Chapter - I

Introduction
Introduction

In the total population of India Muslims number some one and three quarters of a billion souls, and are notable for their total disparity; an inevitable result of so many varying factors. The differences in their population size and dynamics, their ethnic make-up and languages, their natural resources, and the lack of parity in their levels of material wealth, make any attempt at generalization not only impossible but foolhardy. To start with, Muslims can be Shias or Sunnis. If Shia, they can be of any one of a large number of denominations or, if Sunni, they will follow one of the four schools of religious interpretation, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, or Hunbali, all of which have differing views on personal status law. Muslim women form a significant part of this Muslim population globally. This study makes a focus on Muslim Women of India with reference to the Higher education and consequent Empowerment.

Muslim women in the 19th century had far more rights to property than did their British counterparts, although the greater social freedom enjoyed by British women created the impression that women in the West on the whole enjoyed rights superior to those enjoyed by Indian Women. This placed those, who wished to agitate for the implementation of the legal rights of Muslim Women in an awkward position. On the one hand, to leave matters as they were, was to negate these rights, but to insist on change could be seen as inviting interference from the occupying power.

The net result of this unhappy situation was a freezing of Muslim personal law but there was a plus side to this saga as well. Although for many years they were denied of their rights, the fight for the improvement of the status of Muslim Women and for parity with men in political spheres was taken on largely by Muslim men themselves. As a consequence, Indian Muslim women did not have to endure the long struggle against men to achieve civic rights. Rather, men and women united against the negative attitude of their British rulers.

Educationally, British attitudes to education coupled with the Indians’ own inclinations, meant that there were countless schools, colleges and universities in British
India, for girls and boys, by the time of Independence in 1947. Many of the finest of these had been founded in the closing years of the nineteenth century. They ranged from Indian funded and run establishments, to secular English run and medium schools which were modelled on the great British private schools, and missionary run institutions. The level of the educated Indian elite was on par with the best in the world, and in addition to having access to a good education at home, many Indians, both men and women, if they had the means and inclination went to Britain for university and professional training. Hence, in 1947 there were innumerable graduates of Oxford, Cambridge and London universities, medical schools, the Inns of court and military academies. This fine educational legacy and tradition did much to benefit modern India and Pakistan.

A muslim woman can also be of a rural, tribal, feudal or urban background or she can also be, “a highly qualified and self-confident professional, or a self effacing peasant; she can lead a cloistered life, cut off from all decision making and information - in either an urban ghetto of respectability or in the wide expanse of nomadic regions; and occasionally she may even be a central figure of an authority in government or business circles.”¹ That this is exclusively and directly connected to Islam is not true, but the fact is that Islam not only allows women the opportunities for education and contribution to society, but encourages this and supports it fully. And although the creation of educational and other opportunities for women must in some measure be influenced by a country’s economic situation, this however is only part of the story.

What is without doubt the real moving force behind any serious attempt to improve the status quo of women in any country is the priority that the various leaders and governments give to the education of girls and women, and to their empowerment in society as a whole. It is notable, however, that whenever an attempt is made to limit muslim women’s participation in the educational or other processes of their country, the justification given is that it is so prescribed by Islam. This is absolutely not true. In
most cases this retrogressive mind-set is connected with long ingrained social and cultural patterns of the country rather than with anything to do with religion. A minimal study of both the pre-Islamic era, and of the terms and conditions, or rules and regulations, that are clearly stated in both the Qur’an and in the Sunnah - that is to say, the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) - would clearly show us where the truth lies. If the restrictions were religiously based, the various Muslim countries would in fact have a far more unified approach in this field. That there are such huge disparities is a clear indication that these stem from cultural differences, but also from political or social expediency for a particular country or society, rather than from any theological validity.²

On the issue of Muslim women’s education the religion is unequivocal. Islam fully encourages the education and well-being of girls, and the Prophet took every opportunity to make a favourable comment regarding the status of women. Islam is a religion in which the quest for knowledge is imperative. In fact there is a Hadis of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in which he states: “Searching for knowledge is the duty of every believer, male and female” and, on the quality of education, he further said “Educate your children, for they are born for a time that is not yours.” The Holy Qur’an, which is considered to be the direct words of God, is written in Classical Arabic and the text is sacrosanct. The Arabic word for children used in this context is “auladukum” - all children (boys and girls) not “abnaakum” - which would imply boys alone. In other words, equality of opportunity between boys and girls is basic to the religion, and no more so than in matters of education, which completely demolishes the contention that somehow female education is un-Islamic. Islam believes that all children are entrusted to us by God and the relevant verse of the Qur’an again uses the word “auladukum”.

The Prophet, himself the father of four daughters, absolutely abhorred the barbaric pre-Islamic Arab custom of burying girl babies alive and said: “Whoever
hath a daughter, and doth not bury her alive, or scold her, or prefer his male children to her, may God bring him into Paradise”, further emphasising this point by adding, “Whoever doeth good to girls, it will be a curtain for him from hellfire.” The Prophet also said, that anyone, who has had the responsibility for the education of three girls and has done well by them, is surely guaranteed a place in heaven. The fact that the first Muslim converts were women is a lasting testimony to how Islam challenged the previous demeaning status of women and elevated them to equal status with men. Thus, women and girls are in no way regarded as inferior by Islam or treated as such by its Prophet is perfectly clear.

From the late 1860's onwards, many of the protagonists of the Indian muslim reform movement advocated a return to what they saw as Islamic principles and injunctions regarding the education of women. They felt that much of the decay of the muslim civilization in India was a direct result of the ignorance of its womenfolk, and that if women were educated as stipulated in Islam, many problems would be solved. Clearly, civilized, educated women tend to rear educated sons and daughters. The idea was constantly reiterated that as men were being given educational opportunities that were obviously expanding their horizons and opportunities, it was desirable that their womenfolk should have the necessary intellectual tools to be true partners to them, in all walks of life.  

Indian women, muslim or not, were fortunate and unique in that their thrust for education and participation in civil society was encouraged and advanced by men. It is sad, that financial constraints and political upheavals have prevented a much larger number of women from the Indian sub-continent from benefitting from the farsightedness of these early proponents and pioneers of women's education. The personal status of women was greatly improved as long ago as 1961 when the Family Law Amendments were made, putting conditions to protect the first wives and children of a marriage, and also the inheritance rights of children whose fathers predeceased
their grandfathers\textsuperscript{4}. Unfortunately the government changed before these amendments could be further expanded, but, and despite many subsequent efforts by a vocal minority to cancel even what little had been achieved, they have prevailed. The educational patterns for Muslim women in different Muslim societies is the established position of the religion itself in support of education for women. The validity and enormous benefits of even a minimal education for women, Muslim or not, are irrefutable, as is the positive stand Islam takes on education and the pursuit of knowledge in general, which emphasis on the education of women in particular. By virtue of the liberal attitude of the religion towards their education and participation in socio-economic development, Muslim women have the right and opportunity to be modern women in the full sense, with control over their own lives and contributions to make to the life of their communities and nations.\textsuperscript{5}

Education and health are the two main tools with which women can make their contribution. Ruby Mannikin stated “When you educate a man, you educate a person, but when you educate a woman you educate a family.” It is only through education that women can be empowered to take advantage of new opportunities and to widen their horizons.

Objectives of the Study :

The objectives of the study are as follows :

- Importance of education to Women
- To study the Text of Holy Quran that encourages the education and well-being of women and the favourable comments regarding the education and status of women
- To focus the rights of women in Islam
- To trace the growth of higher education of Muslim women in India
- To examine the concept of empowerment and to review the educated and empowered muslim women in India.
**Hypothesis:**

The hypotheses have been formulated as follows:

- Islam as a religious faith is not an impediment for the education of women
- The higher education rate of Muslim women has a gradual growth
- Education and employment have given Muslim women self-reliance
- Education has a direct bearing for empowerment of women

**Survey of Literature:**

In contemporary India, the subject of women's empowerment has received much attention. Many scholars have studied on the Education of women and their empowerment. *Women Education and Development: A New Perspective* by Janardan Prasad gives an account of education of women and the consequent development. *Women Education and Population in India* by Nandita Agarwal analyses the growth rate of education of women distributed in different areas of the country related to population. *Women in Ancient India from 320 A.D. to c. 1200 A.D.* by Tripat Sharma traces the education of women in Ancient India.

economic implications of women workforce in a developing country's economy. Women Parliamentsarians of India by Shanta Bhatt, Women Physicians by Nigar Fatima Abidi, give an account of the excellence of women performance in the said areas. The Constitution of India not only guarantees and safeguards the educational rights of the citizens in general but also specially guarantees and safeguards the educational rights of the minorities.

All India Muslim Women’s Education Conference, Souvenir, 22 December, 1996, sponsored by the Seethakathi Trust and the All India Islamic Foundation mainly deals with the educational backwardness of Muslim women, the root cause of many problems. Government orders, Administrative reports, Quinquennial reports on Public Instruction, Reports of the Commissions, Committees and Review committees have traced the growth of Higher education of Muslim women. The Central Advisory Board of Education Thirty Ninth Session Agenda states that the growth of higher education in our country after independence has been phenomenal. Number of universities and student population increased. The relevance of university education has been considered according to the needs of the nation.

Report of the Commission on Higher Education for Women by Rajammal P. Devadas clearly states that the task of education is to equip men and women towards better understanding of the world and the human situation and develop their abilities to discharge their distinctive roles in society.

Many Scholars have given their views on the importance of the education of women in general Foundations of Education for Free India edited by Premkiralp highlights that the planning of education on a national scale is perhaps even more important than national planning in economic and industrial development for the unity and security of the nation. Private Initiative and Public Policy in Education by R.P. Singh highlights that the Constitution of India lays down specific responsibilities of Federal and State Governments for the quantitative and qualitative development of
education according to the needs of the society and the nation. Further, it highlights that education is also an investment in human capital.

*The Rights of Women in Islam*²⁴ by Asghar Ali Engineer says that the rights of women in Islam can be properly understood only when we know their rights during Jahiliya, the pre-Islamic period. He further says, of late, the question of Women’s status has acquired great importance throughout the world and among all communities for various reasons.

Woman in Islam²⁵ by Said Abdullah Seif Al-Hatimy says that Islam dealt with Human Rights of women when in some parts of the world, conferences were being held to discuss whether she had a soul or not and whether she was human or not or whether she will enter heaven or not.

*A History of Education in India and Pakistan*²⁶ by F.E. Keay talks about the existence of Mosque schools - Maktabs and Madrasas, religious character of these schools and their importance in the life of the Muslims. *Madrasa Education in India: A Study of its Past and Present*²⁷ by Kuldip Kaur states that the basic tenets of Islam were imparted in Maktabs and Madrasas and the students both boys and girls have to mould their life in accordance with the basic tenets of Islam. *Academic Elite and Social Structure*²⁸ by Dr. Jamil Farooqui says that Madrasas became the centres of both the sacred and secular education. *Centres of Islamic Learning in India*²⁹ by Ziyaud-din A. Desai focusses on the fact that Islam permits the right to education for women aiming at a right way of thinking proper understanding of what makes or mars the human soul and building up a healthy mind free from mundane affairs. *Status of Muslim Women in North India*³⁰ by Shibani Roy states that the traditional educational pattern was largely religious in character. When sending girls to school was not in vogue, the parents laid more emphasis on religious education of girls. *Education in Muslim India*³¹ by S.M. Jaffar focusses on the fact that the schools were maintained in private houses for the instruction of girls and the services of Muslim widows were utilised. *The History
and Culture of the Indian People: The Mughal Empire$^{32}$ edited by R.C. Majumdar illustrates that women's education was not completely ignored though, no regular separate schools seem to have existed for imparting education to girls who had their lessons usually from their parents at home.

History of Education in the Madras Presidency$^{33}$ by S. Satthianadhan focusses on the fact that the primary education of the Muslims was encouraged by the special primary standards laid down for Muslim Schools by the British Government. The Development of Modern Indian Education$^{34}$ by Bhagwan Dayal Srivastava states that education commission of 1882 recommended the expansion of education of girls by means of much easier terms of grants-in-aid to girls' schools. Studies in Teaching and Learning: An Introduction to the History of Education$^{35}$ by Richard Aldrich Hodder and Stoughton highlights the various interpretations on Higher education. National Policy on Education$^{36}$ by AtmaRam and K.D. Sharma points out that Higher Education is the system in which the inputs are the secondary students and the outputs are the graduates and post graduates. College Education in India$^{37}$ edited by J.W. Airan states the fact that any improvement in the standard of Higher education has a direct impact on the productive capacity of men and development. Problems of Muslim Women in India$^{38}$ edited by Asghar Ali Engineer states that many muslim women's problems are on account of illiteracy. Muslim Women in India: Political & Private Realities 1890s - 1980s$^{39}$ by Shahida Lateef states that education is a necessary condition for the greater participation of women in modern economies.

Education in India: Policies Programmes and Development$^{40}$ by J.C. Aggarwal states that the goals and the objectives of education are derived from a number of sources including the Constitution of India, Reports of commissions and Review committees and the National Policy on Education. My Life: A struggle$^{41}$ by Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed says that Islam has given women her rightful place in every sphere of activity yet, muslims treat their women as chattel and inconsequent limbs of society.
Area and Scope of the Study:

For the past years the subject of education of muslim women, employed muslim women, higher educational institutions for muslim women education, muslim women organisations, and their programmes to promote muslim women education have been studied.

Muslim women education has been neglected due to religious misconception and also economic barriers. Many muslim families all over the country have their reservations in educating their female children due to conservative attitude or practice. As a result most muslim women confine themselves to household and lack economic independence and exposure in the society.

The primary reason for taking up this study is the fact that the researcher has found interesting studies on Prophet’s emphasis in the Qur’an on the imperative need for educating muslim women and also empowerment of muslim women through education in the country in different walks of life. The study is spread to the entire nation because the subject treatment would be useful for further research on comparative study with other countries and also a few areas within the country.

The researcher has made an analysis of the factors that stand as an impediment for muslim women education and also studied elaborately the Qur’anic emphasis on education of muslim women. This has a relation to widening of horizons of opportunities for positions, professions and empowerment for women and breaking of barriers for empowerment.

Methodology and Sources:

The methodology adopted in the presentation of this study is historical. The data collected for this study belong to two categories - secondary and primary. The researcher has consulted government records, government reports, government orders, reports of commissions, committees and census reports. The secondary sources consist
of various books, journals, periodicals, newspaper clippings. The researcher also has visited a number of relevant websites and has collected materials, for the study.

Limitations of the Study:

The study is not exhaustive but is subject to availability of materials information obtained from the newspapers, magazines, journals and also the worldwideweb.

Concepts used:

The word *empowerment* means the practice of empowering people so that they can have control over various aspects of their lives.

The word *Muslim* includes those who profess "Islam". It does not include Hindus, Christians and Parsees.

Chapterisation:

The thesis is divided into nine chapters.

The first chapter forms the introduction. This gives an Overview of the study, Need for the study, Objectives of the study, Hypotheses, the Survey of literature of contextual relevance, Limitations of the study, Concepts used and Chapterisation.

The second chapter, "Education of Women - An overview" gives an account of the potential side in education which undertakes the difficult task of moulding character, inculcating self discipline, and developing individual potentialities, and qualities that go into the infrastructure of the society. It is this aspect that plays an instrumental role in social change, social mobility and integration and in giving security and success coupled with a spirit of service and satisfaction for the development of the Nation.

The third chapter "Islam and Education" explains the place assigned to education in Islam. Islam stands for enlightenment, allows free enquiry, encourages rationality and admits cultivation of knowledge by learning.
The fourth chapter "The Rights of Women in Islam" narrates that the rights assured to women in Islamic faith. Right to life, Right to marriage, Right to divorce, Right to inheritance, Right to education, Right to Entrepreneurship, Right to equality, as stated in the Holy Qur’an are discussed in detail.

The fifth chapter "Higher Education of Muslim Women" is divided into two parts for better focus - (i) upto 1947 (ii) after 1947. Education of muslim women in its early phase, during the Muslim rule and the Colonial rule and the Causes for their educational backwardness are traced in the first division. In the second division, the causes for backwardness in numerical strength of muslim women, particularly due to socio economic and cultural reasons, muslim women literacy rate, and the contributing factors, the free Indian government policies and the enrolment of muslim women in formal and informal (Distance education through Open university) institutions of higher education are dealt with. In short, this chapter focusses on the Higher education of muslim women with a detailed historical perspective.

The sixth chapter "Empowerment of Women - A Theoretical View" deals with the meaning, definitions of the term empowerment, the dimensions of empowerment, the widespread expansion of this concept of women empowerment in 1980s, and the multiple meanings and interpretations in the 1990s. This chapter gives an importance to the theoretical components of the concept of empowerment.

The seventh chapter deals with "Empowerment of Muslim Women". This chapter traces historically the distortion of muslim women’s rights and privileges through ages which acted contrary to Prophet’s emphasis on women’s education and rights. An attempt is made to trace the causes for disempowerment, and measures towards empowerment. An account is given on such measures namely Women’s human rights education program, International dialogues, Urgent action Alert program, Outreach and Advocacy initiatives. Further, organisations working towards Muslim women empowerment, and the Measures taken in our country.
The eighth chapter deals with "Educated and Empowered Muslim Women". This chapter gives an overview of the factors responsible for empowerment of Muslim women down the ages - ancient, medieval and modern. An account of significant Muslim women in various walks of life such as entrepreneurship, journalism, law, medicine, social work, politics in recent times.

The last chapter forms the conclusion and summary of the study.
References

19. All India Muslim Women's Education Conference, Souvenir, sponsored by The Seethakathi Trust and The All India Islamic Foundation, Chennai, 22 December, 1966.


31. Jaffar, S.M., Education in Muslim India, Muhammad Ahmad for Idarah - I Adbiyat - I, Delhi, 1972.


