Chapter – II

EMPOWERMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW

Gender issues in Muslim societies are as relevant as in any other society. Deviations apart, fundamental teachings of Quran do not accept any difference between one human baby (boy and another girl). The earning capacity of individual differs but each person should strive hard to increase his or her capacity to earn “The Quran clearly states that men shall have what they earn and women shall have whatever they earn... allah has knowledge of all things” Every human being has and identity of his own and plays an important role in all spheres of life. Any population is an aggregate of individuals and, a as such, is reflection of the sum total of their physical, social, economic and political traits. While age and sex are the physiological features responsible for the productivity and reproductively of any person, the acquired attributes of education and skills make one an economic producer. The sublime aspects of life, like religion, though personal and imperceptible, leave a great impact on the sociological configuration of any population.

A study of the religious composition of a population aggregate can lead to a great insight into many aspects of the society of the region where that group is residing. Indians are generally religious in their behaviour, yet on that count, there prevail varieties of beliefs, rituals, customs and practices. These diversities and varieties have given them distinguishable identities and traits. The Census of India, giving cognisance to these characteristics, obtains data for such population traits too. Muslims and Islam have influenced the way of life of the Indians to a Considerable extent. The Muslim Community is
so widespread in India that there is no district in the county which does not have Muslim population in it. Even though there are instances of Hindu-Muslim riots in several parts of the country, both the communities have maintained on the whole, cordial relations. Both of them took active part in the struggle for Independence and fought shoulder to shoulder to shoulder though, at the end, the shortsighted leadership misguided the masses, leading to unwanted partition and bloodshed consequent upon in.

There is ample evidence to an exchange of ideas between the Hindus and the Muslim. Early settlers from the Middle East studied Sanskrit literature, while Arabic and Persian contributed a lot to the enrichment of the Indian languages, especially in the development of Urdu and Hindi. Music was a common thread binding both the communities, and Hindu ‘Pandits’ and Muslim ‘Ustads’ have both joined hands for its advancement. There is a lot of common ground in religious philosophy and moral values. The Hindu ‘Brahme’ and Muslim ‘Allah’ are both eternal and do not possess shape, size or material qualities, both the religions have respect for women.

2.1 Status, Autonomy and the Relevance of Context
Jejeebhoy’s (1997) study, which compared Tamil Nadu, one of India’s southern states, with Uttar Pradesh, a northern state, offers some more basic insights into this relationship between structure and individual. Her study explored the effects of a range of variables on women’s autonomy, some of which reflected factors traditionally associated with female status (such as number of children and, more specifically, number of sons; co-residence with mother-in-law, size of dowry) as well as education and waged employment, variables associated with the modernization paradigm. Measures of women’s autonomy included their role in decision making, mobility, incidence of domestic violence, access to economic resources and control over economic resources. Predictably, women in Tamil Nadu fared better on most indicators of autonomy than women in Uttar Pradesh.
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However, she also found that what helped to explain women’s autonomy varied by region. In general, the traditional factors conferring status on women the number of sons they bore, the size of their dowry and nuclear family residence were more closely linked with the female autonomy indicators in the restrictive context of Uttar Pradesh than they were in the more egalitarian context of Tamil Nadu.

In Uttar Pradesh, women who had brought large dowries to their marriages, who lived in nuclear families and who produced sons were far more likely to report a greater role in household decision making, and greater freedom from domestic violence, than were other women. While female employment also had significant and positive implications for most of the autonomy indicators in Uttar Pradesh, education had a far weaker and less significant impact. In Tamil Nadu, however, the effects of these more traditional status-related variables were far weaker; and female employment and, even more strongly, female education were both far more consistently related to women’s autonomy.

There is evidence, for instance, that women in northern states (such as Uttar Pradesh) are far more likely to express strong son preference than those in southern states such as Tamil Nadu (Dyson and Moore, 1983). The apparently voluntary nature of such choices should not detract our attention from their consequences. If empowerment is simply equated with a decision-making role and control over household resources, then having sons and bringing in a large dowry would be considered conducive to women’s empowerment. Yet dowry simultaneously expresses and reinforces son preference, and transforms daughters into financial liabilities for their parents. Both dowry and son preference are central to the values and practices through which women are socially defined as a subordinate category in a state with some of the starkest indicators of gender discrimination on the Indian subcontinent.
Second, Jejeebhoy’s finding that women’s waged employment had a more marked effect in Uttar Pradesh than did their education in their role in household decision making and access to intrahousehold resources, but that both were important in Tamil Nadu, takes us back to the importance of knowing what access means in relation to different resources and in different contexts. While both education and waged work are considered to promote women’s agency in various ways, they are differently acquired and represent different kinds of resources. Women’s education is the product of the parental decision to invest in daughters, but their participation in the labour market is a more direct reflection of their own agency. In addition, both forms of access are likely to have very different implications in different contexts.

2.2 Muslims Women in India: A Critical Analysis

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 minority communities (especially Muslims and also Christians). So Muslim society, for example, is presented as having a monolithic and undifferentiated character, and Muslim personal law is seen as the defining feature of the lives of Muslims in India. Such typecasting is especially prevalent with respect to Muslim women, who are usually presented as forming a homogenous, undifferentiated group that is so oppressed by the combined effect of polygamy, purdah and triple talaq that it is rendered almost invisible. 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 ("Unequal Citizens: Muslim women in India", New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) 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 Scheduled Castes, they are disproportionately represented among the poor and have the lowest per capita income indicators. This is ascribed not only to 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.

This 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 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 illiterate 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 levels of education. Indeed, in those regions where Muslims are better off (as in the south and to a lesser extent in the west), there Muslim women also have higher levels of education.

However, two other features which are more 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 to render them “unmarriageable”. In addition, the low age of marriage is a major inhibiting factor. For All-India, 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 subservience 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 the 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 the work participation rate of women across communities tends to be low in certain regions, in the north and east especially. Some of this is due to straightforward control over women’s agency by male members of the household. 75 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 woman has access 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. In terms of domestic violence - which is widely recognised to be increasing in India - the incidence cuts across caste, class and community. The survey finds that over 50 per cent of the reported violence (which may of course be different from the actual incidence of violence) is among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes households, who also happen to be the poorest of the poor. Muslim women come in third (after Other Backward Castes) at 18 per cent. What is possibly more significant is that husbands were identified as the primary perpetrators in more than 80 per cent of cases (Muslim Women in India, Jayati Ghosh, September 17, 2004).

Islam attaches great value to education and prescribes it as the duty of a woman as well as that of a man to acquire knowledge. According to Ilse Lichtenstadter (n.d.: 141), “fundamentally it (Islam)
has always considered learning at least a useful accessory to being a good Muslim. ..” Islam thinks that education is a necessary condition which helps women to develop their faculties. In the words of Mohammed Quth (1964:188), “acquisition of knowledge was as great a duty of woman as of man, for, Islam wanted the womenfolk to develop their rational faculties along with physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence... Mohammed preached to his followers: “knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not, it lights the way to heave, it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude; our companion with benefits of friend in the desert; our society in solitude; our companion with benefits of friends; it guides us to happiness’ ‘ (Gore, Desai and Chitnis, 1967-89), The four things which the Prophet commands the followers to do for their children are: (1) to circumcise them (2) to inform them of the principles of their religion (3) to educate them properly, and (4) to marry them off when they reach the proper age. Thus, we see that in Islam education is given an important position in the life of the people. Though Mohammed favoured Women’s education is actual practice the injunctions of the Quran in this respect were completely ignored. The Muslim Community, as it had misinterpreted many other principles of Islam, also considered the education of girls as an unnecessary step. As a result, ‘a situation developed where Muslim societies are educationally perhaps the most backward in the contemporary world’ (Humayun Kabir, 1969:8) In the absence of education, women in the absence of education, women in the Arab countries were considered inferior to men and consequently their status became exceedingly low. their status began to improve as a result of the spread of education. Berger (1962 : 152) Points out that “emancipation of women the Arab world has proceeded indirectly largely as a consequence of their greater education and freedom to work outside Home, rather than as a result of direct legislation aimed at revolutionizing their status.
The conservatism of parents towards the education of girls, together with the practice of purdah or seclusion and early marriage are the main factors which hinder the educational progress of Muslim women. The respondents’ attitudes in this respect largely correspond with their actual behavior. The comparatively higher educated women in the neighbourhood were respected. They were given differential treatment in social gatherings and their advice was sought on several matters. One of the main things Islam commands a Muslim to do is to teach children the principles of their religion. So, religious education is an imperative for a Muslim, for woman. “These religious precepts have never been overruled by custom and are strictly observed by all classes of Mohammedans in India. It is this religious command that compels Mohammedans to instruct their children in Koran and other religious books” (Government of India. “n.d”: 311). Religious education is an essential part of the education to a Muslim and in many cases his education was limited to religious instruction only. Islam has never ordained against the education of women. On the contrary, the Prophet has emphatically proclaimed that Education should be one of the four important responsibilities of a father towards his children, both male and female.

Dr. Malika Mistry, a Pune-based demographer, focused in her paper on the economic and educational backwardness of Muslims in India, particularly Muslim women. She noted that while the 34.7 per cent of Hindu women were illiterate, the figure for Muslim women was 52.1 per cent. While only 2.7 per cent of Muslim women had studied beyond high school, the corresponding figures for Hindu, Christian, Sikh and Jain women were 11.7 per cent, 16 per cent, 16.6 per cent and 30.5 per cent respectively.

Dr. Mandakini Pant, also of the SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, presented an interesting paper on the Bandheria of Jaipur. These are a group of Muslim women, belonging largely to the Kaimkhani Rajput Muslim community, who depend for their livelihood
on tying knots in cloths for the tie-and-dye handicrafts industry. These women, she pointed out, are desperately poor and, having little bargaining power, are at the mercy of unscrupulous middle-men who pay them just a pittance.

Women in India do not constitute an undifferentiated, homogenous category, yet, little information exists on Indian Muslim women. However, the perception that Muslim women's social status in India can be ascribed to a certain intrinsic, immutable feature of Islam or that their legal status derives solely from reference to Muslim laws is widely prevalent. As a result of this misconception, Muslim women are often considered as 'separate' or 'different' from Indian society, reinforcing cultural stereotypes and obscuring their contemporary realities. Mainstream historical narrative with its emphasis on the rise and fall of the Muslim empire excludes Muslim women. Although Muslim women were generally absent from public life during this period, several women from royalty were authors and poets - or even a Sultan as in the case of Raziya Sultana (Muslim Women in India, Seema Kazi).

The rise of communal politics with its inherent link between politics and religion, privileging 'minority' (or community) interests over gender interests, and the appropriation of Muslim women's experiences and aspirations by a (male) Muslim constituency, rendered the possibility of renegotiating their position vis-a-vis Muslim men even more difficult. Muslim obscurantism coupled with Hindu right-wing prejudice made the possibility of Muslim women raising their concerns harder still, as was seen during the passage of the Muslim Women's Bill in 1986. The Bill subordinated the rights of Muslim women to the demands of community identity, denying them their constitutional rights as Indian citizens. The issue was simultaneously used by the Hindu right-wing to incite anti-Muslim prejudice (Muslim Women in India, Seema Kazi).
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 need 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. In a study of 39 districts in 1981 - where the population of Muslims ranged from 20 per cent to 95 per cent (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 per cent, which was lower than the average of 24.82 per cent for the whole country. Muslims' share in public employment in All-India and Central Services is less than 3 per cent. 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. Equally importantly, it is crucial for members of Muslim communities - Muslim women and men - to introspect and debate among themselves as to the reasons and remedies for their economic vulnerability and poor educational and employment status, and to consider possible remedies. There is also a need for debate and mobilization by Muslim women on legal reform in order to overcome patriarchal structures with Muslim communities. The debate on legal reform is linked to debates on women and Islam. Muslim women in India need to participate in the contemporary debate on Islam and women's rights. It is imperative for Indian Muslim women to reclaim their right to religious knowledge, enter the discourse on the Shari'a and challenge
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their historic marginalization from religious knowledge as well as its discriminatory interpretations (Muslim Women in India, Seema Kazi).

Economist Dr. Abusaleh Shariff, in his paper on ‘Relative Economic and Social Deprivation in India’, pointed out that Muslims were among the most marginalised communities in the country, and that the position of Muslim women was, pathetic. He made the distressing revelation that over the past few years, the enrolment rate in elementary schools among Muslim females in India has actually been witnessing a considerable decline. Dr. Ramala Baxamusa of the Research Centre for Women’s Studies, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, spoke at length on ‘The Economic Status of Muslim Women in Maharashtra’. Based on official data, she showed how Muslim women are in economic and educational terms one of the most backward groups in the entire state. Thus, in rural Maharashtra, 40 per cent of Muslim households are without any land, and 42 per cent had a holding of between .01 to 1.0 hectares only. Only some 25 per cent of rural Maharashtrian Muslim women are literate, and the drop-out rate among them is particularly high. Dr. Baxamusa provided a case study of two projects that have recently been started to impart education to Muslim girls in Maharashtra, and made an analysis of their achievements. These are the Saboo Siddiq Open University Scheme in Mumbai for drop-out girls and women, started in 1997, and the community project run by the Department of Post-Graduate Home Science Studies and Research, SNDT Women’s University, in Gilbert Hill, a Muslim dominated slum in Mumbai.

2.3 Women in Islamic Sharia

Maulana Abul A’La Maududi has made a fine psychological distinction, however, between women looking at men and men looking at women. The man, he says, "...is by nature aggressive. If a thing appeals to him, he is urged from within to acquire it. On the other hand, the woman's nature is one of inhibition and escape. Unless her nature is totally corrupted, she can never become so aggressive, bold
and fearless, as to make the first advances towards the male who has attracted her. In view of this distinction, the Legislator (the Prophet) does not regard a woman’s looking at other men to be as harmful as a man’s looking at other women. In several traditions it has been reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) let Aisha see a performance given by negroes on the occasion of the 'Id. This shows that there is no absolute prohibition on women looking at other men. What is prohibited is for women to sit in the same gathering together with men and stare at them, or look at them in the same manner which may lead to evil results. The Shariah has placed restrictions on men meeting strange women privately. Similarly no other man other than her husband is allowed to touch any part of a woman’s body.

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (one who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).  [Quran 49:13]

2.3.1 Economic Aspects
Her position in early Islam was really an exemplary one, one that should be studied and known by every woman as well as every liberationist in the twentieth century—in America as well as in the Muslim World. The Muslim woman, if she is true to the principles of her religion, has lessons in equality to teach the Westerner, and her descendants in the East have to learn anew the role demanded of them by their religion. Orientalists and orientals zealous for modernization should cease to put the blame on Islam, a blame which instead deserves to fall on their own ignorance of the faith and on the political and social decline which their nations suffered in the past. -- Lois Lamya Al-Faruqi Women, Muslim Society and Islam.
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The Right to Possess Personal Property
One aspect of the world-view of Islam is that everything in heaven and on earth belongs to Allah:

To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. . .
(Quran 2:284)

As such, all wealth and resources are ultimately "owned" by Allah. However, out of Allah's mercy He created mankind to be, collectively, His trustees on earth. In order to help mankind fulfill this trusteeship, he made the universe serviceable to mankind:

And He (Allah) has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold, in that are signs indeed for those who reflect. (Quran 45:13)

It is the human family that is addressed in the above, and in other verses of the Quran. And since that family includes both genders, it follows that the basic right to personal possession of property (as Allah's trustees) applies equally to males and females. More specifically. The Shariah (Islamic Law) recognizes the full property rights of women before and after marriage. They may buy, sell or lease any or all of their properties at will. For this reason, Muslim women may keep (and in fact they have traditionally kept) their maiden names after marriage, an indication of their independent property rights as legal entities.

Financial Security and Inheritance Laws
Financial security is assured for women. They are entitled to receive marital gifts without limit and to keep present and future properties and income for their own security, even after marriage. No married woman is required to spend any amount at all from her property and income on the household. In special circumstances, however, such as when her husband is ill, disabled or jobless, she may find it necessary to spend from her earnings or savings to provide the necessities for her family. While this is not a legal obligation, it is consistent with the
mutuality of care, love and cooperation among family members. The woman is entitled also to full financial support during marriage and during the waiting period (iddah) in case of divorce or widowhood. Some jurists require, in addition, one year's support for divorce and widowhood (or until they remarry, if remarriage takes place before the year is over).

A woman who bears a child in marriage is entitled to child support from the child’s father. Generally, a Muslim woman is guaranteed support in all stages of her life, as a daughter, wife, mother or sister. The financial advantages accorded to women and not to men in marriage and in family have a social counterpart in the provisions that the Quran lays down in the laws of inheritance, which afford the male, in most cases, twice the inheritance of a female. Males inherit more but ultimately they are financially responsible for their female relatives: their wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. Females inherit less but retain their share for investment and financial security, without any legal obligation to spend any part of it, even for their own sustenance food, clothing, housing, medication, etcetera). It should be noted that in pre-Islamic society, women themselves were sometimes objects of inheritance (see Quran 4:19). In some Western countries, even after the advent of Islam, the whole estate of the deceased was given to his/her eldest son. The Quran, however, made it clear that both men and women are entitled to a specified share of the estate of their deceased parents or close relations:

From what is left by parents and those nearest related, there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large—a determinate share.
(Quran 4:7)

Employment

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 her 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 child. Such a noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations, cannot be regarded as "idleness." This may explain why a married woman must secure her husband's consent if she wishes to work, unless her right to work was mutually agreed to as a condition at the time of marriage.

However, there is no decree in Islam that forbids women from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit her nature best and in which society needs her most. Examples of these professions are: nursing, teaching (especially children), medicine, and social and charitable work. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from women's talent in any field. Some early jurists, such as Abu Hanifah and Al-Tabari, uphold that a qualified Muslim woman may be appointed to the position of a judge. Other jurists hold different opinions. Yet, no jurist is able to point to an explicit text in the Quran or Sunnah that categorically excludes women from any lawful type of employment except for the headship of the state, which is discussed in the following chapter. Omar, the second Caliph after the Prophet (P), appointed a woman (Um Al-Shifaa' bint Abdullah) as the marketplace supervisor, a position that is equivalent in our world to "director of the consumer protection department."

2.3.2 Social Aspects
The Quran ended the cruel pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide, word:

*When the female (infant) buried alive is questioned for what crime she was killed (Quran 81:8-9)*

The Quran went further to rebuke the unwelcoming attitude of some parents upon hearing the news of the birth of a baby girl, instead of a baby boy:
When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame he hides 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! (Quran 16:58-59)

Parents are duty-bound to support and show kindness and justice to their daughters. Prophet Muhammad (P) said,

**Whosoever has a daughter and does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, Allah will enter him into Paradise.** (Ahmad)

**Whosoever supports two daughters until they mature, he and I will come on the day of judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together).** (Ahmad)

A crucial aspect in the upbringing of daughters that greatly influences their future is education. Education is not only a right, but a responsibility for all males and females. Prophet Muhammad (P) said, "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim." The word "Muslim" here is inclusive of both males and females.

**As a Wife**

Marriage in Islam is based on mutual peace, love and compassion, and not the mere satisfying of human sexual desire.

*And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are signs for those who reflect. (Quran 30:21)*

*(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is*
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nothing whatever like unto Him and He is the One that hears and sees (all things). (Quran 42:11)

**Marriage and Divorce**

The female has the right to accept or reject marriage proposals. Her consent is a prerequisite to the validity of the marital contract, according to the Prophet's teaching. It follows that if an "arranged marriage" means the marrying of a female without her consent, then such a marriage may be annulled if the female so wishes:

*Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of Allah, 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) (Ahmad, Hadith No.2469).*

*Another version of the report states that "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-Majah).*

The husband is responsible for the maintenance, protection, and overall leadership (qiwamah) of the family, within the framework of consultation and kindness. The mutuality and complementarity of husband and wife does not mean "subservience" by either party to the other. Prophet Muhammad (P) helped with household chores although the responsibilities he bore and the issues he faced in his community were immense.

*The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child, nor father on account of his child. An heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on*
weaning by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If you decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided you pay (the mother) what you offered on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what you do. (Quran 2:233)

Prophet Muhammad (P) instructed Muslims regarding women, "I commend you to be kind to women." He said also, "The best of you is the best to his family (wife). The Quran urges husbands to be kind and considerate to their wives, even if a wife falls out of favor with her husband or disinclination for her arises within him. It also outlawed the pre-Islamic Arabian practice whereby the stepson of the deceased father was allowed to take possession of his father's widow(s) (inherit them) as if they were part of the estate of the deceased:

O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the marital gift you have given them, except when they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them, it may be that you dislike a thing through which Allah brings about a great deal of good. (Quran 4:19)

Should marital disputes arise, the Quran encourages couples to resolve them privately in a spirit of fairness and probity. Under no circumstances does the Quran encourage, allow, or condone family violence or physical abuse. In extreme cases, and whenever greater harm, such as divorce, is a likely option, it allows for a husband to administer a gentle pat to his wife that causes no physical harm to the body nor leaves any sort of mark. It may serve, in some cases, to bring to the wife's attention the seriousness of her continued unreasonable behavior (refraction), and may be resorted to only after exhausting other steps discussed in endnote. If that mild measure is not likely to
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prevent a marriage from collapsing, as a last measure, it should not be resorted to. Indeed, the Quran outlines an enlightened step and a wise approach for the husband and wife to resolve persistent conflict in their marital life: In the event that dispute cannot be resolved equitably between husband and wife, the Quran prescribes mediation between the parties through family intervention on behalf of both spouses.

Divorce is a last resort, permissible but not encouraged, for the Quran esteems the preservation of faith and the individual’s right—male and female alike—to felicity. Forms of marriage dissolution include an enactment based upon mutual agreement, the husband’s initiative, the wife’s initiative (if part of her marital contract), the court’s decision on a wife’s initiative (for a legitimate reason), and the wife’s initiative without a "cause," provided that she returns her marital gift to her husband (khul', or divestiture). Priority for the custody of young children (up to the age of about seven) is given to the mother. A child later may choose the mother or father as his or her custodian. Custody questions are to be settled in a manner that balances the interests of both parents and the well-being of the child.

**Polygamy**

Associating polygamy with Islam, as if it were introduced by it or is the norm according to its teachings, is one of the most persistent myths perpetuated in Western literature and media. No text in the Quran or Sunnah explicitly specifies either monogamy or polygamy as the norm, although demographic data indicates strongly that monogamy is the norm and polygamy the exception.

In almost all countries and on the global level, the numbers of men and women are almost even, with women typically slightly outnumbering men. As such, it is a practical impossibility to regard polygamy as the norm, since it assumes a demographic structure of at least two-thirds females and one third males (or eighty percent females and twenty percent males, if four wives per male is the norm!).
No Quranic "norm" is based on an impossible assumption. The Quran was revealed by Allah, Who is the creator of males and females. Allah created about equal numbers of human males and females. This is His law in the physical world. It follows that His "norms" in the social realm must be consistent with His norms in the physical realm. Only monogamy fits as a universal norm, with polygamy as an exception.

Islam did not outlaw polygamy, as did many other peoples and religious communities; rather, it regulated and restricted it. It is neither required nor encouraged, but simply permitted and did not outlaw. Edward Westermarck gives numerous examples of the sanctioning of polygamy among Jews, Christians and others. The only passage in the Quran (4:3) that explicitly addresses polygamy and restricts its practice, in terms of the number of wives permitted and the requirement of justice between them on the part of the husband, was revealed after the Battle of Uhud, in which dozens of Muslims were martyred, leaving behind widows and orphans. This seems to indicate that the intent of its continued permissibility, at least in part, is to deal with individual and collective contingencies that may arise from time to time (e. g., imbalances between the number of males and females, created by war). This provides a moral, practical and humane solution to the problems of widows and orphans, who would otherwise surely be more vulnerable in the absence of a husband and father figure in terms of economics, companionship, proper child rearing and other needs.

*If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one. . . (Quran 4:3)*

It is critically important to point out with regard to polygamy that all parties involved have options. Men may choose to remain monogamous. A proposed second wife may reject the marriage proposal if she does not wish to be party to a polygynous marriage. A
prospective first wife may include in her marital contract a condition that her prospective husband shall practice monogamy. If this condition is mutually accepted, it becomes binding on the husband. Should he later violate this condition, his first wife will be entitled to seek divorce with all the financial rights connected with it. If such a condition was not included in the marital contract, and if the husband marries a second wife, the first wife may seek khul (divestiture), explained in endnote.

While the Quran allowed polygamy, it did not allow polyandry (a woman's marriage to multiple husbands). Anthropologically speaking, polyandry is quite rare. Its practice raises thorny problems related to the lineal identity of children and the law of inheritance, both important issues in Islamic law. In the case of polygamy, the lineal identities of children are not confused. They all have the same father and each of them knows his or her mother. In the case of polyandry, however, only the mother is known for sure. The father could be any of the "husbands" of the same wife. In addition to lineal identity problems, polyandry raises problems relating to inheritance law. For example, which of the children inherits or shares in the estate of a deceased "probable" father?

**As A Mother**
The Quran elevates kindness to parents (especially mothers) to a status second only to the worship of Allah.

*Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. (Quran 17:23)*

*And We have enjoined on every human being (to be good) to his/her parents: in travail upon travail did his/her mother bear him/her and in years twain was his/her weaning:*
(hear the command) "Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is your final destiny." (Quran 31:14)

Naturally, the Prophet specified this behavior for his followers, rendering to mothers an unequaled status in human relationships.

A man came to Prophet Muhammad (P) asking, "0 Messenger of Allah, who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man said, "Then, who is next?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man said, "Then, who is next?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man further asked, "Then who is next?" Only then did the Prophet (P) say, "Your father." (Al-Bukhari)

As a Sister in Faith
According to Prophet Muhammad’s (P) saying, "Women are but sisters (shaqaiq, or twin halves) of men." This hadith is a profound statement that directly relates to the issue of human equality between the genders. If the first meaning of shaqaiq is adopted, it means that a male is worth one half (of society), with the female worth the other half. Can "one half" be better or bigger than the other half? Is there a more simple but profound physical image of equality? If the second meaning, "sisters," is adopted, it implies the same. The term "sister" is different from "slave" or "master". Prophet Muhammad (P) taught kindness, care and respect toward women in general ("I commend you to be kind to women"). It is significant that such instruction of the Prophet (P) was among his final instructions and reminders in the "farewell pilgrimage" address given shortly before his passing away.

Modesty and Social Interaction
There exists a gap between the normative behavior regarding women outlined in the Quran and the prevalent reality among Muslims, both as societies in the Muslim world and as communities in the West. Their diverse cultural practices reflect both ends of the continuum—
the liberal West and the ultra-restrictive regions of the Muslim world. Some Muslims emulate non Islamic cultures and adopt their modes of dress, unrestricted mixing, and behavior, which influence them and endanger their families’ Islamic integrity and strength. On the other hand, in some Muslim cultures undue and excessive restrictions for women, if not their total seclusion, is believed to be the ideal. Both extremes seem to contradict the normative teachings of Islam and are not consistent with the virtuous yet participative nature of both men and women in society at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (P).

The parameters of proper modesty for males and females (dress and behavior) are based on revelatory sources (the Quran and authentic Sunnah) and, as such, are regarded by believing men and women as Divinely-based guidelines with legitimate aims and Divine wisdom behind them. They are not male-imposed or socially imposed restrictions.

The near or total seclusion of women is alien to the prophetic period. Interpretive problems in justifying seclusion reflect, in part, cultural influences and circumstances in different Muslim countries. There is ample evidence in authentic (sound) hadith supporting this thesis. Women at the Prophet's (P) time and after him participated with men in acts of worship, such as prayers and pilgrimage, in learning and teaching, in the market place, in the discussion of public issues (political life), and in the battlefield when necessary.

2.3.3 Other Views in Different Aspects
The following traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) are worth noting in this connection:

"Beware that you do not call on women who are alone," said the Messenger of Allah. One of the Companions asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what about the younger or elder brother of the husband?" The Prophet replied, "He is death".-(Tirmidhi, Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet said,
"The one who touches the hand of a woman without having a lawful relationship with her, will have an ember placed on his palm on the Day of Judgement." - (Takmalah, Fath al-Qadir)

Aishah says that the Prophet accepted the oath of allegiance from women only verbally, without taking their hands into his own hand. He never touched the hand of a woman who was not married to him. - (Bukhari). Umaimah, daughter of Ruqaiqah, said that

"She went to the Prophet in the company of some other women to take oath of allegiance. He made them promise that they would abstain from idolatry, stealing, adultery, slander, and disobedience to the Prophet. When they had taken the oath, they requested that he take their hands as a mark of allegiance.

The Prophet said,

"I do not take the hands of women. Verbal affirmation is enough."

- (Nasai and Ibn Majah)

It is most unfortunate, however, that in spite of this guidance from the Prophet (peace be upon him) many Muslims have adopted the Western system of shaking hands with women, using these traditions in respect of old women as justification. This is clearly an unreasonable extension of the permission. It is therefore, submitted that the Muslims the world over, and ulama in particular, must pause to reflect and stop this Un-Islamic practice which has crept into our society. There cannot be a better form of greeting than uttering Asalamualaikum (peace be upon you) and greeting back with Waalaikumsalam (peace be upon you too).

There is a clear tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraging women to offer their prayers inside their houses :
"The best mosques for women are the inner parts of their houses".

Since the Prophet had not forbidden women to attend the mosques, they continued to come to the mosques. But after his death it became increasingly clear that it was not keeping with the dignity and honour of Muslim women to come to the mosques for prayers, especially at night, because men, being what they were, would tease them. Therefore, the Khalif Umar told women not to come to the mosques, but to offer their prayers inside their own houses. The women of Madina resented this prohibition and complained to Aisha. But they received a fitting reply from her:

"If the Prophet knew what Umar knows, he would not have granted you permission to go out (to the mosque)".

It is reported by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

"The best row for men is the first, and the worst for them is the last. The best row for women is the last, and the worst is the first." - (Muslim)

Talaq is a right available mainly to the husband, but not to the wife, even though Islam allows divorce, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says:

"Of all things that Islam has permitted, divorce is the most hated by Allah." (Abu Dawud)

This shows that the right is to be exercised only when there are sufficiently compelling reasons to do so. Hasty and wanton use of the right of divorce is regarded as most condemnable in Islam. The Prophet said, "Marry and do not divorce, undoubtedly the Throne of the Beneficient Lord shakes due to divorce". Thus Islam encourages reconciliation between spouses rather than severance of their relations.
The Holy Prophet made women integral to his plan for Muslim education and learning when he declared:

"An acquisition of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, male and female"

The Holy Prophet made it a point of duty for every father and mother to make sure that their daughters (and sons) did not remain ignorant of the teachings of Islam because they would, after the marriage, have to play important roles as housewives and as mothers of children. In case the parents had failed to impart such knowledge to their daughters, it was made incumbent upon husbands to teach their wives the basic principles so that they would lead their lives according to the teachings of Islam. It is reported that Malik Ibn Huwayrith and a group of young men had come to live near the Prophet and acquire knowledge from him. When they decided to return to their respective homes, the Prophet told them,

"Return home to your wives and children and stay with them. Teach them (what you have learnt) and ask them to act upon it."

- (Al -Bukhari)

"Ignorant and illiterate mothers cannot possibly rear their children and raise them to be good, effective, capable and intelligent Muslims, in the world today" (Maryam Jameelah Answers Questions, The Criterion, p.46)

The Holy Koran emphatically denounced the custom of taking women as wives against their wishes.

“Oh believers ! It is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against their will”.

- (Part. V, chapter-IV)

It is said that a people’s civilisation may be measured by the position held by its women. The Muslim lawfully recognises the legal
status of women, but additional privileges are granted to their greater responsibilities. The Holy Koran Says.

“Men are the maintainers of women, because Allah hath exalted some of them over others, and because they spend thier wealth for them so virtuous women should be obedient, and guard their private parts by the protection of Allah” - (Part.V, Chapter-IV)

The Prophet while ordering the wives to be obedient had also declared:

“That is the most perfect Muslim whose disposition is best, and the best of you is he who behaves best to his wives.”

And further a famous Hadis is mentioned in Muslim.

“The world and all things in it are valuable; but the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman.”

2.4 Empowerment of Muslim Women: An Overview

However, a number of studies on the status of Muslim women in India suggest that their position is gradually improving but at a snail’s pace. Perusal of a few following studies on Muslim women in India brings out their present status and perception of their rights. For the past two or three decades studies on gender inequality by social scientists, women activists and feminists not only throughout the World but also in India have become very common. These studies are multidimensional in nature. Within the broad field of women studies, study of Muslim women in India has come to occupy an important place. The studies carried out on Muslim women in India defy exact classification. Even the writers on Indian Muslim women come from different backgrounds like, social scientists, politicians, religious leaders, Quranic scholars, journalists, ordinary house wives and active feminists etc.

A quick glance at the studies on Muslim women in India reveals that they deal with different aspect like status and rights according to
Empowerment of Muslim Women: An Overview

Holy Quran, static nature of the Muslim society, socio-cultural change in the community. Overall two arguments are found in these studies. One section of writers and researchers arguing that Muslim community is not interested in change and their women remain in their ignorance and illiteracy enjoying no status and rights. The other which is quite opposite argue that calling Muslim society as static and unchanging is a kind of stereotyping. According to this group of studies Muslim society in India in general and Muslim women in particular are changing gradually and modern forces of change are catching with them.

A minority of researchers and writers believe that Muslims would not like to welcome changes despite their beneficial nature because the society is afraid of losing its identity. In the following pages a few of the available research studies on Muslim women in India are reviewed. Shushtery (1938) writes that Islam contributed to the status improvement of women in the following ways: i) By stressing the need to respect and to give good treatment to a foster mother. ii) By making women the mistress of her own property in which the husband had no right to interfere except with her permission. iii) By giving her the right of claiming divorce (Khula), (iv) By allowing her to hold any public office. v) By giving her the freedom to remarry after divorce, and vi) by encouraging her to study and acquire knowledge.

Kapadia (1965) writes that Islam improved the status of women by restricting polygamy to four wives and favouring monogamy, by condemning female infanticide, by assigning share in inheritance, by declaring Mehr as a compulsory gift to the bride and by re-orienting the Arab law of marriage and divorce in favour of women like providing maintenance (for iddat period) for divorced women and their children. Paradise was promised to a believing woman as it was to a believing man. Maulana Thanavi one of the leaders of Deoband published a book entitled ‘Behishti Zewar’ intended to strengthen the
moral well being of Muslim women. The theme of the book is, welfare of the family in particular and the society in general, and of the moral integrity of the women who serve as wife and mother. Her virtues of nurture and wisdom are shown as essential for the moral well-being of the children and the courage of the husband. Muslim women is portrayed as essentially a strong person who keeps the integrity of the family alive through her courage and support for all the members.

Maulana Mawdudi (1972) has written a book entitled 'Purdah and Status of Women in Islam'. This book emphasised authority and supervision over Muslim women. The book is explicitly a warning of the demoralizing effects of modernisation on Muslims especially on Muslim women. He is against the birth control as he feels it is a threat to the moral well being of the Muslim society. Most important work on the status of women in the recent past is "Towards equality". But this study includes not only Muslim women but also women belonging to other communities, still the Muslim women sample constitute a good number in the total sample at the all India level. Important conclusions on the status of Muslim women in this study are they are neglected in their education, prevalence of polygamous marriages and obscurantist ideas (Government of India, 1974).

Zarina Bhatty (1976) in her article "Status of Muslim Women and Social Change" examined the status of Indian Muslim women in the context of modern ideals of equality and social justice. She observes that Muslim society is slowly moving towards equality of opportunity between men and women. According to her, education is the main source to improve the status of Muslim women to make them aware of the modern values and to enable them to realize their potentialities for nation-building activities and for ushering in a just and peaceful social order. The participation of Muslim women in the social and economic spheres is limited. When compared to their female counterparts in other religious communities. E.H. White (1978) reports "In comparison with other major culture areas, the Muslim
majority Nations of the World have low rate of reported economic activity by women, low female literacy at all levels”. Illiteracy, Ignorance, male domination and traditional beliefs have hindered the progress of the Muslim women in India.

Shibani Roy (1979) looks into the status of Muslim women of North India in historical and sociological perspective. According to her that Islam is the controlling vision of the World Muslim community and the Indian Muslims cannot be an exception. Their behaviour patterns are determined by Islamic world-view and value-system. However, she feels that Indian historical and social experience has its impact on the behavioural patterns of north Indian Muslims. This influence tend to generate a conflict of loyalties and thus this inherent contradiction in the case of Indian Muslim women and this has helped the Muslim women to have a shift in their perception of their status. Education among women has led to a great degree of self-assurance because of economic independence that follows concomitantly if not invariably. In view of the fact that Muslim educated males tend to prefer educated females as their spouses, there has been a spontaneous increase in literacy among north Indian Muslim families. This phenomenon in turn has led to an increase in the age of marriage of Muslim girls.

Siddiqui (1980) explains the concept of equality in Islam for the two sexes in detail. He says that according to Islam there is a specific sex individuality in man and woman which each must preserve and cherish, because it is this individuality which gives them honour and dignity and enables them to fulfil in an effective manner their specific roles in society. Consistent with the exercise of their specific individuality and of the special function flowing there from and involving special rights and responsibilities, both sexes have equal rights and are looked upon by Islam as distinct legal personalities.

Indu Menon (1981) study focusses attention on the role of education in raising the social status of Muslim women in Kerala. She
found that in every major institutional sphere education has contributed to raise in the status of Muslim women, i.e., those who are highly educated have higher status and vice-versa. Parents' income and respondents education were found to be related. The actual reason for the low level of education among the respondents seem to be lack of meaningful role for educated women in the Muslim community. The practice of seclusion (Purdah) is another reason for low level of education. As a result majority of Muslim girls are compelled to discontinue their education after puberty. Early marriage is another reason. Majority of Muslim women think that it is men's responsibility to work and maintain the family. Because women are not expected to perform any meaningful economic role outside home. Education which is necessary for this is not considered to be very essential for them. As in the field of employment Muslim women do not think that politics is a legitimate field of activity for them.

In recent years modernization and development have brought about some changes among Muslim women in their role and status. They are no longer isolated from the outside World. In this process of change, they have surmounted several barriers. "Some of these changes have taken the Muslim women out of the protected environment of the past into the rush and confusion of the modern world. Her world is no longer bounded by the four walls of the house, but by the wider area of civic and national interests and even international relationships" (Woodsmall, 1983:355).

Fatima Abidi's (1986) study "Home-Based Production" -A Case Study of Women Weavers in a Village of Eastern Uttar Pradesh in India" focusses attention on problems faced by Muslim women weavers in the home-based textile industry. Abidi's conclusions were that women were found engaged in weaving activity for 6 to 8 hours a day and at least 1 to 3 hours in winding process along with household chores like child care, animal husbandry, cooking for family, etc. Women remained at home and observed purdah and their status in
the family remained unchanged. Although women weavers carried out the whole responsibility of textile weaving, they did not get any important place in family like decision-making or power to spend money on their own. Their position in the textile industry is very low and the factors responsible for their backwardness are use of purdah, restrictions on outside moments, lack of education, marriage, procreation and capital deficiency etc.

H.Y. Siddiqui (1987) in his study "Muslim Women in Transition" attempted an objective enquiry in respect of status of Muslim women, level of religious orthodoxy, education and employment level, purdah system and related practices, particularly their impact on the social participation of women mainly in decision making within the family, health, family planning, etc. The study found that socio-economic background did show a positive association with educational level of women; urban women had better access to educational and health facilities and exhibited greater change in their social attitude and practices; religious orthodoxy was not increasing nor it could be taken as an important cause of women's lack of access to developmental facilities i.e. education and health.

Safia Iqbal (1988) in her book `Women and Islamic Law' says that Muslim women in India are facing problems such as ignorance about and non-implementation of Islamic principles; illiteracy; the joint family system and alien un-Islamic customs; deprivation of woman's rightful place in the domestic order; exploitation and misuse of women; economic instability; communal riots; ignorance and non-implementation of women's rights granted by Islam. "The process of Modernization in India and the status of Muslim women" by Dr. Sushila Jain's (1988) empirical study of the Muslim women in Jaipur city throws some light on the perception of Muslims regarding such issues as employment, education, and control of household finances etc. She tried to find out whether the process of modernization in India has brought a change in the status of Muslim women. The
trends show that Muslim women are favourably disposed towards economic independence. It was observed that 66.7 percent women were of the opinion that employment of women is good in present day situation. This particular opinion gradually increased in frequency in the young age category respondents. She noted that only education of Muslim women can be instrumental in ameliorating their economic and socio-political condition.

Lateff (1990) in her study found that inspite of purdah, Muslim women have been active in a range of socio-political activities, including voting and seeking employment. Further she stated that Muslim leaders viewed that poverty and unemployment were responsible for the continuation of purdah, not the other way round as is generally believed. Nikhat Firoz (1990) in his paper `status of women in Islam: Alternatives to legislative reforms' recommended that only workable and probable solutions for restoring equality and freedom to women is to expose them more and more to scientific and technological education with better facilities and adequate incentives.

Seema Kazi (1990) reported in ‘Muslim Women of India’ that 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 need attention.

According to Sarkar (1991) "The Hindus had taken more readily to the Western concepts of a humanistic and democratic way of life. On the other hand, the Muslims despite their forward-looking leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, stuck to their conservatism and refused to imbibe democratic values and even modern education. Thus, the hiatus between the Hindus and the Muslims developed, giving rise to an inequality of status for which of course, no one but the Muslims themselves are to blame".

Jahangir, K.N (1991) in her study found that Muslim community by and large felt that investment on a son yields much more than an investment on daughter. Daughters are considered to be
“property” of others. This discrimination is very glaring especially in respect of higher and professional studies. Low income families marry their daughters at an early age. Purdah perpetuates economic dependence of women. Muslim women’s participation in various political activities is not very encouraging but their attitude of participation is quite note worthy. Incidence of divorce and polygamous marriages are higher among the women of poorer class. Muslim women mostly participate in voting. But interference of husband or other male members is too obvious.

The problem of women must therefore be seen as directly relating to the entire society and not just the concern of women. Together men and women must chart a course for the future”. Therefore what is relevant "today is that inspite of Islam’s lead to other religions, why should the Muslims of today allow their women to lag behind the women of other religions and thus betray the legacy of Islam” (Saiyed, 1992:6). Furthermore, "irrespective of what might have happened in the past, no group, community or society and least of all Indian Muslims, cannot expect any enrichment of the overall quality of life, if half the population is kept in seclusion, isolation from the stream of modern knowledge and development (Ibid:8).

It is not that Muslim women did not enjoy equal rights in the past with their men. The Muslim women scholar Leila Ahmad (1992) has argued that the practices relating to gender among the Muslims in the days of Islam were shaped by several factors. According to her the ethical voice of ‘Quran' has also treated men and women as equal before God and could practice same rituals as that of men and her responsibility to God individually. In course of time because of the domination of male Muslim rulers both in the Muslim countries as well as in India and after the ‘Ulemas’ became guardians of the religious law, the position of Muslim women gradually began deteriorating and the Muslim men becoming absolutely authoritative.
Muniza Khan (1994) who conducted a survey of 25 educated Muslim women in Banaras in the State of Uttar Pradesh found that though they resented the practice of polygamy and triple divorce, they did not favour any change because such changes are likely to lead to the Muslims losing their identity in the country. The author feels that the fear of losing identity must have motivated many Muslim women to participate in the Shabano movement.

Zainab (1994) in her study of Bihar Muslim families writes that no daughter receives her rightful share in her father's property. She further comments that a Muslim brother rarely gives the right share in the property to his sisters except paying a token amount. Even if the women are aware that injustice is being done, they rarely resort to legal action because they believe that legal action would be detrimental to their cordial relations with their natal families and would not be in a position to approach their male siblings in times of crisis and need. Syed Mehdi Hussain (1994) in his paper "Muslim women and Higher Education, A case study of Hyderabad" says that education and socio-economic status are closely related. But points out it is also conditioned by the value system prevalent in a given society. His study establishes that if the parents particularly the father is educated there is every likely hood that children will also be educated.

A report of 1996 from the Women's Research and Action Group in Bombay entitled 'Marriage and Politics of Social Change in India's Muslim communities' feel that because of politicized state of religious and ethnic identity in India, it is unlikely that most Indian Muslim women in the near future will be interested in civil marriage. They think it is much more realistic to work within the existing structure, namely the Muslim Personal Law Board. Further they said pressure from women can influence the thinking of the religious scholar-jurists who serve on the board. Md. Shabbir Khan (1996) in his study "Status of women in Islam" concluded that there is a wide disparity between the
status of women in Islam as determined by the tenets of the Holy Quran and the traditions on the one hand and the actual conditions in our country on the other. He suggested that the Government must fulfil their Constitutional obligations of providing free and compulsory primary and middle education with special reference to modern education.

Suhail Ahmad (1996) in his study ‘Women in Profession : A Comparative study of Hindu and Muslim Women’ found that Social background play an important role in determining women’s access to education and her subsequent employment; Majority of the working women came from those families in which the father was educated; There is no significant difference between the Hindu women and the Muslim women in so far educational background of their parents is concerned; Majority of the respondents fathers are in senior administrative, managerial and white-collar professions. More Muslim respondents in the study came from prestigious occupational background than Hindu women; More Muslim women come from comparatively economically better off families than Hindu women.

Chandralekha Lehari (1997) in her study found that main problem regarding choice of suitable match relates to well educated (Muslim women) and limited number of well placed Muslim boys. Attitude towards family planning is quite encouraging. Saukath Azim (1997) in her study “Muslim Women : Emerging Identity” points out that the Muslim community, in the name of religion, has developed certain innocent notions about women’s employment, and shows that there is no inherent contradiction between the two. The study identifies education as one of the decisive factors in sensitizing and conscientizing Muslim men and women. Aneesa Shafi (1998) in her study entitled "Changing Role and Status of Muslim Women : A Sociological Analysis", witnessed degree of change which impacted the traditional value systems. No doubt the Muslim working women have succeeded in bringing about a change in their role - status, however,
traditional roles and statuses still loom large and patriarchal authority still holds on. That being so the natures of relations in the family, kinship relations and social integration have remained comparatively stable. The traditional inequalities between men and women, the problems of Muslim working women at home and outside still provides solid basis for them to strive for emancipation.

Sabiha Hussain (1998) in her study entitled "Attitude and Aspirations of Muslim Women Towards Employment: A Case Study of Darbhanga Town" concluded that the Muslim women, though comparatively less in number, are entering into different fields of employment in spite of all social hindrances. Most of the women under study have negated the idea of women working outside home in any gainful or respectful job as un-Islamic. At the same time they emphasized that when they go out for work they must not put such dress which reveals their charm. They consider that in the present socio-economic situation women should help their husband economically, socially and emotionally in running the family and for providing better education to children and that the men must support the women in carrying out both the duties.

Salima Jan (1998) in her study 'women's studies in Islamic perspective' concluded that Islam has given women the rights which no other religion has given. Due to lack of proper knowledge of Shariah (Muslim Law) as well as wrong practices largely deviating from the true Islamic teachings wrong notions exist about Muslim women. She felt that it is necessary to have adequate knowledge about the Islamic view point and this knowledge will help us to reassess women's role in the light of new changes and new situations. Zainab Rahman (1998) in her paper entitled "Status of women in Islam" concluded that Muslim women are beginning to express an independent opinion in harmony with modern needs and are pressing for a reconsideration and re-statement of social legislation in their favour but a great number of Muslim women continue to be uneducated, exploited
and unaware of their legal rights. Further, she opined that the first requirement for them is education followed by some measure of economic independence.

Zakiya Rafat (1998) in her study on the ‘Status of Divorced Muslim women in Bijnor of Uttar Pradesh’ concluded that the situation of divorced Muslim women is pathetic. They have to depend on her parental family, where they remain a source of worry and resentment for the parents and brothers respectively. They cannot venture outside alone and if they go out alone they become targets of ridicule and adverse comments and even commented upon about their chastity. The author further comments that ideally Islam grants Muslim Women the right to Mehr and remarriage but in reality the socio cultural norms determine their status.

Tabassum F. Sheik (1999) in her article ‘Muslim women and social life’ examined in depth the position of Indian Muslim women in their family and society. After a brief historical survey, it analyses three major areas of Muslim women’s social life: the practice of purdah, the level of religious and secular education and their impact on social life and the various prescriptions and peculiarities regarding married life. She concluded that inspite of the several drawbacks and restraints, the position of Muslim women is changing for the better. Archana Chaturvedi (2003) in her compilation “Encyclopaedia of Muslim women” concludes Muslim women remain largely backward and deprived. They continue to be uneducated, resourceless and victimized inspite of informative attitude of Islamic movement.

Das, Maitreyi Bordia (2003) opined that one of the major reasons for Muslim backwardness is non-participation of women in economic activities. This has two main reasons. First low educational status of Muslim women and second cultural norms of status and seclusion are too often emphasised in explaining Muslim women’s lower engagement in the public domain. Firoz Bhakth Ahmed (2003) suggested that the Muslim community should think of uplifting the
women folk by providing what is mentioned in their holy scripture and responding to the need of the hour. The anti clockwise attitude of Indian Muslims has actually taken away from their women the rights that the Quran has granted them.

Abusaleh Shariff and Azam (2004) in their book ‘Economic Empowerment of Muslims in India’ concluded that female work participation rates are lower than male participation rates for all communities, but in case of Muslims the differential is much more prominent than others. Z.M.Khan (2004) in his paper ‘Socio-economic status of Muslim Women’ stated that there are multiple causes responsible for bad condition of Muslim women particularly in northern and eastern parts of the country. Reasons are not exclusive and reflect the fused, overlapping and historical character of socio-cultural and economic life patterns of Indian society. Social, cultural, religious, legal, economic and political reasons are broad areas, which are generally talked about.

Kalpana Sharma (2005) in her paper ‘winds of change’ concluded that the growing desire for a change amongst Muslim women, one that they are now making public and for which they are mobilising. Sylvia Vatuk (2006) in her study ‘Muslim Women and Divorce in Contemporary India’ found that the threat of Talaq is a real one for many Muslim women involved in conflictual marital relationships, it is probably not as prevalent as is generally believed (generally believed by whom?). Recent religious records in Hyderabad show an average annual rate of 11 divorces for every 100 marriages. Less than half of these divorces are by Talaq, most of the rest are extra-judicial divorces ‘khula’ and are initiated by women. The overall Muslim divorce rate is probably higher than the Hindu or Christian rate, but is much lower than the divorce rates in Western Countries or the Muslim Middle East. But for Muslim women as far women of other religions, desertion, ejection from the marital home, or being forced through mistreatment to leave on her own are much more common.
than divorce. Further she observed that the practice of Muslim Personal Law in India, the clearer it becomes that Muslim women’s major problems are not directly related to the particular code of law under which they live their lives, but the patriarchal structures of a society that limits their options to move beyond a definition of self as dependent minors, subject to others’ life strategies and desires rather than entitled to work toward realizing their own. These issues are systemic ones, shared by Hindu and Christian women as well. They have a largely cultural, rather than specifically religious, basis. Although legal reforms doubtless have something real to offer those Muslim women unfortunate enough to find themselves in unhappy and even intolerable marriages, without other accompanying social changes, such reforms will not suffice.

### 2.5 Sachar Committee Report: An Overview

Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in India and thus the largest religious minority. The 2001 census enumerated India’s Muslim population at over 138 million, and by 2006 the Muslim population would be over 150 million. India’s Muslim population is amongst the largest in the world, exceeded only by Indonesia’s and close to the Muslim populations of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, it is larger than the total populations of most countries of the world. In India, populations of all major religions have experienced large growth in the recent past, but the growth among Muslims has been higher than the average. Religious differentials in growth were observed in the pre-Independence period as well. The last intercensal decade however, has shown a reversal in the trends in growth; not a negative growth but a decline in intercensal growth for India, from 23.9% during 1981-91 to 21.5% during 1991-2001. This has occurred in both the largest religious communities, Hindus and Muslims, with the latter showing a larger fall from 32.9% to 29.5% or 3.4 percentage points, and the former from 22.7% to 19.9% or 2.8
percentage points. Thus, the growth differential has narrowed and is an early indication of convergence occurring over the medium term.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Muslim population (in the post-Partition areas) was close to 30 million and grew rather slowly up to 1921 and later moderately, as did the overall population. Partition led to large-scale migration, and in 1961, well after the major Partition-linked migration had ended, India's Muslim population was enumerated at 47 million, about 10% of the total population of 439 million. The latest census, conducted in 2001, enumerated 138 million Muslims out of India's total population of 1029 million. In 1961, the largest group, Hindus, accounted for 83.5% of India's population followed by Muslims, with 10.7%; other minorities had much smaller shares - Christians 2.4%, Sikhs 1.8%, and Buddhists and Jains accounted for less than 1% of the total population. By 2001, the share of Hindus had fallen to 80.5% and that of Muslims had risen to 13.4%. This rise of 2.7% points between 1961 and 2001 is a consequence of the higher than average growth among Muslims. The shares of other minorities have remained nearly the same, though some small changes, a rise followed by a fall, occurred among Christians and Sikhs. The rise in the share of Muslims has been less than three percentage points over the four decades, that is, less than one point a decade.

The Muslims in India reside across the country, and yet their concentration varies substantially. Besides, the demographic dynamics have changed over different periods in time and in different regions. In 2001, of the 138 million Muslims in India, 31 million, or 22%, lived in one state, Uttar Pradesh. Of course, Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state of India with 13% of the total population. Three other states, West Bengal, Bihar, and Maharashtra also had over ten million Muslims each. The majority of the Muslim population in India are in these four states. Besides, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, and Karnataka had five to ten million Muslims
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each, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu 3 to 5 million each, and Delhi, Haryana, and Uttaranchal one to two million each. Generally, large states also have large Muslim populations, as expected. However, Punjab and Orissa, with populations of over twenty million each, had fewer than one million Muslims.

Large variations were seen in the size of the Muslim population among districts. In 25 districts, the Muslim population exceeded one million each in the 2001 census. The largest was Murshidabad (3.7 million) followed by Malappuram, South Twenty-Four Paraganas, and North Twenty-Four Paraganas. Of the million plus Muslim population districts, ten are in West Bengal, five in Uttar Pradesh, three in Jammu and Kashmir, and seven in other states. Besides, in 51 districts the Muslim population is between half to one million. Thus, 76 districts have at least half a million Muslims each and just over half of India’s Muslim population, 71 million out of 138 million, resides in one of these districts. At the other end, there are 106 districts with very small Muslim populations of below 10,000.

The share of the elderly (65 and above) is not high, both for the general population as well as the Muslim population, and thus old age dependency is quite low. Most populations in the world have more women than men. At birth the share of boys is always higher, around 105 boys per 100 girls, but higher mortality among males compared to females leads to a sex composition favourable to females. However, India and some South and East Asian countries differ from this pattern. Female mortality was higher than male mortality in these parts though now this is not the case and the mortality gap is quite narrow. As a result, there are more men than women in India and the sex ratio (females per thousand males) is lower than 1000; for the period 1961-2001 this has hovered around 930. The Muslim population shows a similar pattern.
The National Family Households Survey (NFHS) data indicate that Muslims have the highest child sex ratio of any social group in the country (Figure 3.5). For instance, the child sex ratio among Muslims was 986 girls per 1000 boys in the age group 0-5 in 1998-99, significantly higher than the ratio of 931 among SCs/STs, 914 among other Hindus, and 859 among other groups.

India's population is predominantly rural. In 2001 only 27.8% lived in urban areas, cities and towns of various sizes, showing a low degree of urbanisation. Moreover, the tempo of urbanisation has been quite low after 1981, with only about two percentage points rise in the share of the urban population over each decade. The Muslim population is also predominantly rural, but the level of urbanisation among them has been higher than the population as a whole. In 1961, while overall only 18.0% of the population lived in urban areas, 27.1% of the Muslim population did so (Fig. 3.8). This substantial gap has persisted, and in 2001, 35.7% of the Muslim population was urban compared to 27.8% of the overall population.

Estimates from different surveys as well as indirect census-based estimates show that infant and childhood mortality among Muslims is slightly lower than the average. The 1981 and 1991 census (indirect) estimates, and the 1992/93 and 1998/99 National Family Health Survey-1 and 2 (conducted in 1992/93 and 1998/98 respectively) estimates show this consistently. The two main indicators, the infant mortality rate (IMR), which is the proportion of children dying before completing the first year of life, and under-five mortality rate (U5MR), which is the proportion of children dying before completing five years of age, are lower for Muslims than the Hindus and hence also lower than the national average (Fig. 3.9). It has been pointed out earlier that Muslims are more urbanised than the general population, and it is known that urban populations have lower mortality. Separate estimates for rural and urban areas show that the lower than average child mortality among Muslims is partly on
account of their higher urbanisation. Within urban areas, Muslim childhood mortality level is very close to the average urban level. While Muslims enjoy some advantage in survival compared to the general population, the mortality among other large minority religious groups, Christians and Sikhs, is even lower than Muslims. Essentially, childhood mortality among Muslims is lower only compared to the Hindus.

How have infant and under-five mortality rates changed over time among Muslims and other SRCs indicates that while infant and under-five mortality rates declined between 1992-93 and 1998-99 among all groups, they declined more rapidly among Muslims than amongst Other Hindus. Thus, Muslims not only have among the lowest infant and under-five mortality rates of all SRCs in India, they also have experienced some of the largest declines in infant and under-five mortality of any social group during the 1990s. The TFR for Muslims is higher than the average by 0.7 to one point as seen from the NFHS-1, NFHS-2, and Census estimates. Other measures of fertility also show higher values for Muslims. For instance, the crude birth rate (CBR), estimated from Census figures is also higher among Muslims (30.8, against 25.9 for the total population and 24.9 for Hindus).

However, I have seen that mortality among Muslims is lower and fertility higher than the average. Detailed analyses for the decade 1981-91 showed that part of the higher than average growth of Muslims is accounted for by lower than average mortality, but a major part was explained by higher fertility. The contribution of migration, obtained as the residual, was relatively small, about one sixth of the growth differential between Hindus and Muslims.

2.5.1 Minorities and Development
The Indian Constitution is committed to the equality of citizens and the responsibility of the State to preserve, protect and assure the rights of minorities in matters of language, religion and culture. That
is why our national leaders while framing the Constitution, emphasized the doctrine of unity in diversity.

Thus, in any country, the faith and confidence of the minorities in the functioning of the State in an impartial manner is an acid test of its being a just State. Among these, the Muslims, the largest minority community in the country, constituting 13.4 per cent of the population, are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators. While the perception of deprivation is widespread among Muslims, there has been no systematic effort since Independence to analyze the condition of religious minorities in the country. Despite the need to analyze the socio-economic and educational conditions of different SRCs, until recently appropriate data for such an analysis was not generated by Government agencies. There have been welcome change in the scope of data collection with respect to SRCs in the 1990s, which, in turn, has made this report possible. The current effort is the first of its kind to undertake a data-based research on the Muslims in India.

2.5.2 Mandate of the Committee
A wide variety of policy initiatives and programmes have been launched by successive governments to promote the economic, social and educational development of the minority communities in India. However, while the Muslims have no doubt made some visible progress, the perception remains that the economic and educational gap between the Community and the rest of the SRCs has been widening. Once the ‘development deficit’ among Muslims is assessed policy interventions will need to be reviewed in the context of available evidence, and new initiatives launched to grapple with the marginalization of Muslims in the social, economic and political space.

Interestingly, despite the overwhelming participation of people in meetings and through representations, there was much trepidation and skepticism regarding the setting up of this Committee. While many welcomed and appreciated this initiative there were others who
were skeptical and saw it as another political ploy. There was a sense of despair and suspicion as well. “Tired of presenting memorandums”, many “wanted results”. The “non-implementation” of recommendations of several earlier Commissions and Committees has made the Muslim community wary of any new initiative. While not everybody has lost hope, many feel that any change in the attitude of the State requires “commitment and a change in the mindset” observed some. Another common refrain was that the Muslim situation should be looked upon not as a problem of a minority, but as a national concern. It is in this broad context that the rest of this chapter should be viewed.

The obsessive focus on select cases of Muslim women passionately discussed in the media results in identifying the Muslim religion as the sole locus of gender injustice in the Community. Consequently, the civil society and the State locate Muslim women’s deprivation not in terms of the ‘objective’ reality of societal discrimination and faulty development policies, but in the religious-community space. This allows the State to shift the blame to the Community and to absolve itself of neglect.

Women in general are the torchbearers of community identity. So, when community identity is seen to be under siege, it naturally affects women in dramatic ways. Women, sometimes of their own volition, sometimes because of community pressure, adopt visible markers of community identity on their person and in their behaviour. Their lives, morality, and movement in public spaces are under constant scrutiny and control. A gender-based fear of the ‘public’, experienced to some degree by all women, is magnified manifold in the case of Muslim women. The lines between ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe spaces’ become rigid. The community and its women withdraw into the safety of familiar orthodoxies, reluctant to participate in the project of modernity, which threatens to blur community boundaries. It was said that for large number of Muslim women in India today, the only
‘safe’ space (both in terms of physical protection and in terms of protection of identity) is within the boundaries of home and community. Everything beyond the walls of the ghetto is seen as unsafe and hostile — markets, roads, lanes and public transport, schools and hospitals, police stations and government offices. Interestingly though, in many meetings women participants emphasized that given appropriate opportunities to work and get educated, they would ‘manage’ all these issues.

The feeling of being a victim of discriminatory attitudes is high amongst Muslims, particularly amongst the youth. Education is an area of grave concern for the Muslim Community. The popular perception that religious conservatism among Muslims is a major factor for not accessing education is incorrect. The recognition of their educational backwardness is quite acute amongst a large section of Indian Muslims and they wish to rectify it urgently. There is a significant internal debate about how this should be done. Private minority institutions and Madarsas are seen as the only option available to the community for improving the educational status of the Muslim community.

2.5.3 Poverty — the Main Cause of Low levels of Education

High dropout rates among Muslim students are worrisome. As with many Indians, the main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children are forced to drop out after the first few classes. This is particularly true for Muslim girls.

Moreover, a community-specific factor for low educational achievement is that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. The low representation of Muslims in public or private sector employment and the perception of discrimination in securing salaried jobs make them attach less importance to formal ‘secular’ education in comparison to other SRCs. At the same time the Community, especially the educated Muslim middle class, finds itself frustrated and alienated because of the lack
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of presence and opportunities in administrative, policy and political spaces.

The provision of ‘equivalence’ to Madarsa certificates/degrees for subsequent admissions has been emphasized. The recognition given to these courses by some universities has contributed in a large measure towards students of these courses accessing higher education. A wide variety of problems associated with the education of Muslim women were raised. These problems result in low enrolment and retention. In this dismal scenario there is one big ray of hope; while the education system appears to have given up on Muslim girls, the girls themselves have not given up on education. There is a strong desire and enthusiasm for education among Muslim women and girls across the board. This was one of the most striking pieces of information the Committee gathered in its interactions in the different states.

Muslims, by and large, are engaged in the unorganized sector of the economy which rarely enjoys protection of any kind and therefore the adverse impact of liberalization has been more acute for them. The traditional occupations of Muslims in industries such as silk and sericulture, hand and power looms, the leather industry, automobile repairing, garment making have borne the brunt of liberalization.

Muslim women are overwhelmingly self-employed (engaged in home-based work). Sewing, embroidery, zari work, chikan work, readymade garments, agarbatti rolling, beedi rolling are some of the occupations in which Muslim women workers are concentrated. Their work conditions are characterized by low income, poor work conditions, absence of toilet and crèche facilities, lack of social security benefits like health insurance and the absence of bargaining power. In several states home-based industry has virtually collapsed leaving poor Muslim women spiraling downwards to penury.
Muslims, especially women, have virtually no access to government development schemes. They experience discrimination in getting loans from the Jawahar Rozgaar Yojana for Below Poverty Line (BPL) beneficiaries, in getting loans for housing, in procuring widow pensions etc. Muslims are often not able to avail of the reservation benefits available to OBCs as the officials do not issue the requisite caste certificates. It was also alleged that many eligible Muslim OBCs were not included in the official list which results in denial of several benefits to the Community. Many Muslim women experience ill-treatment at the hands of authorities when they apply for new ration cards. So deep is their alienation from state services that a large number of poor Muslims do not even have BPL cards. They are unable to avail of free uniforms in schools, or college scholarships for want of appropriate caste and income certificates. In the context of increasing ghettoisation, the absence of social services (health, schooling, ration, municipal/government offices) impacts women the most because they are reluctant to venture beyond the confines of ‘safe’ neighborhoods to access these facilities elsewhere. Muslim women have almost no presence in decision-making positions — from gram panchayats to the parliament. They even fail to find a place in minority welfare institutions set up by the Government.

This chapter provides a broad perspective on issues relating to the education of Muslims in India. It shows that Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality education; their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. In some instances the relative share for Muslims is lower than even the SCs who are victims of a long standing caste system. Such relative deprivation calls for a significant policy shift, in the recognition of the problem and in devising corrective measures, as well as in the allocation of resources. This chapter focuses on the differentials in levels of educational achievement amongst India’s Socio-religious Communities(SRCs). The availability of Census data on
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educational attainments by religion for the first time since Independence has enabled the Committee to examine the temporal trends in educational attainments.

The literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 was 59.1%. This is far below the national average (65.1%). If the SCs/STs, with an even lower literacy level of 52.2% and Muslims, are excluded, the remaining category of ‘All Others’ show a high literacy level of 70.8%. In urban areas, the gap between the literacy levels of Muslims (70.1%) and the national average is 11 percentage points and in relation to the ‘All Others’ category it is 15 percentage points. Although the levels of literacy are lower in rural areas (52.7% for Muslims), the gap between the compared categories is also narrower. It is important to note, however, that the SCs/STs are still the least literate group in both urban and rural India. Although the literacy levels of 64% and 68% amongst male SCs/STs and Muslims respectively are not low, they are far below the level for ‘All Others’ which is 81%. In contrast, Muslim women with a literacy level of 50% have been able to keep up with women of other communities and are much ahead of the SC/ST women in rural India.

As many as 25 per cent of Muslim children in the 6-14 year age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. This is higher than that of any other SRCs considered in this analysis. The incidence of drop-outs is also high among Muslims and only SCs/STs have a marginally higher drop-out rate than Muslims. Overall, while the share of dropouts and children who have never attended school is still higher among Muslims than most other SRCs, enrolment rates have risen significantly in recent years. In a recent study it was found that apart from the economic circumstances of the households, school enrolment for different communities is significantly affected by the local level of development (e.g., availability of schools and other infrastructure) and the educational status of the parents.
The NSSO 61st Round data (provisional) regarding graduate level education, furnished by the NSSO to the Committee, show that the SCs/STs and Muslims are the most disadvantaged as their respective shares are much lower than their share in the population. In the case of Muslims their share in graduates is 6% while their share in population aged 20 years and above is about double at over 11%.