



Research Paper

Effects of Modern Education on the Muslim Women

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ABSTRACT

After independence, women's education made considerable progress in India. The number of girl's schools and colleges increased. Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily. Muslim parents are becoming anxious to educate their daughters along with their sons. Village girls are going to schools while in towns many of them are seeking higher education. Today, our country has significant number of Muslim girls and women attaining modern education as compared to the past. Still Muslim women's educational condition and impact on their lives are changing very gradually, and sometimes; the change is painfully slow, because for a long time, Muslim woman have remained secluded and have lived the life of submission, so most of them are apprehensive of the idea of change.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In India, especially after independence, women have begun to participate in certain spheres of Socio-economic activities. They have started coming out of their seclusions and are actively participating in vocations that were predominantly the monopoly of males. Today, women participate in private and public, organized and unorganized sectors, although their representation is dismally low. In the various occupations that they join, women enjoy a status more or less on par with men. Women are working in almost all types of jobs such as technical, professional and non-professional, in both private and public sectors, residing in rural and urban areas with or without their kith and kin. The economic independence and education resulting from their active roles outside home has improved and changed their role merely as housewives. 'Women are gradually realizing that they have personalities of their own as human beings and that their mission in life does not end with becoming good wives and wise mothers but also realizing they are all members of the civic community and of the body politic'.

Muslim women today are different from yesterday in all spheres of life. They are coming out of their veils and are sharing greater responsibilities in National reconstruction. Muslim women are availing themselves the opportunities provided to an average citizen of India. Nowadays, we can see Muslim women in the field of teaching, medicine and even judiciary. The focus of this article is to understand the impact of education on the lives of the Muslim women in India and particularly Bihar. The impact of education on each and every aspect of Muslim women such as independence, economic impact, relations with husbands, children and their upbringing and similar aspects that highlights the different aspects of Muslim women's lives.

II. BRIEF BACKGROUND OF MUSLIMS IN THE STUDY AREA OF BIHAR

Islam constitutes second largest religion in Bihar. According to 2011 Indian census, there were 17,557,809 Muslims constituting 16.9% population of the state. Most of Bihari Muslims are concentrated in Seemanchal region which comprises Kishanganj, Araria, Katihar and Purnea, where Muslim population is around 45-50%.

In large north Indian states including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam, the educational level and economic conditions of Muslims is worse than that of other communities. A majority of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, the states that contribute a large chunk of the overall Muslim population in the country, are battling poverty and backwardness. In some parts of Bihar and West Bengal, the poverty is so extreme that they can't think beyond anything except two square meals a day.

According to a newspaper article published in Indian Express, in 2011-12, more than five years after the Sachar Committee report, the 68th round of the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) survey

showed that Bihar's Muslims lagged behind on all development indices, including in districts of the Seemanchal region where their numbers were high.

However, an article of Times of India in Jan 2014 mentions that, "Muslims are better placed in comparison to Dalits in 31 of 37 districts of Bihar, but Muslims are at the bottom at the national level," Having got some background about the conditions of Muslims in Bihar, I have visited few districts of Bihar to interact with some families and understand the changing educational scenario in Muslim families and education's impact on Muslim women. I have also searched few extra ordinary stories of Muslim women in Bihar through secondary research.

III. THE CASES

There is a general perception that Muslim women rarely pursue higher education or go for competitive exams. In fact, the social odds are stacked even higher once they get married and have kids. However, women like Ghazala Tasneem challenge such stereotypes. On October 31, 2017, Ghazala Tasneem was rewarded for all the sweat and efforts she had put in for the last three years. She was selected for the Bihar Judicial Services Competitive Examination with 65th rank and can soon aspire to be a judge.

'Indeed, it was difficult, but thanks to Allah, due to the continuous support and motivation from my husband and other family members, I have achieved what I deserved,' says Tasneem, a housewife from Katihar district of Bihar with two sons and goes on to add that, 'Islam and Muslims are not against education. Islam teaches one to gain knowledge from cradle to grave, but some people misinterpret Islam'.

Around the same time, Ms. Shahla Nigar had stood second in the prestigious Civil Services Examinations, conducted by the Union Public Service Commission and she has opted for the Indian Administrative Service and had opted for the cadre of her home state of Bihar. Shahla studied at Arrah and Muzaffarpur districts and finally at Indira Gandhi Girls High School, Hazaribagh (now in the newly-created Jharkhand State), from where she passed matriculation in which she stood first among girls. She continued with her brilliant academic career at the Patna Women's College from where she did her Intermediate in Arts before moving to Miranda House, Delhi University for a graduate course. Shahla ranked first in Delhi too. She continued with her studies at Hindu College of the Delhi University from where she completed her MA in political science. Later, she completed her MPhil, also from the Delhi University and enrolled for a Ph. D on 'Liberalism and Communitarianism', which included a study of the American political theorist John Rawls. However, even before she could conclude her doctorate, Shahla was selected for an officer's job in the NABARD, country's premier agriculture bank. 'I really had to burn the midnight oil after office,' Shahla Nigar had then said. Besides, the hard work she had put in, she gave credit for her success to Almighty Allah and to the blessings of her late father, Abdul Moin Khan, who was an executive engineer in Bihar's Irrigation Department, and to her mother. She has a family of three sisters. At the time of her result, eight years had passed since her father died, but he still continued to be an inspiration to her. The other source of inspiration was her mother, who, she said, has made many sacrifices to educate her and her two sisters. Her first objective, she had then said, would be to work for the empowerment of women and the marginalized in general, using education as her preferred tool.

4.1 Guncha Sanobar, First Muslim Female IPS Officer from Bihar

Guncha Sarobar originally belong to Piparrehan village of the West Champaran district of Bihar. She is the daughter of retired IPS officer Anwar Husain, the ACP of Patna City during 2007-09 and who had volunteer retired as DIG from Darbhanga. Her father taught her three daughters well. Sanobar's elder and younger sisters were doctors and she herself got graduated from Dayananda Sagar College of Engineering, Bangalore, in 2012. Guncha Sanobar will always be the first Muslim woman IPS officer from her state and second among her analogue in top civil servants after Shehla Nigar, the first Muslim woman IAS officer from her state.

Though these are some of the extraordinary stories of Muslim women breaking all barriers to achieve knowledge and success, few ordinary Muslim women with whom open ended discussion had been conducted and these women have never been mentioned in newspapers but represent the hope and help the objective of this chapter. However, before their stories are represented here, the two of the most important women from Islamic world needs to be mentioned for their intellect, capabilities and the significant impact they had on the religion.

Khadijah Binte Khuwaylid, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), was a wealthy tradeswoman, the richest woman in Mecca at the time, who exported goods as far away as Syria. To manage her large business, she employed several males and to do so then in Arabia, necessitated that you have a high level of understanding and wisdom.

Aishah Binte Abu Bakr, the youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), was very talented and possessed an incredible memory. As a Muslim scholar, she is credited with narrating more than two thousand Hadith and was noted for teaching eminent scholars. She had a great love for learning and became known for her intelligence and sharp sense of judgment. Her life also substantiates that a woman can be a scholar, exert influence over men and women and provide them with inspiration and leadership. The example of Aishah in

promoting education, particularly education of women in the laws and teachings of Islam, is a hallmark in female education in Islam. Because of the strength of her personality, she was a leader in every field of knowledge, in society and in politics.

4.2 Muslim Women of Dalsingsarai, Samastipur District of Bihar

Dalsingsarai is a town and a notified area in Samastipur district in the state of Bihar. As of 2011 India census, The Dalsingsarai Nagar Panchayat has population of 23,862 of which 12,552 are males while 11,310 are females as per report released by Census India 2011. Population of Children with age of 0-6 is 3710 which is 15.55 % of total population of Dalsingsarai. In Dalsingsarai Nagar Panchayat, Female Sex Ratio is of 901 against state average of 918. Literacy rate of Dalsingsarai city is 77.86 % higher than state average of 61.80 %. In Dalsingsarai, Male literacy is around 83.64 % while female literacy rate is 71.44 %. In the population of 23,862, just 6.55% are Muslims, which is around 1563 Muslims. Of these approximately 741 are females (as per average of Census) and around 529 women are literate among them (as per Census average literacy in Dalsingsarai).

Visit to at least ten Muslim household was made. It was pleasantly surprising to see that in each household that was visited, there is at least one woman who is a teacher and teaching in a Government school either on contractual basis or on permanent basis. In fact, I visited 5-6 Muslim houses of Chaknawada village and all of them are in blood relation to each other and are highly educated. Each household has at least one women teacher.

4.3 Support of Husband in Education and Career of Wife – A Special Case

This story is about a lady in her fifties, Mrs. Nafees Bano, whom I met in Chaknawada Village of Dalsingsarai. She has been a permanent government primary school teacher for more than two decades. On the verge of becoming the Principal of the same school, an hour-long discussion brought up many interesting facts about her. ‘Whatever I am today is because of the relentless support and sacrifice of my husband’, said she.

The root of her story takes you to the 1975 era. Her parents lived in the village of Maskandargah of Begusarai district. During that period, the girls of her family were provided education at madrasas only. Her father Mohammad Ashfaq Ahmad was a Haafiz (one who learns Quran by heart) and had small stationery shop. The family was very religious and had five daughters and two sons. Mrs. Nafees is the second daughter and third child of the family. The family was very poor but righteous and humble. Their lives were governed by the tenets of shariah and Islam. She reminisces that when her marriage was fixed to Mr. Abdul Rashid from Chaknawada village of Dalsingsarai in the District of Samastipur, she was hardly 16 years old. Her would be father in-law was extremely poor having a tea and snack stall in the village. His younger son Mr. Abdul Rashid used to study as well as run the tea stall with his father. The precondition of marriage as put forth by the would-be father in law to Mr. Ashfaq was that his would be daughter in law should continue her education before getting married. At that time, Nafees had obtained education in Madrasa equivalent to Class 5. After this, Nafees’ father got her daughter to complete Ustania (equivalent to Class 8) from Madrasah Board. After completing Ustania, Nafees got married to Mr. Abdul Rasheed and came to Chaknawada Village of Dalsingsarai. The level of poverty and condition of life was worse at there as compared to her parents. However, her husband and father-in-law were education enthusiasts and had great level of inclination towards education. Hence, they supported her and made her complete the Fauqania and Maulvi degrees from the Madrasah Board. Her husband used to put in double effort throughout the day and night with a goal of providing better education and life to her wife. “He used to work very hard. Soon he closed the tea stall and obtained permit for the Government Ration distribution shop”, she said with eyes fixed on the pages of her life. However, he continued his education as well and used to put in a lot of effort on the education of his wife. Soon he got himself and his wife enrolled for Teacher Training course and completed the course successfully. In fact, it was Mrs. Nafees who got the teacher’s job first and then her husband also got the teacher’s job. She told all this with unmatched excitement in her voice and her eyes gleamed with happiness and pride when she added, ‘My daughter Nahid is a doctor today and married to another doctor Dr. Taban Rizvi. They both are doctors in a government hospital of Ranchi.’

Though my journey was tough and full of struggle, I got the will and determination to see through them due to the relentless support extended by my husband.

4.4 A Tailor Settles in The Native Place of his Wife and the Educational Journey of his Family

This story is about a Muslim family in Maulvichak panchayat of Dalsingsarai in Samastipur district of Bihar. I visited the place during my field work and while talking to the people, I told them that I was working on a project related to education and empowerment of Muslim women. The ‘Mukhiya’ or ‘Chief’ of the village is a lady. She heard me and when I sought any feasible help in this regard, she took me to a nearby Urdu medium school. There I met many Muslim lady teachers but the story of one of them inspired me a lot. That Muslim lady teacher, Zaibun, during discussion we had, told that she was born in an extremely poor family. The lady, in her

fifties, informed that she has three sisters and two brothers. Her father was a communist ideology supporter but was very poor. With great struggle her father gave her education till intermediate. However, she was married to not so educated person in Alamchak village of Begusarai district. Her husband was very supportive, and the biggest support came from her brother, who was elder to her but younger to the eldest brother. "My husband decided to settle in Dalsingsarai so that I could continue the education. My brother had the instrumental role in getting me admitted to B. Ed course and with great struggle but relentless support and cooperation from my brother and husband; I could complete my B. Ed", said Zaibun Nisa with moist eyes. Her husband started a tailoring shop to support her while all support came from her brother as well. She continued to reflect in her past, 'I got the job of a teacher many years after my marriage. It was my deepest desire to provide good and quality education to my children. I had seen struggle for major parts of my life and had always dreamt of providing high education to my children'. She stopped to wipe tears through corners of her saree and continued, 'When my daughter Shaista Nahid (name changed as requested) cracked the Bihar Medical entrance, I couldn't believe that my dreams were finally turning into reality. She is the first doctor from the family and it was a matter of pride for the entire family. It was like a dream considering the difficult background we had as even basic necessities used to be available after lot of struggle. From that stage to seeing my daughter becoming a doctor is possible because of blessings of Allah and the support of my brother and husband'.

People say that education opens a lot of other doors. Shaista Nahid was married to a doctor in Bhagalpur and both are now practicing together. She concluded, 'From a time when girls did not have access to education or quality education, to the present phase where my family has been nurtured through education, has been a long journey. My husband never felt dwarfed by my education and extended full cooperation in my career and the career path of our children. People say that Muslim women lag due to Islam. However, I believe and have experienced that my religion has given me strength to face all the struggles and emerge triumphed. All the hurdles were due to cultural effects that women of our state and village faced for long. Lack of proper educational facilities for women and especially Muslim women has been another big cause in poor state of education of Muslim women.'

4.5 A Proud yet Worried Mother of Educated Daughters

This story is about a family of four brothers from Chandpurfatah Village, Vaishali district of Bihar. This was an extremely poor village with high level of illiteracy. There an orphaned and not so educated man who was youngest among his siblings, married an intermediate passed girl in around 1987-88. The girl belonged to a very poor family too. Though the match was not compatible on many fronts, yet it seemed to be a match decided by the Almighty as all that the man wanted was a decent girl and nothing else from the girl's family. Mrs. Fauzia Abedin faced a lot of hurdles in getting adjusted to the manners of the family. Her education and pious background proved helpful in initial years of married life and many adjustments and compromises that she had to make due to complete incompatibility in lifestyle and nature of the spouse. Her husband had a business in Kolkata, the capital city of Bengal. He brought his wife along immediately after marriage to a two-room small flat at Kolkata where she became mother to two daughters and a son. Though Mrs. Fauzia's husband was not very educated, he made great efforts to see that all his nephews get quality education and he was a great education enthusiast and laid high emphasis on education and merit. Hence, Mrs. Fauzia and her husband were clear about one common goal, that their children should and must get quality education. All her children studied in very good schools of Kolkata. The other girls of her husband's family were either uneducated or had extremely low level of literacy. It was only her husband and his elder brother, who lived in Delhi and had two daughters as well, laid great emphasis on educating the daughters with quality education.

'It was really difficult for me in the initial years. Had it not been because of the religious family that I came from, it would have been extremely difficult for me to adjust and be happy in the married life. My education came in handy too at that time. Later on, my entire focus along with my husband was channelized to the education of our children. My elder daughter did B. Com (honors) from Kolkata University and after Intermediate; she decided to do become C.A. (Chartered Accountant). She cleared the Foundation and Intermediate of C.A. exams. Immediately after she completed graduation, I wanted to get her married. However, she wanted to continue her education and complete her C.A. After she cleared C.A. intermediate exam too, it was getting harder and harder to get a suitable match for her', informed Mrs. Fauzia while giving complete background story of her family. She used to teach her children at home specially her younger daughter till most part of their school years. It was her sacrifices and efforts and her husband's strict guardianship towards education that their children could achieve high education with very good results.

She continued, 'Despite using all means and continuous efforts for three years, I could not find a suitable match for my elder daughter Urufa nor was she satisfied to marry any of the less worthy or educated persons who were available. During this time, she somehow could not clear her CA finals, probably because of the social pressure she was subjected to due to not finding a suitable match. She decided to go for higher education from a foreign country. Initially, both I and my husband were reluctant as the circumstance of girls going out of city on their own was not socially acceptable in our family. After much convincing by her and by

other supportive relatives of the family, we got convinced and she went to Europe for her Master of Finance. Presently, she has completed her masters there, doing a part time job and also got a full-time job (waiting for joining date) in a very big and reputed company.’

A combination of grief and proud expression were simultaneously reflected on Mrs. Fauzia’s face when she added with a tone of a proud mother, ‘Today, she is the right hand of her father. From Europe, she manages all issues of the families, do all managerial work for her father including his business schedules and accounting, guides and make decision about home, family and siblings, and take care of each and every member of the family in all possible way she can. Despite being extremely tensed and worried about her not getting married, we never compromised or stopped her from attaining higher education. While we were talking, I could see the tears of pride with subdued worry in the eyes of Mrs. Fauzia. Her younger daughter cracked Medical entrance and got admission in Delhi and Urufa had great role in all the guidance, logistics and formalities from entrance exams to getting her admitted.

IV. CONCLUSION

After talking with many Muslim families and Muslim women from different district of Bihar, few interesting facts predominantly surfaced. As compared to past generation, the attitude of Muslim families towards education of Muslim women has definitely shown a positive trend. More and more Muslim families are inclined towards modern education and want the girls to be given educational opportunities and facilities at par as that received by the boys. Most Muslim girls in Bihar still prefer teaching over other jobs. Also, most of the Muslim women wants high standard education but not with prime objective of getting jobs or be the bread-butter earner for the family. However, education has definitely changed the gender roles in the families in a better way. Women, due to positive impact of education, has been increasingly involved in family discussions and given due respect and status as per their talent, qualities and personality traits. This is a refreshing change from the past when Muslim women were not involved in family discussions and did not enjoy much status as they lacked many personality traits due to lack of proper education. Also, the wide gender gap bias with respect to status given has been shortening with every generation getting more and more Muslim girls getting high qualification and better education.

Most women disagreed that modern education has empowered them. Most of them believed that women were empowered more than 1400 hundred years ago by Prophet Mohammad (May peace be upon him). They strongly advocated that Islam has empowerment for women imbibed in its foundation. Education was never restricted for women. However, due to lack of proper facilities where education could be imparted within the guidelines of Shariah was lacking and this compounded along with social norms resulting in poor Muslim education in the past. However, gradually this has been changing and more and more Muslim families are providing quality education to daughters as well and a true compliance of Islamic norms are being followed where women feel special, wanted, esteemed and empowered. Modern education has further given them proper channel for realization of the same. Most of the educated Muslim women mentioned that women have always been special in Islam, just that they are special and comfortable in their gender, roles and responsibilities. Most women interacted with are practicing Muslims who attained high education but never felt that veil or purdah or for that matter any of the tenets of Islam contradicted or hindered the path to good education.

The positive impact of education of Muslim women, particularly in Bihar, far outweighs the few negative impacts. During the interaction with Muslim women, the negative impact highlighted by them included misplaced feminism questioning any and everything, being rebellious and negatively revolutionist in the guise of seeking equality and freedom, weakening of institution of marriage, ego and disrespect for anything and everything that differ with individual’s notion of ought to be, weakening of relation and family values, increased level of immorality in the name of being modern and educated, inability to compromise or make adjustments and lack of discipline and respect in some cases with misconstrued concept of being educated. These were subjective negatives as expressed by most of the Muslim women interacted with. However, the major common negative as agreed by almost all families was that highly educated Muslim girls finds it very difficult to get a suitable or at least equally educated groom.

However, the positive impact of modern education as could be inferred from the given cases shows the improvement in all parameters of life through literacy and education level with each generation. Most of the women have constructed a value system on the combined foundation of Islamic preaching with Modern education. It is evident that most of the educated Muslim women have equal or greater say in family matters and discussions. Marriage is now more on the basis of collective consent including the clear consent by the woman being married. Muslim woman has now been exercising the right to reject a prospective groom if she feels that he lacks vital parameters she has set for her would be husband. Educated Muslim women not only make decision about their own career path but has a say in the discussion related to life and important decisions of siblings as well.

Overall, it can be concluded everything comes in a package with all positives and negatives. Earlier generation was apprehensive about the security of women and dilution of their value system through interaction

with other gender and cultures and hence they were protective and apprehensive about championing the cause of education for women. However, with changing time, liberalization in 1991 and the Muslim women being married in 70s and 80s had catalyst effect in the literacy and educational level of the girls of next generation. The result has more positives than the negatives.

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