Case studies

The following eight case studies were identified for thorough probing of status of Muslim women. The purpose of the case studies was in-depth investigation of their life events in their lives and the factors that influenced or affected their social lives.

Case study 1

Fatima (name changed, 44 years of age, government teacher), who belongs to a middle class family was good in studies but was married at the age 20 years when she completed her schooling to a local small time business man who now owns a shop in Bhaderwah. She has a son and daughter. Her son is doing engineering and daughter is in 11th standard. According to Fatima education is an important tool in this modern world in the time of crisis in terms of widowhood, desertion and high cost of living it becomes a support. She lives in a nuclear family and decisions regarding family matters and children are taken jointly along with her husband. She does not wear burqa and simply covers her head with dupatta or scarf. In the initial years of her marriage she has also been a victim of domestic violence while she was living in joint family. She used to silently bear all the humiliation. Hers was an arranged marriage and she has not received mehr from her husband. Her father did not have much property so she did not demand share in the parental property and was given dowry. After the birth of her first child as son she continued her studies with the support of her husband but was opposed by male members of the family. With sheer determination she completed her graduation, looked after her children and household chores but never got any respect and support from her in-laws. After completing her graduation she applied for a government job and was selected as a teacher. At that time she was already a mother of two children a son and a daughter. She supported her husband financially and provided good education to her two children. She was of the opinion that modern education is very important for a girl especially in case of difficulties of life as they can take up a job to support themselves. Daughter in-law is never treated like daughters in their in-laws family therefore parents should make daughters economically independent by giving them proper education and should not hurry for early marriage. She believes that government should start more welfare schemes for poor girls’ education especially in far-flung villages as she herself comes
from backward village. When asked about personal law she says that polygamy should be banned and poor women should be given maintenance to stop violence against women provisions should be added in Muslim Personal Law to punish such persons.

Case study 2

Roshi (name changed, age 32, Bureaucrat), smart and active mother of a girl child lives in a joint family along with her parents in law, has done post-graduation and M.Phil in Botany and works as an account officer. Her husband, a postgraduate in Zoology, is working as an officer with the state government. Her father and mother both are government employees. Roshi opines that a girl should acquire as much education as she can as education helps in improving ones social position. Her education has contributed in various ways in her life in getting a job, a good match, economic independence and respect in the society. She approves of co-education as girls have to study in co-education at the university level and also in professional colleges. With regard to decision making she says the decisions are taken jointly with her husband after proper discussion. She exercises control over her earnings, has an independent saving account and owns her separate car. When asked whether she will give property and dowry to her daughter she says they education is the best dowry for her but she will give property share to her. She took up the job to make her own identity and her husband supports her which shows favourable attitude to her work, she gets a lot of respect and support from her parents in – laws as well. She does not observe purdah as she was of the view that, “It is not necessary that a person wears a burqa. She has neither received her share in parental property nor she demanded as she does not need it. She opines that working women cannot give much time to their kids but there is no problem when kids start going to school. According to her education and economic independence gives women a high status in society and she is satisfied with her life.

Case study 3

Shaheen (name changed, age 28 M.Sc, M.Phil) working as a contractual lecturer in a college. Her Father is a retired government officer and Mother is a private school teacher. Her husband who is also a postgraduate works in the government sector with a
monthly income of Rs. 34,000. Shaheen has a 3 month old male baby. The objective of education and employment for her is to become economically independent and secure in life. She lives in the joint family and all decisions in the family are taken by her husband and in-laws. She was of the opinion that the employment is the most effective method for change in the status of Muslim women.

She got married at the age of 26 and had not received mehr from her husband at the time of her Nikah. She had an arranged marriage with her consent. She is against the practice of dowry even then she had to bring gifts for her in-laws in the form of gold and clothes which is a traditional practice in Bhaderwah, those who are not able to or who don’t like to follow are often looked down upon in the society as dowry is linked with the economic status of the bride’s family. She is a victim of domestic violence and says women in an abusive relationship suffer silently out of fear for her family honour. Even after giving birth to a baby her situation in her in-laws family did not change and constant threats of divorce were posed to her and she kept on bearing all this suffering and humiliation for her new born baby and tried to please everyone in the family and her husband but their behaviour did not change. Then she narrated the whole situation to her mother and she took her daughter back to her home. Her parents called the community members and decided that she should take divorce from her husband as her parents loved her and were worried that living with a man who did not support and love her is not good for her future life. She believes that a husband should provide maintenance for the children after divorce. She was given maintenance only for the iddat period and no maintenance was given to her son. Her parents are supporting and she herself is also working to support her son and herself as she doesn’t want be burden on her parents for a long time. She says that triple talaq and polygamy should be banned and there is a need to bring change in personal law so that a poor woman does not suffer.

Case Study 4

Nazma Begum (name changed, age 58, self employed) is a widow and a mother of three children two son and a daughter. Her two sons are working in government department and daughter doing graduation. She was married at the age of 20. Her husband was running a government ration store and a small shop in their own village. She
was living in joint family along with her parents in-law. She opines that illiterate and unemployed women have to face a lot of difficulties. Her husband had died in a road accident and she faced financial difficulties but she did not give up and her in-laws also supported her. Her father in law gave her share of her husband’s property and earning of shop was handed over to her. She took up the responsibility of her children and worked hard to educate them so that they do not face any problem in life. She is successfully running her shop and government ration depot. According to her being a woman and that too a widow she faced a lot of problems but her children were her support system and her mother in law treated her like her own daughter. Her parents-in law financially supported her children’s education. After her father in law died, Nazma along with her mother in law looked after their family property and the shop which was the only source of their earning. Her elder son got a government job after he finished graduation with this their financial condition further improved. According to her, education is very important so she wants higher education for her daughter and is not in favour of early marriage of her daughter. She says no marriage until she gets a suitable job so that she does not face problem like her mother. She believes that support of parents-in law is very important for a girl after marriage. She opines that without their support it was difficult for her to face the tragedy of life and bring up her children without husband. She is also giving maintenance to her sister in-law who is divorced and living with her. She believes that women should be given maintenance beyond iddat period as poor women who do not have any source to support their life become miserable. Girls should be given share of property and brothers should understand that Islam has given right of property to daughter. Now Nazma Begum is a successful business woman despite of the fact that she is not highly educated but due to her determination and hard work she overcame all the hurdles of life. She is respected in the village and was also elected as panchayat member. The local women go to her with their problems and Nazma always helps them.

Case study 5

Shazia (name changed age 25 years) belongs to a middle class family. Her father died when she was very young. She lives with her mother and two brothers near Bhaderwah town. She has studied upto 12th standard. Being the only sister of her brothers
they loved her and wanted to give her education although their financial condition was
not very good still they wanted to educate her but Shazia was not interested in further
education. Instead she wanted to do vocational course so that she can lessen her brothers
burden by supporting herself. She was in school when her mother passed away and she
became totally dependent upon her brothers but her brothers were very supportive and
took care of all her needs. She was interested in stitching and knitting so after completion
of her school she opted for vocational course in stitching and embroidery. At the age of
23 years her brothers got her married out of Bhaderwah. Her husband is a government
employee and they live in joint family. After marriage she became victim of domestic
violence. She opines that always a woman is held responsible for trouble in marriage. She
suffered silently and did not want to share her problems with her brothers as she believes
that her brothers have already done a lot for her. She was tortured for not bearing child
and her mother in-law threatened her with second marriage of her husband. In our
society it is always a woman who is victimised and stigmatised if she is not able to give
birth to a child and a man is never questioned. One day Shazia called her brother to take
her back home and her brother took her along with him but she never told him the true
reason. One day she narrated the whole story to her aunty living in her neighbourhood
with whom she was having very good relations as she treats Nazma like her own
daughter. She told her aunty that her husband is impotent which her mother in-law is not
accepting and tortured and blamed her for not being able to bear children. Her aunty
narrated this problem to her husband and brothers of Shazia. Her brothers and uncle then
called Shazia’s husband at their home and his medical test was done which proved his
impotency. Later her brothers with the help of community leaders took Shazia’s divorce
from her husband. Her brother helped her to get away from the torture of her in-laws. She
was given dower at the time of divorce. If the impotency of husband is established then
according to Muslim Personal Law a wife has a right to take divorce from her husband.
This right was successfully used by Shazia and local religious leaders and community
members supported and helped her in taking divorce.
Case study 6

Tasleem (name changed 55, government teacher) is a government school principal; she has done M.A, B.Ed. Her husband is a government employee. Her father is also a retired government teacher and mother is a house wife. She has two daughters and a son. Earlier she lived in a joint family and according to her for a working lady joint family is always helpful for upbringing of small children. Before her marriage their financial condition was not good and being the eldest among her siblings her father got her married early at the age of 21 years. After marriage she continued her studies as her father and father in-law encouraged her to study further. She has done her graduation and post graduation with the help of her husband as her in-laws were financially strong and are one of the influential families of the area. She believes that even after getting married it is the responsibility of a daughter to support her parents so when she got a job she helped her brother and sister in their studies. Her brother went for higher studies and is working abroad and the financial condition of her parents improved and her sister is a lecturer. According to her daughter and son should be treated equally. According to her employment is very necessary for a girl in today’s changing world and job also gives security to a woman and she can face any tragedy and hurdles of the life and no more feel a burden on family. Tasleem herself a mother of three children believes that mother is a first tutor of her child and their personality reflects the norms and values that a mother gives to her children. Her son is an engineer and working in Gulf while her one daughter is doctor and settled abroad with her husband and other daughter is doing post graduation. According to her parents education and economic status of parents plays important role in the education and life of a children especially girl child. Being a teacher and coming from a poor family she always encouraged parents to educate their children so that they do not suffer like their parents.

Now Tasleema lives in a nuclear family but she shares a cordial relation with her in-laws and supports other members of the family whenever they need. According to her due to high cost of living people prefer small families in Muslim community. She herself married early and believes that girls should be married at least after they complete their graduation or after 24 or 25 years. At the time of her Nikah she did not receive mehr and
says that her husband done a lot for her, whatever she had achieved today was because of her husband. He gives her everything so she does not need the mehr. Regarding decision making she takes decision jointly with her husband on children’s career and marriage but on daily household needs she mostly decides herself and some time discusses with her husband. She has her own identity in the society and people respect her at workplace and at home. She narrates that she works with teachers both male and female from both religions and all give her due respect. She eats lunch with all teachers and never discriminates with any one being the head of the School. She always helps students especially who come from poor families with uniform and books. She does not wear burka and covers herself with dupatta because she says that its not your garments but your behaviour, how well you perform your responsibility is more important. Regarding share in the parental property she says that parents who hold a lot of property should give share to a daughter as well. She comes from a poor family and her father did not have much to give, she never demanded and she further says that Allah has given her everything now and she will definitely give share in the property to her daughters as it is their right granted by Allah. She says the time has changed and today’s woman is much empowered due to education and employment and is becoming economically independent. Gone are the days when woman was confined to the traditional roles of mother and wife. Women’s status in Muslim society is undergoing a change.

Case Study 7

Salma (name changed 58 years, village panchayat member) is an ordinary Muslim woman but due to her work gained a name and respect in the village society. She belongs to a middle class family her father is retired government employee and mother was a house wife who died few years back. She has studied upto 10th standard and got married at the age of 19 years. Her husband is a business man and local political party worker. Salma is a mother of four children, three sons and a daughter. She wants to give higher education to her daughter as she believes that girls education is more important than boys as boys can earn easily by doing any job or business while a girl needs a respectable job with higher education. While her two sons are doing business with her husband and are not highly educated. Her daughter is doing MBBS and one son is an engineer. After her
marriage she lived in a joint family and had to do all household work along with outside field work during crop season. She did not face any type of domestic violence and says that little family trouble is a story of every household. But due to her caring nature and performing all family responsibility she was respected by her in-laws. She says that sometimes she felt that she was treated like a working machine and no option except doing all work and looking after family members and treated like unpaid family worker. Their work is never counted as a work and dawn to dusk women have to work silently. If they oppose or demand anything they are threatened that they would be sent back to parents or would be divorced and second marriage therefore for the sake of parents honour they suffer silently. Salma considers woman’s work very important in today’s world. She says that if a woman is going out for work she escapes from family torture and economically becomes independent and can fulfill her needs. In family woman was not given permission to work outside and this was considered against the family honour. Salma’s family position improved when her husband made separate house to live but their family property was joint. Now Salma began taking decisions regarding household and children along with her husband. Salma’s husband belonging to a political party asked Salma contest panchayat elections as a member from a reserved seat for women. She says that after becoming the panch her life began to change and she utilised this opportunity. Her husband became her guiding force and helped her to win the elections and she equally got support from her children and other family members. Her main motive was to encourage female education and awareness among women regarding government welfare schemes. Sarpanch of the area also belonged to their family and was younger to her so she got more confidence and support to do her duties. Even sarpanch gave her responsibilities regarding women’s issues in the village. She says that she feels confident as being respected in the village and has got her own identity. People of the area call her lady sarpanch. She says that she encouraged sarpanch to initiate all provisions related to women. She got work for poor women in MGNREGA. She gave name of poor family living in kutcha house through Indira Awas Yojna to get money to built pucca house. She encouraged parents to send their daughters to school. Provision of clean drinking water through pipes was provided so that women did not need to go far places to bring water. She opened a vocational centre at her own home with the help of
local women who knew knitting and stitching to teach other women and girls. She says that she was able to help these women as she belongs to a family having political influence and sarpanch belongs to her family. People want Salma to become their next Sarpanch. She says that panchayat system provides platform to a woman to enter politics and show their capability as a leader. She says that more women should be encouraged to enter panchayat and sarpanch seats should be reserved for women. She is also helping a poor girl who was divorced by her husband as her family is poor and not able to maintain her properly. She says that divorced women should be given maintenance by their husband if he is financially strong beyond the period of iddat. When asked about share for daughter in the family property she says that she did not demand share as she felt her relation with her brother will get spoil. She further says that parents should give share in property to their daughters which will provide security to them and says that she will definitely give property share to her daughter.

**Case study 8**

Fatima begum (name changed age 43, government employee) is working as a lab assistant and mother of a daughter. Her father runs a shop and mother is a house wife. She lives with her parents and brother. She says that education increases employment prospects by which woman does not remain dependent as a burden on her parents and brothers. She was married at the age of 23 years and had arranged marriage with her consent. Her husband is a government employee. She narrates how polygamy affects the life of a woman. She had a troublesome married life. Initial years of her marriage passed off happily and she gave birth to a girl child. She feels that Muslim men take advantage of Muslim personal law and system of polygamy. Increasing trend of dowry has made life of poor women very miserable as their parents are not able to match rich people. In her marriage her parents gave gifts in the form of clothes and gold along with household gadgets. After the birth of her first child her husband demanded a bike from her parents but she refused to fulfill her demand. After that her husband started torturing her and threatened her that he will go for second marriage. Her in-laws were also not supporting her. She told about his demands and threat of second marriage to her mother. Her brothers gave bike to her husband still he continued to torture her and was not supporting
her financially. She says that she is working and earning a good salary and he was even against her job and demanded that she should handover her earnings to him which initially she gave but later she refused. Her mother-in-law also forced her to hand over her earnings to her son. She said that every day she faced humiliation for the sake of her daughter and parents. She says that one day she was beaten badly and her brother took her home and police complaint was lodged against her husband. She says her husband married the second time without her consent and hid her second wife from her and he was maintaining his second wife with her earnings. She says that when she came to know about that her parents and brothers decided not to send her back to her in-laws family. In Muslim society wife always suffers due to polygamy and they have very less chance to retaliate and speak against this. She says that her job helps her to stand on her feet and face all these difficulties but under Shariat a woman is always suffering at the hands of man. She further says that then she decided to take divorce from her husband whom he refused to give then her father and brother consulted local Muftis and they advice to go for a Khula. If women ask for a divorce then wife does not get her maintenance. She got all her gifts and gold and bike back from her husband and is happy as single mother. Neither she demanded nor her husband gave any maintenance to her daughter. She says that her work gave her economic freedom and she is providing good education to her daughter and she will not marry her daughter until she gets employed. She does not demand anything from her parents as she is living with them and they always supported her. She shares good relation with her brother who is married and having children. She says that there is need to bring changes in Muslim personal law and the system of polygamy should be banned and maintenance for the children should be made a liability of father as male is always comparatively free of his responsibilities as a husband and father.

Case study 9

Nighat (name changed 29 years doctor) is young hardworking and intelligent girl who hails from a poor family and has written her bright future with her determination and hard work. She even faced a discrimination within her family when her grandparents encouraged her parents to educate their son and not the daughter but their parents
supported her education inspite of a poor financial condition. Nighat is now working as a
doctor and pursuing her Post graduation also. Her father runs a small shop in their village
and her mother is a housewife who runs a boutique from home to support her family.
Nighat lives in a nuclear family along with her parents and brother. She narrates her story
of struggle and how her parents helped her to reach this position. She says that her
parents gave equal opportunity to both children and their dream was to give good life to
their children which they succeeded. She says that her brother is elder to her and working
as a government teacher and always supported her financially. She narrated that during
their childhood and schools days they faced a lot of problems. Her parents worked day
and night for their children. People in the village also helped them by giving old books
and school uniforms. Her mother started working from home and stitched clothes and
taught women and girls about knitting and stitching and started earning. Later she opened
a small boutique at home due to which financial condition of family improved. She says
that it was duty of children to fulfill the dreams of parents and help them economically.
Both brother and sister worked hard and her parent’s prayer was heard by Almighty when
her brother completed his graduation and took up a private job to support family. He
continued his studies. Some years later he got job of a teacher through reserved Quota.
Nighat says her brother spent his earnings on her education when she was doing medical
course. She further says that her job raised her social status but also raised economic
status of her family. She wears hijab by her own choice but was never forced by her
parents and brother. She says that she wants to serve the people of her areas who helped
her and her family during their poor financial days. She along with her brother have built
a new small house for their parents and also a car for them. When asked about her share
in the family property she says that her father does not own much property and he
provided her education due to which she got her present status and identity in the society
and this is biggest gift from her parents.

**Case study 10**

Shabana (name changed 34, housewife) is a married woman and a mother of two
children. Shabana has done graduation and is married to an advocate. Her father and
mother both worked in a government sector. Shabana lives in a joint family and has a son
and daughter. She believes that one should go for a small family because more important is to raise children well and in a healthy environment. She says that “I am economically dependent on my husband and don’t have any identity in the society”. She spends whole day doing household chores and enjoys no leisure time. She says that education and employment help women to improve their position in the society. She wears burka when goes outside for shopping or in family functions. She likes wearing burka and considers wearing burka as an Islamic tradition. Decisions regarding children and property are taken by her husband while decisions for other household matters are taken jointly by her along with her husband. She decides about purchasing modern gadgets for the house. She never faced domestic violence in her family but says that small quarrels happen in every relation and every house. She opines that employment is important for a woman but her husband does not favour doing any kind of job and believes that by doing job a woman is not able to give proper time to children as mother is important for the development and upbringing of children. Shabana was married at the age of 24 years and according to her ideal age for girl’s marriage is 25 years. She had an arranged marriage with her consent and had not received mehr at the time of Nikah. Shabana has got share in her parental property and was not given dowry except few gifts for her in-laws. She says that girls should be given a share in the property if father has enough property. It provides economic security to a girl. Her husband’s family is a conservative Muslim family, females in the family enjoy very less freedom and are not allowed to work but give importance to female education. She wants to educate her daughter and will allow her to go for job as it will help her to create her own identity in the society. She does not like to speak on personal law and do not consider it discriminatory for the women.

From the above quoted case studies a few general observations can be made. Awareness regarding the importance of education is emerging Muslim women. Daughters found to be more educated then their mothers. Women highly favour education and employment for their better social position. Increase in marriage age is also increasing and Muslim women favour marriages after completion of education or some case say no to marriage daughter until she get job. Education and employment lead to high status and respect in the society for women (case 2 depicts this perception). Education of father and husband is also related significantly and parents want secure
future for their daughters through education and employment. Purdah system is not prevalent among women; instead of wearing Burka they cover themselves with dupatta or scarf, burka is very uncommon among women in Bhaderwah and found few cases who practice purdha and wearing burka while girls wearing abayas with head scarf is found in Bhaderwah. Regarding decision making women have less say in joint families but they exercise greater authority in decisions regarding their children, especially on their education. Educated and employed women participated more in decision making. Preference was given to small families and equal preference to son and daughters. Educated and working women prefer 2 children and it has mostly become a norm among Muslims in Bhaderwah. Most of the marriages among Muslims are arranged by the parents with daughters consent. Dowry is practised among Muslims as it has become a social obligations and this practice also lead to domestic violence against woman. Most of the cases depicts that women are deprived of their rights of inheritance. Mehr is also not given at the time of Nikah and divorced cases do not get maintenance beyond Iddat period. In most of the cases women favour maintenance for the poor women after iddat period and they should be given share in family property. Women found against the practice of polygamy and want ban on it through bringing changes in Muslim Personal Law.

The case studies reveal that education and employment was seen by Muslim women as major mean of improving their social status in family as well as in society. Old customs and traditions are no more hindrance in changing status of Muslim women as today they are availing all opportunities to educate themselves and become economically independent and no more burdens on male members. Women are also becoming aware of their Islamic rights and discrimination in Personal Law, they want ban on polygamy and are demanding maintenance after iddat period and inheritance rights. From the above case studies it can be concluded that case studies justify the empirical data thus supporting the quantitative analysis.