CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

And that human can have nothing but what he does. So just as no soul shall carry the burden of any other, the soul shall only benefit from the good that one earns for himself. (Every human being is responsible for his own works.)

- Holy-Quran 53:39

Jabir b. ‘Abdullah (Allah be pleased with them) reported: About his maternal aunt’s work participation, Allah’s Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: Certainly you can pluck (dates) from your palm trees, for perhaps you may give charity or do an act of kindness.

- Holy – Prophet (may peace be upon him)

A working woman has a more interesting life than one who does not work and there is also the charm of a pay-pocket- but she often has to pay a heavy price for all this.

- Manjit Bhatia

"To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”

- Jawaharlal Nehru.
Importance of Women - As a Human Resource

Women who constitute half of the world’s population are not fully harnessed as a human resource. Any society cannot go ahead if 50 per cent of the population does not participate in its developmental activities. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India observed that neglect of women would be criminal since humanity had been deprived of half of the energy and creative talents. Right through history, in all religions and cultures women have been assigned a secondary status.¹ (Shakuntala Balaraman, 1986).

The world wars proved to be a turning point in the history of mankind. The participation of women in the work force started increasing since then. This trend is observed in developing nations.²

In tune with the world wide trend, Indian women are marching towards self-development. In India, women played a secondary role for centuries together. During the colonial rule, women lived a miserable and horrible life in diverse situations.³

Mahatma Gandhi, Father of Indian Nation helped women to find a new dignity in public life, a new place in the national mainstream, a new confidence and a consciousness that they could act against oppression.\textsuperscript{4}

The socio-economic changes that were set in motion in India after independence provided women with better educational and employment opportunities. Besides, a series of laws such as the Special Marriage Act 1954, the Hindu marriage Act 1955, Equal Remuneration Act 1976 passed by the government of India helped to improve the lot of women. Today educated Indian women have made a landmark in the non-conventional fields like consultancy, marketing, advertising, garment exporting, interior decoration, beauty parlours, road and building construction. Women have started coming forward in considerable number in certain spheres of higher category jobs like civil service, judiciary, foreign service, medicine and architecture. In organised sectors like banking, insurance, communication and air transport women's share in employment has recently doubled over the decade and government's intervention played an important role in this regard.\textsuperscript{5}


Role of Women

Women are at the heart of development. They control most of the non-money economy (subsistence agriculture, bearing and rearing children, domestic labour) and take an important part in the money economy (trading, the 'informal sector', wage employment). Everywhere in the world women have two jobs around the home and outside it.

Women are half the world's population, receive one-tenth of the world's income, account for two-thirds of the world's working hours, and own only one-hundredth of the world's property. The process of industrialisation, urbanisation and the increased educational and employment opportunities for women have brought about changes in the traditional attitudes and values of urban women in India.

The role of women in our society even as career women, not to speak of householders, is not insignificant. They have played a significant role in the socio-economic and political development of our country. The old order which confined women to the home as servants, and helpers to their men folk, is being replaced now by a new one in which women increasingly undertake to fulfil many roles, within the home as wives, mothers and home makers and outside it, as partners and co-workers of men in all types of enterprises. The few fortunate women who have the benefits of higher education seem to be quite obvious of
their immense responsibilities for the emancipation of the women in the country side and of the working and middle class families in urban areas. The production side of women's work at home is gradually decreasing leading to a reduction of woman's role at home. Women perceive more and more clearly that if they really want to contribute to the welfare of their family and society the most effective way is to go out of home and earn money.6

Besides, soaring prices and rise in materialism make man work against time in his attempt to survive in the fast changing society, and also to accumulate more and more goods. If he cannot do it alone, his wife has to provide more, either by bringing in a fat dowry or by going out to work. Thus we have a working woman.7.

Today, the state has accepted women's empowerment, and women as active agents participating in their own development. Most of the countries now recognise the need for gender justice and equality. Women can change the nature of power rather than power change the nature of women. Women try to devote most of their time for maintaining their living standard with the help of earnings through employment in urban areas.


Emancipation of women is one of the indicators of economic development and social changes. The position of women in a society is an index of its level of civilisation. Women constitute one half of the population, that is one half of the country's human resources. Apart from the fact that they constitute one half of the country's 'man power', women play an important role in shaping the personalities of the nations’ young human resources.\(^8\)

The position of women has changed not only in the sphere of marriage and family but also in the spheres of education, employment and political life. Women's employment has an important role in women's empowerment. Employing of women particularly in the organised sector ensures better living conditions for herself and her family.

If women are to empower themselves they have to be provided with wholesome opportunities and rights, access to basic civic amenities, right to education, right to earn a livelihood, right to equal wages, right to question, and fight justice, right to decision-making to live way they want, protection against violence and injustice to them. They need the strength to free themselves from the oppressive and dependent conditions of living. If national development and women's development have to be purposive and relevant, women have to be equal partners with men. The powerful and deep rooted cultural forces, outdated value

---

systems, discriminatory socialisation process, and oppressive social structural forces that obstruct such an access need to be confronted and reversed.

Women have achieved only limited access to some fields of life. More often they are the implementers of decisions, and not the decision makers for their own cause or any other related cause. They are under constant pressure on the home front and at the work place. The dual roles and responsibilities have resulted in a lot of tension, stress and strain for the women. They are therefore hard pressed in finding time to devote to themselves and their own personality development.

At present, women occupy positions in every field of activity, and command honour and respect similar to men. Thus it may be understood that some of the sociological, economic, and psychological characterization of women have been changed because of education and employment.⁹ (Murali Manohar, 1989).

Mahatma Gandhi referred to women as the nobler sex. According to him, "If she is weak in striking, she is strong in suffering." In Indian society, the women are visualised in two extreme positions. On the one side, Indian women are celebrated as 'Sakthi', the source of power. On the other side, from the sociological set up, women are being considered as the weaker sex and hence they

are left with closed commitments only. In modern society women are said to be equal to men. The actual situation is far from this. The fact is that in modern society women constitute the disadvantaged, if not depressed, section. Irrespective of their social status, women play a very active role in the economic activity either as workers, or as producers of various goods and services or in the domestic side as house-maids.

Indian women are patient in nature and do have the capacity to accept everything. Normally they do have more confidence in the male members of the family. Our culture makes them good subordinates and executors of decisions made by the male members. Moreover in general women are capable of working hard physically on all occasions and mostly at all ages. The women's uplift depends upon two requisites, self-reliance and economic independence. Women's participation in the economic activity is important for their personal advancement and improvement of their status in society. Women must join the labour force of the country on an equal footing with men and get integrated into the system.

Strandt said that, 'setting resources into women's hands, integrating women in the wage labour force and securing female rights to enable and empower women for other actions are deemed significant in themselves". Urbanisation, higher education, recognition of talents and abilities and meaningful employment have provided women with new avenues to express and assert themselves. The
rural women have been working for a living in the fields alongside of their men. The middle class Indian working women in the cities have stepped out in search of economic gains as well as the fulfillment of their personal hopes and desires. Now, it is admissible even for married women to take up gainful employment. The upper and middle class women are finding a purpose in their lives. Women with education and employment make a mark for themselves in society by the flowering of their personality while retaining their essential womanliness. Their mental orientation is more prepared than a typical household. In the event of working outside, the traditional division of labour has been rearranged to meet the situation.  

Educational, political, economic and social changes have changed women’s status, their roles and way of life. But this could also change their feminine character a little. Indeed they work, but they work for the family that too for financial reasons. They work to support their family. The working women, on the whole, never sought to sublimate or bypass the demands of family life. Rather their homes and families have either come first, or have stood at par with their work.

This role is very significant, as far as the art of maintaining a stable family life and thereby a stable society is concerned.

---

1.3 Women Workforce in the Labour Market

Traditionally women's occupational status has always been closely associated with the home and family. She has only a secondary status because she is economically dependent on her father or husband. 11.

In order to improve the status and position of women at home and in the society at large, it is necessary to achieve economic independence for women.

Freedom depends on economic condition even more than political. If a woman is not economically free, without self-employment and self-earnings she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependants are never free. 12

For a woman, an opportunity to productive work is not merely a means to higher income but also to self respect, to the development of her personality and to a sense of participation in the common cause of the society. The low status of women in large segments of Indian society cannot be raised without the opening up of opportunity of independent employment and income.


Economic independence makes women conscious of their rights. By working outside the home and coming into contact with other people they have broadened their outlook and mental horizon.\textsuperscript{13}

The image of women in society is fast changing. But it is difficult to define clearly the changing shape of the image. One thing is clear; women are entering the labour force in a large number.\textsuperscript{14}

Employment is considered to be an important indicator of women's achievements in the economic sphere. In the organised and industrial sectors employment of women has gone up rapidly. A similar increase could be seen in the unorganised sectors which are outside the reach of public regulation, labour laws and other forms of public control. They are employed in considerable numbers in public services in several countries. They are employed in all services not in the same proportion as that of western countries.

The labour force participation rates particularly of women and teenagers are very sensitive to the general level economic activity. The impact of economic conditions on female labour force participation can take two forms. In times of economic downturn, the wife or other members of the household may enter the

\textsuperscript{13} Margret Cormack, (1976), \textit{The Hindu Women}, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{14} Devaki Jain, (1975), \textit{Indian Women}, Navajeevan Press, Ahamedabad, p. 74.
labour force to supplement the family income. These additional workers often leave the labour force once the major breadwinner is reemployed on a regular basis. If an employed woman loses her job, and cannot find a new one after a prolonged search, she may become discouraged and leave the labour force. Despite the rapid growth of the female labour force in recent years, women still primarily confine themselves to certain areas and occupations. Women are largely employed in primary sector of the economy. In the secondary and tertiary sectors the female working force is much less as compared to male employed in transport, storage and communications.\textsuperscript{15}

The phrase 'working women' is generally understood to mean women who take up jobs usually outside the home, the work being mostly of a remunerative nature. The term is however a misnomer in so far as it implies that the housewife is not a 'working woman'. It is indeed surprising that housewives all over the world have not taken exception to this usage.\textsuperscript{16}

Women are employed in all fields. They are shouldering official, family and social burdens. While working in the mixed group, there is a need to keep up with the status, which can be higher, compared with non-working housewives.


Working women can be defined as the employed women ranging from those who are employed in small scale industries and organisation to those who, possess ownership, and authority in organizations, in government, private and quasi-government.\textsuperscript{17}

Working women could be brought under three categories on socio-economic basis. The first category includes agricultural workers and those engaged in traditional menial services, construction work and domestic works such as cleaning, cooking and washing.

The second category mostly consists of those women who work in offices or in factories. They can be called the blue-collar women workers.

The third category of women workers are well educated. They are quite well off in life. They have both vertical and horizontal mobility.\textsuperscript{18}

The employment of women under the next three types of industries, electricity, gas and water supply, construction and trade and commerce reveal a downward trend.

\textsuperscript{17}Lawrence Marry (1996), “Status of Working Women”, \textit{Kisan World}, Vol. 23, No.12, December, p. 34.

These three categories of industries seem to provide the largest avenue of employment to women job-seekers in India. Under the division of transport, storage and, commerce, there was a substantial increase both in the number of workers as well as in their proportion.

The majority of women under these divisions takes up the white collar jobs and work as clerks, typists, stenos, telephone operators, secretaries, assistants etc. Women workers are preferred in these jobs because of their submissive docile nature. They do not, in general, take active part in strikes and other trade union activities. This is an important feature of women workers.

1.4 The Status of Women in Islam

1.4.1. Women in Ancient Civilization

Describing the status of the Indian women, Encyclopedia Britannica states “In India, subjection was a cardinal principle. Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence says Manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is descent traced through males to the exclusion of females”.

In Hindu scriptures, the description of a good wife is as follows: “A woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, acquires high renown in this world, and, in the next, the same abode with her husband.”
In Athens, women were not better off than either the Indian or the Roman women. “Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male – to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin. Her consent in marriage was not generally thought to be necessary and “she was obliged to submit to the wishes of her parents, and receive from them her husband and her lord, even though he were a stranger to her”.

A Roman wife was described by an historian as: “A babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband’.

In the Encyclopedia Britannica, we find a summary of the legal status of women in the Roman civilization: In Roman Law a woman was even in historic times completely dependent. If married she and her property passed into the power of her husband ... the wife was the purchased property of her husband, and like a slave acquired only for his benefit. A woman could not exercise any civil or public office could not be a witness, surety, tutor, or curator; she could not adopt or he adopted, or makes will or contract. Among the Scandinavian races women were: under perpetual tutelage, whether married or unmarried.

According to the English Common Law, “... all real property which a wife held at the time of a marriage became a possession of her husband. He was entitled to the rent from the land and to any profit which might be made from
operating the estate during the joint life of the spouses. As time passed, the English courts devised means to forbid a husband’s transferring real property without the consent of his wife, but he still retained the right to manage it and to receive the money which it produced. As to a wife’s personal property, the husband’s power was complete. He had the right to spend it as he saw fit.

Only by the late nineteenth Century did the situation start to improve. “By a series of acts starting with the Married Women’s Property Act in 1870, amended in 1882 and 1887, married women achieved the right to own property and to enter contracts on a par with spinsters, widows, and divorcees”. As late as the Nineteenth Century an authority in ancient law, Sir Henry Maine, wrote: “No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the Middle Roman Law”.19

1.5. Women in Islam

In the midst of the darkness that engulfed the world, the divine revelation echoed in the wide desert of Arabia with a fresh, noble, and universal message to humanity: “O Mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a

single soul and from it created its mate (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women”. (Qur’an 4:1).

A scholar who pondered about this verse states: “It is believed that there is no text, old or new, that deals with the humanity of the woman from all aspects with such amazing brevity, eloquence, depth and originally as this divine decree”.

Stressing this noble and natural conception, the Qur’an states:

He (God) it is who did create you from a single soul and there from did create his mate, that he might dwell with her (in love)... (Qur’an 7:189).

The creator of heavens and earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves … (Qur’an 42:11).

And Allah has given you mates of your own nature, and has given you from your mates, children and grandchildren, and has made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of God that they disbelieve? (Qur’an 16:72).

The Social Aspect

(a) As a child and an Adolescent

Despite the social acceptance of female infanticide among some Arabian tribes, the Qur’an forbade this custom, and considered it a crime like any other
murder. “And when the female (infant) is buried alive – is questioned, for what crime she was killed” (Qur’an 81:8-9).

Criticizing the attitudes of such parents who reject their female children, the Qur’an states: “When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of ) a female (child), his face darkness and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance) and contempt, or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on (Qur’an 16:58-59).

Far from saving the girl’s life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment for her. Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad in this regard are the following:

“Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise.” (Ibn Hanbal, 1957).

“Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the day of judgement as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together)”.

A similar Hadeedh deals in like manner with one who supports two sisters. (Ibn-Hanbal, No.2104). The right of females to seek knowledge is not different from that of males. Prophet Muhammad (P) said: “Seeking knowledge is
mandatory for every Muslim”. (Al-Bayhaqi) Muslim as used here including both males and females.

(b) As a Wife

The Qur’an clearly indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves of the society, and that its objectives, besides perpetuating human life, are emotional well-being and spiritual harmony. Its bases are love and mercy. Among the most impressive verses in the Qur’an about marriage is the following:

“And among His sings is this: That He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are sings for people who reflect” (Qur’an 30:21).

According to Islamic Law, women cannot be forced to marry any without their consent. Ibn Abbas reported that, a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammad and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice … (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it). (Ibn Hanbal No.2469). In another version, the girl said: “Actually I accept this marriage but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)” (Ibn Maja, No.1873).
Besides all other provisions for her protection at the time of marriage, it was specifically decreed that woman has the full right to her Mahr, a marriage gift, which is presented to her by her husband and is included in the nuptial contract, and that such ownership does not transfer to her father or husband. The concept of Mahr in Islam is neither an actual or symbolic price for the woman, as was the case in certain cultures, but rather it is a gift symbolizing love and affection. The rules for married life in Islam are clear and in harmony with upright human nature. In consideration of the physiological and psychological make-up of man and woman, both have equal rights and claims on one another, except for one responsibility, that of leadership. This is a matter which is natural in any collective life and which is consistent with the nature of man. The Qur'an thus states: “And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them” (Qur’an 2:228).

Such degree is Quiwama (maintenance and protection). This refers to that natural difference between the sexes which entitles the weaker sex to protection. It implies no superiority or advantage before the law. Yet, man’s role of leadership in relation to his family does not mean the husband’s dictatorship over his wife. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions. The Qur’an gives us an example: “… If they (husband wife) desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation, there is no blame on them” (Qur’an 2:233).
Over and above her basic rights as a wife comes the right which is emphasized by the Qur’an and is strongly recommended by the Prophet (P), kind treatment and companionship. The Qur’an states: “O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit what the women leave behind, against their will. You shall not force them to give up anything you had given them, unless they commit a proven adultery. You shall treat them nicely. If you dislike them, you may dislike something wherein GOD has placed a lot of good” (Qur’an 4:19).

Prophet Mohammad (P) said: The best of you is the best to his family and I am the best among you to my family. The most perfect believes are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives (Ibn-Hanbal, No.7396). Behold, many women came to Muhammad’s wives complaining against their husbands (because they beat them) … those (husbands) are not the best of you.

As the woman’s right to decide about her marriage is recognized, so also her right to seek an end for an unsuccessful marriage is recognized. To provide for the stability of the family, however, and in order to protect it from hasty decisions under temporary emotional stress, certain steps and waiting periods should be observed by men and women seeking divorce. Considering the relatively more emotional nature of women, a good reason for asking for divorce should be brought before the judge. Like the man, however, the woman can
divorce her husband without resorting to the court, if the nuptial contract allows that. More specifically, some aspects of Islamic Law concerning marriage and divorce are interesting and are worthy of separate treatment. When the continuation of the marriage relationship is impossible for any reason, men are still taught to seek a gracious end for it. The Qur’an states about such cases: “When you divorce women, and they reach their prescribed term, then retain them in kindness and retain them not for injury so that you transgress (the limits) (Qur’an 2:231).

c) As a mother

Islam considered kindness to parents next to the worship of God: “And we have enjoined upon man (to be good) to his parents: His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness ...” (Qur’an 31:14).

Moreover, the Qur’an has a special recommendation for the good treatment of mothers: “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him, and that you be kind to your parents ...” (Qur’an 17:23).

A man came to Prophet Muhammad (P) asking: O Messenger of God, who among the people is the most worthy of my good company? The Prophet (P) said, Your mother. The man said then who else: The Prophet (P) said, your mother.
The man asked, then who else? Only then did the Prophet (P) say, your father. (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

A famous saying of the Prophet is “Paradise is at the feet of mothers”. (In Ibn Majah, Ahmad) “It is the generous (in character) who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them”.

3. The Economic Aspect

Islam decreed a right of which woman was deprived both before Islam and after it (even as late as this century), the right of independent ownership. According to Islamic Law, woman’s right to her money, real estate, or other properties is fully acknowledged. This right undergoes no change whether she is single or married. She retains her full rights to buy, sell, mortgage or lease any or all her properties. It is nowhere suggested in the Law that a woman is a minor simply because she is a female. It is also noteworthy that such right applies to her properties before marriage as well as to whatever she acquires thereafter.

With regard to the woman’s right to seek employment it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither maids nor baby-sitters can possibly take the mother’s place as the educator of an upright, complex free, and carefully-reared children. Such a noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations,
cannot be regarded as “idleness”. However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit her nature and in which society needs her most. Examples of these professions are nursing, teaching (especially for children), and medicine. Moreover there is no restriction on benefiting from woman’s exceptional talent in any field. Even for the position of a judge, where there may be a tendency to doubt the woman’s fitness for the post due to her more emotional nature, we find early Muslim scholars such as Abu-Hanifa and Al-Tabary holding there is nothing wrong with it. In addition, Islam restored to woman the right of inheritance, after she herself was an object of inheritance in some cultures. Her share is completely hers and no one can make any claim on it, including her father and her husband.

“Unto men (of the family) belongs a share of that which Parents and near kindred leave, and unto women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be a little or much a determinate share”.

Her share in most cases is one-half the man’s share, with no implication that she is worth half a man! It would seem grossly inconsistent after the overwhelming evidence of woman’s equitable treatment in Islam, which was discussed in the preceding pages, to make such an inference. This variation in inheritance rights is only consistent with the variations in financial responsibilities
of man and woman according to the Islamic Law. Man in Islam is fully responsible for the maintenance of his wife, his children, and in some cases of his needy relatives, especially the females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife’s wealth or because of her access to any personal income gained from work, rent, profit, or any other legal means.

Woman, on the other hand, is far more secure financially and is far less burdened with any claims on her possessions. Her possessions before marriage do not transfer to her husband and she even keeps her maiden name. She has no obligation to spend on her family out of such properties or out of her income after marriage. She is entitled to the “Mahr” which she takes from her husband at the time of marriage. If she is divorced, she may get alimony from her ex-husband. An examination of the inheritance law within the overall framework of the Islamic Law reveals not only justice but also an abundance of compassion for woman.

4. The Political Aspect

Any fair investigation of the teachings of Islam or into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of woman’s equality with man in what we call today “political rights”. This includes the right of election as well as the nomination to political offices. It also included woman’s right to participate in public affairs. Both in the Qur’an and in Islamic history we find
examples of women who participated in serious discussions and argued even with the Prophet (P) himself (Qur’an 58:14 and 60:10-12).

According to Islam, the head of the state is no mere figurehead. He leads people in the prayers, especially on Fridays and festivities; he is continuously engaged in the process of decision-making pertaining to the security and well-being of his people. This demanding position, or any similar one, such as the Commander of the Army, is generally inconsistent with the physiological and psychological make-up of woman in general. It is a medical fact that during their monthly periods and during their pregnancies, women undergo various physiological and psychological changes. Such changes may occur during an emergency situation, thus affecting her decision, without considering the excessive strain which is produced. Moreover, some decisions require a maximum of rationality and a minimum of emotionality – a requirement which does not coincide with the instinctive nature of women.\(^\text{20}\)

Today the Muslim Ummah is faced with the challenge of restoring a pure, just Islam and re-establishing its laws and precepts in Muslim lands, by as law, and eliminating the influence that caused our societies to decline, and the status of Muslim women to decay. For years Islam has been charged with the injustices that have been suffered by Muslim women, yet the truth is becoming increasingly

\(^{20}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp.5-6.}\)
apparent: these injustices have resulted from the imposition of colonialist laws, and from the inadequacies and deficiencies of other faiths and cultures.  

1.6. Muslim Women in India

Stereotyping is usually a necessary precondition for social discrimination, and all the more so when various social and cultural realities are sought to be hardened into “identities”. That is probably why, over the past decade especially, certain stereotypes have been systematically developed about the minority communities (especially Muslims, but also Christians).

In such a context, it is refreshing to come across a study that seeks to go beyond the sociological veil spread by a focus on purdah, and actually examines the conditions faced by different categories of Muslim women in the country. A new book by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon  presents the results of a national survey covering around 10,000 Muslim and Hindu women. This is the first such survey of this magnitude, covering the whole country, and obviously therefore, the findings deserve attention. But perhaps even more interesting than the results themselves are the insights that are drawn into the interplay of various factors that determine the conditions of Muslim women’s lives.


Of course, there are some easily predictable conclusions, especially with respect to economic status. The low socio-economic status of Muslims is now well known; like the scheduled castes, they are disproportionately represented among the poor and have the lowest per capita income indicators. This is ascribed not only to the lack of access to asset ownership, but also to poor educational attainment and occupational patterns, which show clustering in low-paid activities, as well as the concentration of the Muslim population in the economically backward regions of the country.

The economic differentiation constitutes probably the primary source of differentiation in status between Muslim and Hindu women in the aggregate, since the household’s level of assets ownership, occupation and income possibilities critically determine the basic conditions of life of the women. However, there are significant regional differences in this; Muslims are generally poor in the north (especially rural areas) and the east, but less so in the south.

But other findings of the study are much less predictable, and do much to demolish the damaging stereotypes that are so widely purveyed about Muslim women.

One of the standard assumptions about Muslim women is that religion prevents them from getting more equal access to education. It is certainly true that Muslim women are more likely to be illiterates than Hindu women (in the
survey, 59 per cent had never attended school and less than 10 per cent had completed school). However, the study shows that this is essentially the result of low socio-economic status, rather than religion. Across the survey, among all communities and caste groups, financial constraints and gender bias dominate over other factors in determining level of education. Indeed, in those regions where Muslims are better off (as in the south and to a lesser extent in the west), Muslim women also have higher levels of education.

However, two other features that are specific to the Muslim community may have operated to devalue continuing education for girls. The first is that Muslim men also have very low educational attainment in general. The study found that 26 per cent of educated Muslim women had illiterate husbands. This low male education level would create further pressures to impose ceilings on girls’ education, so as not be rendering them “unmarriageable”. In addition, the low age of marriage is a major inhibiting factor. At the national level, the mean age of marriage of Muslim girls is very low at 15.6 years, and in the rural north it falls to an appalling 13.9 years.

Low marriage age has a number of other adverse implications: It is usually associated with high early fertility, which affects women’s nutrition and health status; it tends to reduce women’s autonomy and agency in the marital home and
to create conditions of patriarchal sub-service that get perpetuated through life, and it thereby often reduces self-worth.

This, in turn, may affect women’s work participation in direct and indirect ways. It is well known that work participation of Muslim women is very low, but the study indicates that this may be less due to the force of religion per se than to the patriarchal structures and patterns as well as low mobility and lack of opportunity that define their lives. It is worth noting that work participation rate of women across communities tends to be low in certain regions, especially in the north and the east.

Some of this is due to straightforward control over women’s agency by male members of the household. Seventy five per cent of the women in the survey (both Hindu and Muslim) reported that they need permission from their husbands to work outside the home. Interestingly, the study revealed that across the board women in India tend to have relatively less autonomy of decision-making within the household.

Less than 10 per cent of the respondents took any decisions on their own in major or minor matters, and among the 30 per cent who took decisions jointly with their husbands, Muslim women reported greater consultation than Hindus for all categories of decisions. Clearly, however, patriarchal control remains one
important constraint upon the outside work of women, among Muslims as well as
certain other social categories.

But in addition, most of the outside work that the representative Muslim
to falls in the lowest paid and most exploited categories of
labour. Such activities – self-employed in low-productivity activities in the
informal sector, as casual labourers and domestic servants – imply poor working
conditions and low wages. It is, therefore, possible that Muslim women are kept
out of the paid workforce not only by religious or purdah type motivations, but
perhaps more significantly by low education, lack of opportunity, low mobility
and the inability to delegate domestic responsibilities. 23

1.7. Muslim Women’s Work Participation in India

According to the 2001 Census, Muslim constitutes 13.4 per cent of India’s
population. Indeed, India has the second largest Muslim population in the world.
Table 1.1 shows; population of Muslim is steadily increasing, as unadjusted
growth rate increased from 22.9 per cent to 36 per cent during 1981-2001. Sex
ratio among Muslim population at national level is 936 which are just above the
national average of 933 for all religions. It probably presents that the position of
women has worsened considerably, a decline in the sex ratio due to absolute

23Ibid., p.3.
condition of health and survival for women. What it means is that the gap between male and female survival may have increased.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{TABLE 1.1}

\textbf{POPULATION AND PROPORTION OF MUSLIM POPULATION BY SEX, SEX RATIO, PERCENTAGE INCREASE, INDIA 1981-2001}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Education is an indispensable means for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery because economic dependency is another factor contributing to the low status of women. As per 2001 Census, literacy rate for the population age of 7 years and above in the country as a whole stands at 64.8 per cent. Muslim literacy rate is lower than the national average literate rate at

\textsuperscript{24}Nahid Sarikhani, “Muslim Women’s Work Participation in India”, \textit{Journal of Social Science}, Vol.17(3), 2008, pp.219-222.
59.1 per cent. In the rural areas, literacy rate is 52.7 per cent and in the urban areas it is 70.1 per cent in India (Census of India, 2001).

TABLE 1.2
LITERATES RATE OF MUSLIM BY RESIDENCE, SEX, INDIA - 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Literates</th>
<th>Illiterates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39248081</td>
<td>27148553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>67.60</td>
<td>50.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>22624881</td>
<td>14742834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>62.30</td>
<td>42.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>16623200</td>
<td>12405719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>76.30</td>
<td>63.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Also, of the total Muslim population age of 7 years and over, 40.9 per cent are illiterates. This rate in rural areas (47.3 per cent) exceeds the urban areas (29.9 per cent). In addition, the figures at Table 1.2 has shown, rate among the Muslim women 49.9 per cent is higher than the Muslim men (32.40 per cent) and this pattern, similarly blinks among rural areas (male is 37.7 and female is 57.3 per cent) and urban areas (male is 23.7 per cent and female is 36.80 per cent). The statistics above indicate Muslim women have not been able to take full advantage in the society.
As a matter of fact, available literature indicates that there is a close relationship between the spread of female education on the one hand and the development status on the other. As Safia Iqbal (1986) says in her book (women and Islamic law the greatest problems discerned by the Muslim women are that women lack proper knowledge of their faith, and that this is why Muslim men sometimes mistreat their women.25

**TABLE 1.3**

WORK PARTICIPATION RATE OF MUSLIM POPULATION BY SEX, SEX RATIO, AND RESIDENCE: INDIA, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>43296093</td>
<td>33886213</td>
<td>9409880</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>78.30</td>
<td>21.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>29151524</td>
<td>21559619</td>
<td>7591905</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>74.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Areas</td>
<td>14144569</td>
<td>12326594</td>
<td>1817975</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87.10</td>
<td>12.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


25A. Sharma, Women in Indian Religions, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.
The work participation rate is defined as percentage of total worker (main and marginal) to total population. This is often considered as a very crude measure since this does not take into account the age structure of the population.

According to the Census of 2001, in India of the total population of 138,188,240 the number of Muslim returned as workers is 43,396,093. In other words, 31.3 per cent of the Muslim populations of India constitute workers. Of these workers, 33,886,213 are males and 9409880 are females (Table 1.3), sex ratio in between them are 278, in order words; the 2001 Census has recorded a Muslim working population sex ratio of 278 Muslim women per 1000 Muslim males. A majority of Muslim workers (21,559,619) in the country are employed in the rural areas, primarily as labourers and cultivators and the number of Muslim women is 7,591,905. Sex ratio of Muslim women workers has risen in rural areas (352) compared to the whole country (278). Of course, in urban areas, it is the other way round.
### TABLE 1.4

WORK PARTICIPATION RATE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES BY SEX:

**INDIA - 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India /States / Union Territories</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jammu &amp; Kashmir</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daman &amp; Diu</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadra &amp; Nagar Haveli</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharshtara</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshadweep</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondicherry</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anadaman &amp; Nicobar Islands</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Population figures for India and Manipur exclude those of Mao Maram, Paomata and Pural subdivisions of Senapati district of Manipur.
According to Table 1.4, the highest work participation rate of Muslim women over 30 per cent has been returned from Himachal Pradesh (32.9 per cent) and Mizoram (37.9 per cent). The lowest work participation rate of Muslim women less 10 per cent has been recorded in 9 states and Union Territories. The rest of the work participation rate of Muslim women of over 10 per cent to 20 per cent has been recorded in 21 states and Union Territories. In general, with regard to the above data, there exists a wide gap between the work participation rates of males and female.

**TABLE 1.5**

**WORK PARTICIPATION RATE OF MUSLIM POPULATION BY CATEGORY OF WORK, SEX, INDIA, 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Total Workers</th>
<th>Cultivators</th>
<th>Agricultural Labourers</th>
<th>Household Industry Workers</th>
<th>Other Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43296093</td>
<td>8979686</td>
<td>9545976</td>
<td>3520467</td>
<td>21249964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>22.10</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>49.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33886213</td>
<td>6910438</td>
<td>6645706</td>
<td>1708121</td>
<td>18621948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>19.60</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9409880</td>
<td>2069248</td>
<td>2900270</td>
<td>1812346</td>
<td>2628016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>30.80</td>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>27.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, results have shown, of the total Muslim women population of 66,814,106, the number of Muslim women recorded as housewives is 57,404,226 or 85.90 per cent, and only 14.10 per cent of Muslim women are workers. The statistics in the rural and urban areas are 17.5 per cent and 7.7 per cent respectively. Table 1.5 shows that a majority of Muslim women workers in India are employed in the rural areas, primarily as agricultural labourers and cultivators. In the urban areas, a part of the Muslim women workers are employed in the unorganised sector, i.e., in household industries, petty trades and services, buildings and construction etc.

In general, results have indicated that there exists a wide gap between the work participation rate of males and females. Considering the social situation of Muslim women in India, we should implement proper programmes aimed at improving the awareness level of Muslim women about equal status of women with men. This belief is translated into actual practice through several institutions, customs and practices. It is essential to implement legislations that protect Muslim women’s rights by advertisement, plays, films, etc.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26} Nahid Sarikhani, \textit{op.cit.}, 2008.
1.8 Statement of the Problem

Women who constitute half of the world’s population are not fully harnessed as a human resource. Any society cannot go ahead if 50 per cent of the population does not participate in its developmental activities. Right through history, in all religious and cultures, women have been assigned a secondary status. The world wars proved to be turning points in the history of mankind. The participation of women in the work force started increasing since them. This trend is observed in developing nations. In tune with the worldwide trend, Indian women are marching towards self-development.

The socio-economic changes that were set in motion in India after Independence provided women with better education and greater employment opportunities. Today educated Indian women have made a landmark in both conventional and non-conventional fields. In the case of Islamic women, the religion prevents them from getting equal access to education and work participation. It is well known that the work participation of Islamic women is very low more due to the force of religion per se than the patriarchal structures and patterns as well as low mobility and lack of opportunity. It is worth noticing that the work participation rate of Islamic women tends to increase in recent times. The position of Muslim woman has changed not only in the sphere of marriage and family but also in the spheres of education, employment and
political life. Women’s employment particularly in the case of Islamic women has an important role in women’s empowerment. Hence, the present study is an attempt to analyse the nature of women workforce, particularly that of Islamic women in Madurai of Tamil Nadu region with the following specific objectives.

1.9 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study area:

1. To study the socio-economic background of Islamic women and relationship with the familiar characteristics.

2. To examine the variation in income of the women working in public and private sectors.

3. To assess the contribution of the respondent’s income towards family income and quality of work life.

4. To analyse the extent to which work participation of women empowers them in socio-economic and decision making.

5. To analyse and compare the work-family conflict of women employees in public and private sectors.
1.10 Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no variation in income among the women workers in public and private, central and state, and industry and service sectors.

2. There is no difference in the perception of quality of work life and job satisfaction between women workers in public and private sectors.

3. There is no difference in women’s empowerment between public and private sector women employees.

1.11 Limitation of the Study

The study is restricted to Madurai region where the female working population is sufficient in number for the study purpose and belongs to different sectors. Though a number of governmental organisations are functioning in Madurai region, the researcher has selected women employees working in state and central governments or public sector, and industrial and service departments of the private sector. As Madurai region is an industrialised area, the researcher studied the private industrial units that employed Islamic female workers. Hence, the results of the present study are to be viewed with the above limitations.
1.12 Chapter Scheme

The study is organized in seven chapters.

Chapter I introduces the subject, status of women in Islam, women in ancient civilization, Muslim women in India, Muslim women and work participation, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, hypotheses, limitations and chapter scheme.

Chapter II reviews the earlier studies relating to women working in organized sector. And further the theoretical perspectives of women labour participation are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter III describes methodology adopted and the profile of the study area.

Chapter IV analyses the characteristics of the sample women employees, the relationship between the characteristics of women employees and their familial characteristics and women workers’ contribution towards family income.

Chapter V explains the work-family conflict, quality of work life and job satisfaction. Further it examines the inter-correlation among work-family conflict variables and assesses the contribution of independent variables to work-family conflict.
Chapter VI deals with work participation of women and empowerment of women through decision making. The factors which influence the empowerment of women are also analysed.

Chapter VII presents the summary of findings along with conclusion and suggestions based on the study.