear that patriarchal attitudes anteced the emergence of Islamic culture in Iran (Kandiyoti, 1991; Hatem Mervat, 1995; Moghadam, 1993). This factor creates a complicated position for women in Iran because they amalgam with modernity and women’s movement.

Islamic Revolution has run into four stages for women and among these revolutions 1979 Islamic revolution is an important event for Iranian women because their social status after revolution has become different (Ramazani, 1993). In the first stage of Islamic revolution legislative decisions were taken to
segregate women from the public area and their jobs market became limited. Women remained at home and confined to their family. The second stage of Islamic revolution was the eight year war with Iraq. During this period the role of woman in public domain was limited. All domestic activities for instance, laundries and kitchen servicing were done by women who served as nurses in military hospitals and were given more pronounced civilian profile in many government offices. But war created a lot of problems because male members were killed and wives left alone. After 1985 government tried giving some rights but it was too less (Afkhami, 1999).

The third stage of Islamic revolution is the period in which the economic role of women becomes significant. In this period the government was compelled to change the course of social and economic development (Padidar, 1999). During this period attention was given to women as agents of human resource development. Women’s status was enhanced in the area of education especially and government focused programs on women’s health. 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 (Bagley, 1998; Kazemi, 1996).

In the fourth stage women achieved a high rate of higher education and more than 70 percent of students in universities are girls. In recent years there is improvement in their health condition. Female life expectancy is more than the male (73 years for females and 70 years for male). However, women were in a disadvantageous position with regard to employment. Only 15 percent of women were employed and the educated unemployment rate for women is more than 22 percent. Though the age at marriage is increased, they suffer from heterogeneous improvement in their status and there is not much harmony between the factors that determine their status especially the religious laws and traditional beliefs impose on their marriage (Esfandiari, 1997; kian, 1995; Statistical Institute of Iran, 2006).
Studies conducted in Iran have shown that changes have taken place for women from tradition to modernity. However, this modernity and empowerment is not only due to higher level of literacy but also other factors, some of which leave a longer-lasting impact, while others are sporadic. One such influence has been the impact of family planning, which gives women the power to negotiate their fertility but vanishes once reproductive activities are over. This is true even for illiterate women, albeit to a lesser degree. The reduction in the number of children also has adverse effects, as some men have resorted to second wives to have more children. On the other hand, one may not argue that in the short term of a few years of education without a fundamental change in other aspects of their lives adds little value to their quality of life nor does it free them from their social bonds. Education has opened doors for girls from certain social and economic backgrounds, but at the same time it has also triggered, either directly or indirectly, inevitable reactions among the less-advantaged layers of society. As a result, those girls who do not have the protection of a closely knit social group find themselves (Tremane, 2006).

**Muslim Women in India:**

Muslim rulers ruled India for centuries. With the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, India’s Muslim history and the Muslim contribution is being obscured and downplayed. Against this background, the opportunities for Muslim women to raise their concerns over access to educational rights and work opportunities, or to raise issues within Muslim personal law – including marriage, divorce and personal freedoms – are severely restricted.

Studies have highlighted that Muslim women are less educated and have lowest work participation rates in all categories of work. They are also the economically vulnerable and politically marginalized group in the country. In 1983, the Gopal Singh Committee constituted by the government, declared
Muslims as a ‘backward’ community in India. A central feature of this ‘backwardness’ is their exceedingly poor socio-economic status. Most Muslim women remain as invisible workers in the informal economy. The Muslim share in public employment is less than 3 per cent. Within this picture of marginalization, it is a predictable certainty that the corresponding figures for Muslim women are further skewed towards the bottom. A lack of information on Muslim women contributes to the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes and struggles. Consequently, the notion that Muslim the status of women in India is attributable to certain intrinsic, immutable ‘Islamic’ features or that their social status derives solely from Muslim laws is widely prevalent. On the other hand, the appropriation of Muslim women’s issues by a vocal and politically influential Muslim male constituency for political purposes poses a considerable challenge to Muslim women’s legal empowerment (Seema Kazi, 1999).

Studies conducted on Muslim women opine that Muslim women in India have less opportunity for higher education and jobs and are deprived of equal rights to participate in decision making process because of tradition and culture. Further, there are many misconceptions regarding status of Muslim women in India. The sanction as well as practice of polygamy and divorce in Muslim society is a controversial issue. There has been a notion that the incidence of polygamy and divorce is very high among the Indian Muslims. It has an impact on the status of Muslim women. This stereotyped notion is not only affecting the Muslim mind but also influencing the political and communal situation of the country (Mondal, 1997).

The gender relations among Indian Muslims are rather unequal. Division of labour based on gender is very conspicuous. Women are mainly engaged in household works viz. cooking, cleaning, washing, child rearing etc. Actually women are engaged in indoor works and men in outdoor work. Even in ceremonial and community activities, women have a very limited role to play.
Women have very little say in controlling family resources. Their role in decision making process in the family or society is very insignificant due to poor self image and lack of confidence owing to the process of socialization and gender construction under patriarchal social set up. However, in recent times, the unequal gender relations in Muslim society have also been gradually changing due to various internal and external forces. Due to lack of education and social isolation the political awareness among the Muslim women is very less. Their participation in political process of the country is peripheral. Due to steady process of politicization of the country their level of political awareness is gradually increasing. But for taking political decisions they still depend upon males. Like other women in the country, the Muslim women are also changing, but rather slowly. Education, modernization, development programmes and reform of some laws are considered as the important factors of their change (Roy, 1979).

**Theoretical Framework**

Several factors are supposed to be the causes of the gender inequality of women. These are socio-economic, political, legal, and religious. Secondly, tradition, illiteracy, schooling facilities, neighborhood factors also has impact on gender inequality. These factors are interlinked and exert their influence directly and/or indirectly on their inequality. The influences of these factors on Muslim women are diagrammatically represented in Fig-1. The Fig-2 shows the possible consequences of gender inequality of women, on the family and on the Muslim society.
Fig. 1: Causes of gender inequality

Fig. 2: Consequences of gender inequality
The present study adopts a theory of household on gender inequality developed by Amartya Sen (2001). He argued that the theory of the household represents the household not as an undifferentiated unit, but as a unit of cooperation as well as of inequality and internal discrimination. He has worked on problems of discrimination against women in the development process, on survivorship differentials between men and women under conditions of social discrimination against women, and on women’s agency in the process of social development.

Sen takes a comprehensive and deeply concerned look at the many faces of gender inequality. Focusing on South Asia, (India) he discovers in the data thrown up by the Census of 2001 an interesting phenomenon – a split India, something of a social and cultural divide across India, splitting the country into two nearly contiguous halves, in the extent of anti-female bias. He concludes by identifying the principal issues, emphasizing the need to take a plural view of gender inequality, and calling for a new agenda of action to combat and put an end to gender inequality. He believes that inequality between women and men can take many different forms. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems. He illustrates with examples of different kinds of disparity. In some regions in the world, inequality between women and men directly involves matters of life and death, and takes the brutal form of unusually high mortality rates of women and a consequent preponderance of men in the total population, as opposed to the preponderance of women found in societies with little or no gender bias in health care and nutrition. Mortality inequality has been observed extensively in North Africa and in Asia, including China and South Asia.

Secondly, Sen argues that given the preference for boys over girls, many male-dominated societies have, gender inequality. This preference can manifest itself in the form of the parents wanting a newborn to be a boy rather than a girl. There was a time when this could be no more than a wish (a daydream or
a nightmare, depending on one’s perspective), but with the availability of modern techniques to know gender of the foetus, sex-selective abortion has become common in many countries. It is particularly prevalent in East Asia, in China and South Korea in particular, but also in Singapore and Taiwan, and it is beginning to emerge as a statistically significant phenomenon in India and South Asia as well. This is high-tech sexism.

Thirdly, Sen says that in many countries of Asia and Africa, and also in Latin America, girls have far less opportunity of schooling than boys do. There are other deficiencies in basic facilities available to women, varying from encouragement to cultivate one’s natural talents to fair participation in rewarding social functions of the community.

Fourthly, Sen mentions that inequality of special opportunity. Thus when there is relatively little difference in basic facilities including schooling, the opportunities of higher education may be far fewer for young women than for young men. Indeed, gender bias in higher education and professional training can be observed even in some of the richest countries in the world in Europe and North America.

Fifthly Sen mentions that in terms of employment as well as promotion in work and occupation, women often face greater handicap than men. A country like Japan may be quite egalitarian in matters of demography or basic facilities, and even, to a great extent, in higher education, and yet progress to elevated levels of employment and occupation seems to be much more problematic for women than for men.

In many societies the ownership of property can also be very unequal. Even basic assets such as homes and land may be very asymmetrically shared. The absence of claims to property not only reduce the voice of women, but also make it harder for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and
even some social activities. This type of inequality has existed in most parts of the world, though there are also local variations. For example, even though traditional property rights have favoured men in most of India, in what is now the State of Kerala, there has been for a long time, matrilineal inheritance for an influential part of the community, namely the Nairs.

Lastly, there are often enough basic inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household, which can take many different forms. Even in cases in which there are no overt signs of anti-female bias in, say, survival or son-preference or education, or even in promotion to higher executive positions, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care. It is for example, quite common in many societies to take it for granted that while men will naturally work outside the home, women could do so if and only if they can combine it with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties. This is sometimes called “division of labour”, though women could be forgiven for seeing it as “accumulation of labour”. The reach of this inequality includes not only unequal relations within the family, but also derivative inequalities in employment and recognition in the outside world (Sen, 2001).

Since women are in different conditions concerning social, political and prestigious status as well as occupation and income, different theories are offered to explain their status each of which regarded special dimensions and particular effective factors. It seems that theories of sexual inequalities can have some degree of an exact correspondence with the present situations of women and men in both Iran and India.

There are three indices regarding theories of gender inequality; (i) women and men not only enjoy different social statuses, but they are also placed in unequal social positions: (ii) women, in comparing to men of the same social position, have lower financial benefits, lower social status, and less
power and opportunities. This inequality originates from social institutions, not from any biological or character difference between women and men; (iii) third index of status is that although people are different from each other concerning their talents and other characteristics, there are no natural or inborn factors that distinguish the two sexes from each other (Humm and Gembele, 1997).

Liberal feminism demonstrates the moderate face of feminism and tries to make the status of women clear according to equal rights and artificial banners to women’s participation in public places beyond family and housework. Gender inequality raises issues such as jobs to female, separation of women in public and private areas and socialization of children. Post colonial feminism originates from anti-colonial campaigns of Eastern nations and tries to criticize the ethnic-centralism of the west and also the ignorance of the special conditions of Eastern Countries in interpreting gender inequality (Kane, 1998). The theory of resources also highlighted the gender inequality. According to the theory of resources which is proposed by Collins (1975) more the women have access to different resources such as education, occupation, power fertility and even beauty which are among the cultural capitals, they will be placed in fairer relationship with men. In sum, the more facilities a woman has, the more power she will have to object to inequalities and the more negative attitude she will posses toward gender inequalities (Collins, 1975).

Need for the study

There is a diversity of opinion regarding social marginality of Muslim women. Some regard it as the legacy of tradition. While others consider that the women’s passivity, seclusion and marginal place in Muslim society have little to do with Islamic tradition, but are on the contrary, ideological constructs which are alien to Islam but affects of the misuse of power by reactionary forces. These aspects are very crucial in the context of theoretical frame of
reference in understanding and examining the status and empowerment of women in Muslim society.

Over the last two decades the position of Muslim women has come to the notice of the academicians, policymakers and development authorities of India. Muslim women, unlike other women, are more undernourished, more under compensated for their labour, and more under represented in formal decision making bodies than men. The marginalized status of Muslim women is not well documented. Therefore empirical information on Muslim women, particularly on their social position as well as problems and prospects, is very much needed for the sake of their empowerment, which is a priority area of India’s national development.

Secondly, very little information is available on the status of Muslim women in India. The available information on Muslim women is mostly on their stereotyped images leading to debates and counter debates. A description of their social situation told by the Muslim women themselves is really a missing aspect of our knowledge system. To learn this hidden perspective’ an empirical knowledge of their over all social situation is very much needed.

There are fundamental factors that determine gender inequality. Gender inequality exists in education, health, empowerment in the family; participation in the socio-economic activities and ownership assets. Both Indian and Iranian Muslim women have considerably improved in some domains such as education and health but inequality exists in other areas. Thus socio economic participation and job opportunities for women are very less. For instance only about 2 percent of women are working in management jobs in Iran. Women’s right over asset ownership and in the family is very less. Therefore, the present study will highlight and address these issues and suggest suitable remedial measures to improve the status of women in Islamic society.
Objective of the study

The main focus of this study is to understand the gender inequality in the status of women in Mashhad town of Iran and Bangalore city in India vis-a-vis that of men. The specific objectives are as follows:

(i) To study the women’s position in Islamic Society.
(ii) To understand how gender inequality affects women’s role in the family regarding decision making.
(iii) To examine how gender inequality affects health condition of women.
(iv) To highlight how gender inequality affects women’s education especially higher education and job opportunity in the society.

Chapter outline of the study

Including the present, this study contains six chapters. The second chapter presents a review of related literature on the subject. Chapter three concentrates on methodology and sampling design of the study. In chapter-four we have presented interpretation of the results of the primary investigation. Chapter five highlights some of the case studies and profile of Muslim men and women from whom data were collected. It also deals with some of the group discussions conducted to elicit qualitative data for the study. Chapter six is devoted to summary and conclusion of the study.