Chapter - VIII

Educated and Empowered Muslim Women
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Education provides the most vital qualities of confidence, capacity to work and thereby leads to empowerment. Muslim women who by virtue of social norms and practices had suffered backwardness due to lack of education though Islam as a religion sancioned it. Several organisations individuals, through theoretical and practical applications have lifted the backwardness of Muslim women and as a result muslim women have conquered to dark areas of ignorance and fear. This chapter gives a glimpse of some of the outstanding Muslim women performers in different walks of life over a period of time.

There exist 110 million Muslims in India - which, with the exception of Indonesia - is the largest population of Muslims in a single country in the world. Muslim communities in India are geographically scattered, culturally diverse and economically disparate. A majority of Muslims in India live in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. According to the 1991 Government of India Census, there are over 48 million Muslim women in India.¹

The problem facing the muslim community, particularly women can be seen in the contextual frame work of current socio-economic, political, cultural scenario in the country. The partition in 1947, had most of the muslim intelligentsia and the economic elite migrate to Pakistan.

Muslim Women's Socio-Economic and Political Status:

In modern day India, the socio-economic status of women in Muslim communities, along with their political participation rates and the need for legal reform, are causes for concern and it needs attention. This point cannot be overstated in a context where, in 1983, the Gopal Singh Committee instituted by the government, declared Muslims as a ‘backward’ community in India. A central feature of this ‘backwardness’ is the appalling educational and socio-economic status of Muslims in India, particularly Muslim women.²
In a study of 39 districts in 1981 - where the population of Muslims ranged from 20 percent to 95 percent (which could be considered a fairly representative sample of the Muslims in India) - the literacy rate of Muslim women was found to be 21.91 percent, which was lower than the average of 24.82 percent for the whole country. Muslims share in public employment in All-India and Central Services is less than 3 percent. Within this picture of poor overall employment statistics, it is a predictable certainty that the corresponding figures for Muslim women are lower still.

The impoverished status of a large number of Muslim women in India underlines the urgency for further inquiry in this area and also the need for active intervention by state agencies to implement policies to redress this imbalance - and ensure Muslim women's full and equal participation as Indian citizens. Yet, it is interesting to take note of Muslim women through ages, who had made outstanding contributions to society and culture.

**Popular Muslim Women in India**

**Medieval Times**:

During India's long history the twin ambitions of empire and plunder had gone on, since the time of Alexander and from Mongols to Mughals. Romans in Europe before the birth of Christ made wars on neighbouring tribes, and hordes, golden or otherwise, seeking land, slaves and riches overran the Iranian Plateau and spilled into India. Only after the emperor Babur's reign (1483-1530) did Islamic rule settle down on this continent bringing with it administration and a wealth of culture, splendid buildings and riches, that inspired the adventurers of Elizabethan times to think in terms of Empire for the West.

The daughter of Babur, who lived till the age of eighty, wrote amazing chronicles of Mughal period, covering the times of its four greatest kings. The Mughals were real historians, male and female alike, and many women were known, for their showed their literary and poetic skills. Babur's own memoirs are
as revealing and candid as Mahatma Gandhi’s Experiments with Truth. But no one equalled Gulbadan Begum, Babur’s daughter, who faithfully records the continuing nomadic life of these one-time Mongols, whose women went to war, lived most of their lives in camps, bore their children, often in flight from danger, and at times took over, as ancient Roman matrons used to do, when a king was weak or beleaguered.\(^5\)

Given the lack of roads and transport beyond horses and camels, the distance Mughal women travelled in the course of their lives was remarkable. It is over three thousand miles today from the heart of Iran to Delhi through desolate regions, from salt lands to mountains and deserts. Gulbadan Begum, with a small retinue, took seven years to make her pilgrimage to Mecca.\(^6\)

One can imagine the privations in the wooden ships of those days, trading as they had done from ancient times between India and Rome, Egypt or Phoenicia. Such ships were suitable perhaps for the spice, ivory, muslim, and indigo trade, but not for gentlewomen. Yet in the long white robes of pilgrimage, they dared the rigours of travel by sea and land, modesty protected and vows achieved.

Nur Jehan, emperor Jehangir’s redoubtable queen, behind the traditional latticed screen, carried on state business with the nobles, played polo and hunted with the best of them, from the shuttered canopy of a royal elephant. She was a crack shot and once killed four tigers with six shots in rapid succession. She was to be, no less skilful in outmanoeuvring their captor, Mahabat Khan in a curious palace coup, which made the Emperor prisoner until his wily queen got him out of the rather serious impasse.\(^7\) Jehangir was content to leave the administration of the poetry and to the state to the decision and the determination of his strong-minded Queen.

Palace life in those days filled, like royal courts in other times and worlds, with fetes and feasts of imperial extravagance. The Mina Bazaars, in the precincts
of the Agra or Delhi forts were like the fetes and feasts at Versailles, when the ladies of the court would set up stalls and lure the King and his courtiers to buy their wares. It is said, that Jehangir caught the sight of Nur Jehan, at a Mina Bazaar, and fell so madly in love with her, he could not rest till she was his.8

Hamida, wife of Humayan and mother of emperor Akbar, in her later years as royal matriarch, was instrumental in reconciling her great grandson, Salim, who was revolting against his father, emperor Jehangir. Hamida intervened and settled the matter. Salim finally came to her magnificent feast, fell at his father's feet and brought him gifts and three hundred and fifty elephants. Thus, Hamida's intervention saved the day and at this historic family feast, Jehangir proclaimed Salim his heir. He was the future Shah Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal to honour his adored wife, Mumtaz. The Pharaohs raised monuments to their own glory, but it was a Muslim King who honoured a woman.

Chand Bibi belonged to the Nizam family. In 1595, when Mughal attacked Ahmednagar, she led the Nizam's army.9

In later years, three generations of Begums of Bhopal ruled their state wisely and well. This succession of ruling queens in Bhopal is rare in the annals of any history. Mother, grandmother and great grandmother reigned in an uninterrupted succession. The last, Nawab Sultan Jehan Begum, was enlightened and from 1920, for ten years, she was the Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University.10

In the early British period, Begum Samru was the wife of Walter Reinhardt, a French soldier of fortune. In 1800, the British confirmed her as an independent woman ruler. She headed her troops and managed her estate with commendable skill.11 She died at the age of 85 in Sardana.

Most royal women throughout history tended to be poetesses and promoters of art and culture, but all of the prominent women from the time of Babur were literate, if their letters, which often commanded events in troubled times are evidence.
Modern Times:

The contemporary Islamic world includes twenty two Arab states and some eighteen non-Arab ones like Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh. India is not an Islamic state, but Muslims form the largest minority, 14 percent of the total population. With the loss of status and wealth, the position of Muslim women deteriorated over the years in every way. Muslims in India are generally concentrated in pockets of former Muslim rulers such as Hyderabad, Uttar Pradesh, Kashmir, Delhi, Bengal and parts of the South. Having lost their political power, the inevitable happened, men sulked in their tents and women were increasingly oppressed. Poverty took its toll.

With partition many migrated to Pakistan decimating the ranks of traditional craftsmen such as jewellers, brass workers, weavers and embroiders. Many of the educated upper classes sought new opportunities in the new country. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan, insisted that it was now “Hindu India”. However, this was only a political.

Muslim Women Entrepreneurs:

The economic development of a country, to a large extent depends on effective entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are the movers and shakers of industry. Women entrepreneurs, who have assumed the role of key performers in the process of economic development, industrialisation and social change are called as cultural heroines. Recently, Muslim women have widened their outlook of ‘Entrepreneurship’, as the most important for the rapid industrial development and economic progress. Muslim women have been increasingly coming forward as wage earners. A recent study of the Town and country planning organisation (TCPO) under the union Ministry of Urban affairs and Employment has shown that self employment was the most dominant motive for a woman to set up an enterprise. The survey, conducted by TCPO covered 183 representatives women enterprises in the country, has revealed that they generated more jobs than those run by men.
For every 1 lakh of rupees fixed investment, they created employment for 6 persons as against an average employment in the enterprise run by women was nine, more than the average employment of 6.3 persons in SSI Units. These enterprises engaged both skilled and unskilled workers.14

The requirements for successful entrepreneurship are,
(i) Professional attitude
(ii) Management skills & decision making
(iii) Exposure to the demands of the market
(iv) Sale increase

The major impediments for Muslim women entrepreneurs are,
(1) A system which is highly competitive
(2) An unstable market

Whatever the hurdles they had to cross, it is nevertheless abundantly clear that Muslim women have benefited by a study of the predominantly Muslim area of Old Delhi in 1987 some interesting data emerged.15 Women in so called secluded work-at-home situation were contributing substantially to family incomes through embroidery and beading skills. This was in great demand in fashionable boutiques in the capital. The women's problem was middlemen. They were often cheated, underpaid and could not negotiate deals for themselves. A young 20-year old Muslim girl of the area, making hand knitted wool sweaters beat them at their game. She did her own shopping and marketing. Other women could have followed her example, but their menfolk systematically refused to let them exercise that freedom. The Muslim male in India suffered from a combination of excessive pride with fear of censure from his community. It has been a major factor for backwardness of the Muslim population in India and degeneration of a people of consummate skills in architecture, crafts and arts, apart from thinkers, poets and musicians, who continue to be revered all over the country. Women in these conservative areas therefore lack education or, even if they are educated, lack the ability to fight obscuratism in their own homes. In many cases they are also completely unaware of their basic Islamic rights.16
Muslim women dominate the SEVA organisation in Lucknow specialising in the exquisite chikan embroidery on gauzy cottons, and Quarunissa is famous for reviving the magnificent zardozi embroidery in gold thread, silks and jewels of Mughal times, which created fabrics and garments like tapestry, or hand embroidered brocade.¹⁷

Then, there is Roshan Ben Shaikh of Gujarat. Her entrepreneurial skills built up a patchwork co-operative that has given an economic outlet in the area to countless Muslim women. Roshan Ben is a typical woman from the village, strong, disciplined and hardworking, with this one difference, she was never intimidated by the dictates of men and proved that she could be a full time worker, wage earner and community benefactor. Organisations like Dastkar in Delhi have helped to increase her marketing skills, creating new outlets for her creative talents.¹⁸ In all such cases it does mean that a Muslim woman must have both self-confidence, and courage.

The List of small industrial units run by women Entrepreneurs by the office of the commissioner of Industries Delhi Administration states the registered units and working in the industrial sheds developed by Delhi government under various schemes allotted to unemployed graduates and other categories. The list has a total of 916 such units spread over 10 zones. Out of them the list shows 21 units being run by Muslim women.¹⁹
Table 8.1

The details of these units are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Total No. of Units run by Women</th>
<th>No. of Units Run by Muslim Women</th>
<th>Percent Share of C in D %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pahar Ganj</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Karol Bagh</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Civil Lines</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Narela</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Shahdara</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Delhi Cantt.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>916</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following is the finding of the author after a survey.20

1. **Ms. Yasmeen Parveen** : Proprietor of Book Binding and Printing firm located at 1701, Kucha Dakhni Rai, Darya Ganj in the old city. She is 12th class pass. Card board boxes were manufactured and box printing was also done in her factory. It was established in 1988, but the whole operation was stopped in 1995. The product was sold in the local market. The funds were raised persoanally and no outside help was obtained. Three daily wage workers were employed in the factory. Many times she had to face the labour problem. The skill of the trade was acquired by her personally. She has two sons and one daughter. One of the sons is doing MBA while the other one is doing a Computer course. The daughter is pursuing her Bachelors degree from Zakir Hussain College of Delhi University. The unit was closed down at the behest of the children, who felt the same was not profit making.
2. **Ms. Zohra Begum**: The City Leather House is registered with Mrs. Zohra Begum as the proprietor located at 334, Gali Badam Rai, Darya Ganj in the old city. It was established about 5 years ago. It is actually run by her son, Mr. Hamid Khan. Leather garments, Purses and Belts are manufactured for the local market. The funds were raised personally and the training of skill has been acquired by Hamid Khan personally. She is herself High School pass. She has 3 daughters and 4 sons. Two of the sons and one daughter are married. This is the type of namesake Muslim Woman's Enterprise.

3. **Ms. Kausar Begum**: Proprietor of Sunflo Industries located at 2476, Chatta Jan Beg, Kamra Bangash, Darya Ganj, Delhi. This enterprise was established about 6 years ago and is run by her son. The allotment was obtained in her name and now she helps, by looking after the requirements of the factory and banking functions.

4. **Ms. Kausar Parveen**: She is the proprietor of Roop Herbal, a beauty parlour located at 1709, Gali Tehsildar, Darya Ganj, Delhi. This is not registered as a Small Scale Industry with the Delhi Administration, but beauty parlours have come up at every nook and corner of the whole city. So it was also taken as one unit to be studied in detail. The funds for the parlour were arranged personally and it was established about 7 years ago. She is assisted by her sister in running the parlour. The parlour caters to about 10-15 customers every day. At the festive season the number rises to 25-50 customers. Her father is in the Scrap business. She has two sisters and two brothers. Sisters are 9th and 10th pass. One of the brothers studied upto class 5 and is working at a watch shop. The other brother has studied upto class 12.

There are some beauty parlours that have come up in many localities. One such parlour is run by **Miss Khursheed** in Chitli Qabar Area of the old city. The parlour is called ‘Mona Lisa’.
5. **Ms. Saeeda Begum**: She is the proprietor of Jahangir Offset Press established in 1984 at 2095, Rodgran, Lal Kuan, Delhi. Book printing is the main work at this press. It caters to the local market and the finance has been arranged personally. Seven workers are employed and there are no labour problems. She believes and practises the traditional Islamic life style. She intends to give good education including religious education to the children. At the same time she advocates healthy social interaction with all communities. She has four children. The eldest son aged 18 years is studying in class 12, the other son is 12 years old and is in class 9. The elder daughter is 15 years old and is in class 10, while the youngest daughter is 8 years old and is in class 3.

6. Sigma is another enterprise that is looked after by men only but was registered in the name of a woman, **Mrs. Mumtaz Khan**. It is Mr. Ahsan Khan who is running the Leather Goods Export Business. It was financed personally and has workers. He has learnt the skills of leather goods manufacturing himself.

7. **Ms. Shahnaz Akhtar** and her sister **Kaneez Bano** are running the Zari Zardozi work at 3150, Kucha Pandit, Lal Kuan, Delhi. The Zardozi is a family profession and the skill has been well developed over the last 45 years. They are manufacturing and decorating clothes and garments of all types. The marketing is done at the local level. The funding of the enterprise has been done personally. The father of these girls is a State Award Winner Craftsman. He was given award in 1982 and again in 1995. Kaneez Bano won the award for the year 1983. Their unit has been selected by the Government as a training centre. The trainees for zari and zardozi work are sponsored by the Government and they are to be trained by these sisters. The government gives them a grant of Rs. 1500.00 per month for training 10 persons. The training time is from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and then from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The duration of training is from one to two years. They have 6 employees and cater to the local market. The finances have been arranged personally.
8. **Ms. Saeeda Begum**: got the Carton Box Products at 50-51-86 Gali Kabaliyan, Jama Masjid, Delhi registered in her name. Actually it was done by her Brother-in-law and now after her death he is running the unit. The establishment is about 30-35 years old. The product is marketed locally and finances were arranged by self. The number of employees in the organization is 10.

9. **Ms. Shaheda Parveen**: She is running the Tin Light Industries with Moon as the trade mark. The enterprise was established in 1964. She is only 8th class pass but is a real entrepreneur. She belongs to a very conservative family and society of Deoband, Saharanpur, U.P. This is the place where Darul Uloom, the great Islamic University of India is located. The women of the town cannot think of even coming out of the house to do anything or to buy anything from the market. There they observe very strict purdah. The ladies cannot show even their hands. She came to Delhi with her husband. He does not do any work and so is not earning anything. He is rather involved in politics. She started doing petty work for others. She learnt and developed the skill of spray colouring of iron handles, etc. herself. She learnt the job as a challenge and became successful in the art. Now she is performing job-work. She has electronic ovens for the colour plating. She has automatic plastic moulding dyes. There is also a washer moulding machine. She has two sons. They studied upto class 8. She herself is 8th class pass. Now the children have also learnt the skill and are helping her in the job and machine work. She started this work in 1964 and is now making holders, bakelite washers with hydraulic moulding machines. Her market is local and funds were raised personally and by borrowing loans. Now the parties which want jobwork to be done by her help her by way of advance payment. She has employed two workers. She has two daughters. One of them studied upto class 10 and the other till class 12 and the third upto graduation. She has full faith in Allah and wants to have good relations with all the communities. Kiran Bedi IPS, made Peace Committees in the Mohallas of Delhi. She is a member of one such committee of her area. She was given the rank of a Special Police Officer (SPO) by Delhi Police. She is a very enthusiastic, hard working, true Muslim woman entrepreneur.
10. **Ms. Syeda Hashim Ali**: She and her husband look after her Primovac Engineering which is manufacturing Vacuum Pumps. It was established in 1980-81 at 68-69 Gali Jama Masjid, Khureji Khas, East Delhi. The product is marketed locally and funds were raised personally by self. Now about 25 to 30 workers are working in this factory. She has one son who has taken admission in Engineering in Jamia Millia Islamia Engineering College. She is an undermatric whereas her husband acquired the technical know-how himself. The President’s award for Self Reliance was won by her.

11. **Ms. Farha Junaid**: She is running a garment manufacturing unit with about 30-35 workers. She has done Diploma in Fashion Designing from Lucknow (U.P). She is the daughter-in-law of Mr. Yunus Saleem, ex-Central Minister and Governor. Her husband is an exporter of leather items and ceramic goods. The product is exported as well as sold in the local and national market. 50% of the ladies suits are exported to New York, USA. About 800 to 900 suits are manufactured every month. She faces no labour problem. Before 1990 she was manufacturing or making ladies’ suits on a very small scale. After 1990 riots many uprooted Muslims from East Delhi came to her father-in-law for getting relief. They were mostly tailors, embroiders and zari or zardozi workers, cutters etc. She immediately came to their help and planned to rehabilitate them in their skill and craft. So she enlarged her unit. As they were all dexterous workers she was happy to help them. For two years she worked on no profit, no loss basis. After that the workers were in a position to re-establish themselves. They work for a salary ranging from Rs. 3000 to Rs. 3500 per month. Some earn even Rs. 6000 to Rs. 7000 per month. They like to work in their own home. She has two children. The son is studying in St. Columbus School and the daughter is in Mt. Carmel Convent School of Delhi. She is herself about 30 years old and is a real Muslim Woman Entrepreneur.

12. **Ms. Riaz Rizvi**: She is a very dynamic Muslim woman entrepreneur. She is
independently running export business since 1979 under the name 'Manzoor International' dealing in Brass wares, Handicrafts, Foodstuffs etc. Her market is international, covering USA, most of the European countries and South Asian countries. She has travelled to most of these countries in connection with her business. She is independently handling all the activities of her business, such as looking after the production, manufacturing, shipping, banking etc. She is operating her business from her house in Johri Farms, Okhla, New Delhi. Her husband is a University Professor. She has one son who is an Engineer and two daughters. One of the daughters is doing her engineering while the second is in class 12. She is a real Muslim Woman Entrepreneur.

13. **Ms. Tabassum Jung**: She is running a Beauty parlour in Darya Ganj, old city. She is the wife of Nawab Zafar Jung. He is the owner of 5 Star Guest House. She is running the business independently.

14. **Ms. Shahnaz Hussain**: She is the proprietor of internationally famous Shahnaz Herbals. Her products are marketed all over the world. The training imparted at Shahnaz Herbal's enables people to run beauty parlours and clinics successfully. Now even franchise is permitted to run herbal clinics in the name of Shahnaz.

15. **Mrs. Shoaib**: She is running a tailoring and packing unit for European dresses. She is running this unit on job-work basis for export houses. She is operating in NOIDA (UP). This area in the vicinity of Delhi is functionally a part of industrial Delhi.

16. Another gifted family of women achievers was the Tyabjis who must have all forgotten decades ago how to wear a burkha! **Kamala Tyaji**, a barrister in London for twenty years, returned to India at the time of the Bihar famine in 1967 and went into immediate action in organizing and setting up the women's India Trust with twenty four women, which has now mobilized hundreds of housewives to earn and produce quality jams, preserves, pickle (some of which are exported) and
block prints on cottons and calico, shoulder bags, soft toys and tailored clothes for the local markets. Garment manufacturing and children's clothes are a great feature of household production like bead work, hand-made lace and table linen, all of which has done so much to enhance women's incomes within their homes.

The suggested strategies for bringing more muslim women into the entrepreneurial arena are:

a) The qualities and value of a Muslim woman should be explored and determine what type of personal support she wants and why?

b) The various types of discrimination and constraints like psychological, socio-cultural, economic and other problems need to be discussed as these hamper their entrepreneurial aspirations and various measures to overcome them may be identified.

c) The formal and non-formal course/training in skills, management of money and enterprises should be provided to them.

d) New avenues should be explored for self-enterprises, upgrade their knowledge, skills and provide them with suitable technical guidance, financial and marketing support, infrastructural facilities.

e) Identify training institutions which impart vocational training programmes to develop entrepreneurial skills and make Muslim women aware of the support they could expect from development agencies.

f) Greater priority should be given to development and provision of infrastructure, access to water, fuel, housing, primary health care and child care centres. Better facilities help to effect a change in life style and subsequently in attitudes.

g) The efforts of various institutions dealing with research and technological innovations to relieve Muslim women from their domestic drudgery may be intensified. This would also allow them to participate in further gainful activities outside the domain of their usual traditional work.
The success of such programmes would make the Muslim women's daily life physically more comfortable and provide a chance to think about her own interest and potential, make her self-reliant and provide an opportunity to catch up with the changing times. Any change for the better in women's conditions in society always has wide ramifications rippling through many spheres of influence, thereby strengthening their position in the society and increasing their contribution to the economy of the country.\textsuperscript{22}

**Muslim Women as Educators/Educationists:**

In the professions Muslim women are today active in every field. They may not be employed in creative work in large numbers, but where they have grasped opportunity and ignored censure or prejudice, they have invariably proved outstanding. Perhaps, the most interesting element is the wide spectrum of Muslim women in a variety of professions. Teaching and later nursing were services, to which women as a whole gravitated in India. Hamdard School of Nursing in Delhi has specialised in giving nursing training to Muslim women.

Enlightened women started many schools and colleges even a hundred years ago. One such pioneer was Wahid Jehan Begum, the wife of Sheikh Abdullah, who together with him started the first Muslim Girls' school in Aligarh in 1906 (which later grew into a school and college and became part of the university), just like the mother of Suhrawardy in Bengal who was principal of the Girls' College in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{23} The Aligarh Muslim University (1921) was the offshoot of the College started by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan Taj Hyder started the College for Muslim Girls. At present, 25 percent of the students are Muslim girls. In Bombay Kulsum Sayani was the pioneer of adult education for Muslim women before independence.\textsuperscript{24} However, the movement became so strong, adult education was taken up for women of all communities all over India. Many muslim women have been active in the academic world, teaching in the Universities in subjects ranging from urdu, english, hindi, chemistry, social sciences, political science, history and economics. At least, thirty muslim women
teach in a wide spectrum of subjects in different colleges in Delhi. At the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi Imran Qadir is a lecturer in social medicine. Aitiya Habib is a social scientist and Zoya Hasan teaches political science. With an unorthodox background and a Ph.D. from Penn University in the USA, Zoya has recently co-authored a significant book called State Political Processes and Identity and another book by her, also published in 1989, is Dominance and Mobilisation of Rural Politics in Western U.P. Among other Muslim academicians, Jehanara Shah is Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia and Fahmida Naqvi and Kishwar Salim, teach chemistry. An unusual seat at the Jamia is held by Qaman Ghaffer in Islamic studies.

Women's education was well developed in the late Nizam of Hyderabad's territories in keeping with the Prophet's injunction to educate women as well as men. This was certainly carried out by Sir Imad-ul-Mulk and the Mahboubia Girls' school was the result. Perhaps, not many hyderabadi women went in for higher education but Zehra Bilgrami, from another very enlightened family was the first lawyer, and Begum Zain Yarkhan was the Principal of the first Women's college. At present, the women's department at Saboo Siddik Polytechnic trains over 450 women in vocational subjects like journalism and textile designing. More girls are enrolled in English medium schools. Women at present comprise over 70% of Muslim students in Anjuman-i-Islami's Medical college.

In Tamilnadu, at Kilakarai (Ramanathapuram District) Mrs. Sumayaa Dawood is a Principal and Head, Department of Home Science in Thassim Beevi Abdul Kader College for Women. She has a very good academic record to her credit. She has undertaken a major Research project on the topic “A profile on the trends of food production and marketing of street foods available in Madurai, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari and Ramanathapuram with special reference to women in micro enterprises”, sponsored by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. Grant allocated for three years is Rs. 4,59,560/- (May 2001). She received the Rashtriya Rattan Award for the contribution made for the promotion of National Integration from Global
Economic Council, New Delhi and the Presidency Guides Award in 1981 from the President of India. She presented a paper on the topic Liberation of Women Initiatives and Challenge in the National Seminar held at Avinashilingam Deemed University, Coimbatore in 1999. She has been a member of Academic Council and Senate of the Madurai Kamaraj University from 1999 onwards.

**Muslim Women Journalists:**

Zoghra Humayun Mirza was, perhaps, the first real woman activist battling for women’s rights through the magazine she edited, which today is being highlighted by women activists from the United States. But, as far back as 1996 Shamsul Ulama Maulavi Mumtaz Ali started a weekly journal in Lahore, edited by his wife Mohammedi Begum. This paper set the trend for women writers. So many women showed their literary and poetic skills.

Quarratulain Hyder, the famous novelist and poetess had an early groundwork in journalism from her mother, Zazar Sajjad Hyder, who edited a children’s magazine when she was in purdah, when still in her teens. She then began to write for urdu magazines and was herself a novelist with far-ranging views on women’s role and women’s rights. Infact, it was a novel-writing family, Quarratulain herself perhaps outshone them all and in 1967 was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for Urdu literature and the Soviet Land Award in 1969 for the translation of her books. Another writer, Kishwar Sultan, from the orthodox Husseini family of Uttar Pradesh won a UNESCO award as a playwright and today is the senior most woman in radio. Attia Hosain of the eminent family of Lucknow wrote an exquisite novel of the life of those times called sunlight on a Broken coloumn which as recently been reprinted to international acclaim, by the Virago Press in England.

In the field of Journalism, Razia Ismail, a former correspondent in India of the Christian Science Monitor, is currently in charge of UNICEF’s Information Services in Delhi. Fatima Zakaria is a former editor of the Sunday Review of the Times of
India, **Seema Mustapha** writes for the telegraph of Calcutta, **Sadia Dehlavi** is editor of Banu, a serious magazine for women and **Fatima Al Talib** is a freelance writer.\(^{30}\) **Anees Jung**'s features in the Hers column in the New York Times gave fascinating insight into women's life in Hyderabad.\(^{31}\) She writes a regular column in The Times of India. **Amina Jayal**, daughter of Sir Akhbar Hydari, has had an interesting career as a freelance journalist, illustrator of children's books and copywriter in an advertising firm.\(^{32}\)

**Muslim women in the field of social work:**

**Begum Hamid Ali**, a prominent social worker of the years before independence, was also a Tyabji. Her sister was the much loved **Raihana, “Mata Amani”**\(^{33}\), a Sufi, who was a devotee of Mahatma Gandhi's ashram and who later become a 'holy woman' to whom many kinds of seekers after truth flocked for her wisdom and benediction.

**Raihana**, like countless Muslim women from Bombay, was liberated in more than a modern sense. Despite a rather Victorian home background, she revived a Sufi tradition, a great link between medieval Iran and India. When Sufism was at its height in northern India, Muslim women saints preached to the masses. Their followers were Hindu and Muslim alike. Famous among such Muslim women were **Lal Ded** in Kashmir, often known as Lalla Arifa, and the revolutionary **Habba Khatoon** who in the 16th century publicly opposed the emperor Akbar's expansionism in the north in her fiery poetry and oratory.

To return to the present **Laila Tyabji** also belongs to the enlightened and highly literate Tyabji clan. Designer of exquisite ethnic influenced clothes, she embroiders many of them herself while Dastkar, the organization of which she is a moving spirit, promotes women's handwork from all over the country. They advise on improving designs and arrange fairs to market and popularize goods. Laila is also gifted in stage design and has contributed her skills to many theatre productions.\(^{34}\)
Journalism, writing law and social services are professions in which Muslim women have had a great deal of success. In the field of social work Begum Wahabuddin of Hyderabad was not only President of the Rural Women’s Organization but also built a remarkable agency to rescue the impoverished Muslim women, formerly wards of the Nizam’s vast estates. In hard times when they no longer came under kingly ‘grace and favour’, with the abolishing of princely states, she set up workshops for block printing, garment making and embroidery table and bed linen, cushions and table runners, which found a ready market. She also ran a nursery school for poor children in her own home which was a haven for everyone, welcomed as they were by her supportive husband and family.

Social welfare attracted countless Muslim women like Zarina Currimbhoy in Bombay who set up women’s income generating schemes in the slums and even food preparation for homes and offices. Fathema Islamail was a pioneer whose remarkable network for the physically handicapped after her daughter contracted polio, launched a new approach to the handicapped in India. Her own tragedy led to work to alleviate that of others. Begum Ali Zaheer was Chairperson of the national organization, the central Social Welfare Board, as was Masuma Begum of Hyderabad before her. The CSWB is perhaps unique as a social instrument in improving the women and children in particular, as it was entirely financed by the Government, yet, mobilized over twenty thousand women in voluntary service all over the country, many of whom were Muslims. Masuma Begum came from an enlightened family of Hyderabad which contributed significantly to social work, the arts and journalism. Begum Jouher Osman Ali Khan Sahiba is a dedicated Social Worker of Chennai, former Member of the Governing Body of Anjuman-e-Himayath-e-Islam, Member of four delegations, Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India, pioneer of mass marriages through Islamic Cultural Trust and Social Aid Trust and a Recipient of National Humanity Award.
Hotel Management:

In Hotel Management, a very unusual profession for a Muslim woman Ruhaina Jayal was in a rare career for any woman as executive chief at two leading hotel chains in India.39 Zoleikka Ahmed is the Directress of the School of Hotel Management in Calcutta.

Muslim Women in Legal Profession:

Law is another field where educated Muslim women have made a mark. Justice Mrs. Fathima Beevi was the first Woman Judge of Indian Supreme Court and the first Woman Governor of Tamil Nadu, having won great renown in the High Court of Kerala. In the courts of Delhi Sona Khan and Sumbul Rizvi, Tanveer Akhtar, Zubeida Khatum and Fahmida Hasan among others work in an otherwise fairly male dominated legal arena. There are many others in the main cities of India too.

Muslim Women in Politics:

While in politics women have been active since independence. In recent years Mohsina Kidwai was Minister of Urban Development and a Cabinet member, while Members of Parliament like Sayeeda Khatun, Akhbar Jehan Abdullah and Abida Ahmed who were elected from the huge constituencies of Indian democratic life, had to campaign in all sorts of conditions common to the hustings, but perhaps uncommon for women who had historically led sheltered lives.40 Hamida Habidullah, wife of former General, was a member of parliament too and the women of this family centred in Lucknow were all active in public life. Maimuna Sultan, an active politician was Chairman of the Housing Board in Bhopal. Begum Abida Ahmed however, did have an edge over other Muslim women41 as her husband, Fakhryuddin Ali Ahmed, had been President of India. But apart from that she was concerned with child welfare and set up a home for abandoned children. Najma Heptullah is a Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Union Parliament of India.
To sum up, While this may be somewhat incomplete picture of Muslim women in India, leaving out many, who have contributed at every level of society to honour the name of women and contribute to the development of India itself, it does prove, that the Muslim threads in the fabric of this country have been a part of a grand design, that has made this country so full of variety and vitality. Further, it is evident that a percentage of muslim women in the society through education, particularly higher education have gained confidence, attained skills of entrepreneurship, management, and thereby economic independence and equality in society.
References


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