



## Study on the Problem and prospect of Muslim Women participation of politics in India

\* MD KHAIRUL ANAM and \*\*Dr. MADHU

\*Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

\*\*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

Email: [anammgr786@gmail.com](mailto:anammgr786@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Politics is the progeny of political engagement, which is the mother. As it produces, nurtures, develops, rules, and shapes politics, the former is of utmost importance to both the country and the individual. Because of this, political engagement in every aspect of a nation's affairs defines its politics, and despite the fact that women make up close to half of the population, their political importance is far less than that of men. Women make up the bulk of the population. Women have always been viewed as second-class citizens in communities where men dominated, as is evident from history. The potential of women has been limited by forcing them to carry out domestic tasks within of four walls. Indian women were not allowed to leave their homes. Their freedoms and rights had been revoked. Enrolling them in school was prohibited. They had an idea of the perfect housewife. They have no access to opportunities in society, politics, the economy, or health. Women must be given more influence if civilisation is to advance. Muslims have a tremendous influence on Indian society. The largest minority in this nation is them. In 2011, the overall population of India was 13.4% Muslim, with the majority of them residing in Lakshadweep and Jammu & Kashmir. Emerging nations like India are currently concerned about the empowerment of women. It is thought that a number of factors, including the "invisible" role and "marginal" social status of women in Muslim societal dynamics, have hampered the development of Muslim society. The rate of women's emancipation is in danger within the greatest Muslim minority. Lack of social chances for Muslim women is a severe issue that needs immediate attention. The position of Muslim women in India will be primarily examined in this essay.

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### INTRODUCTION

Women are the group most at risk in the advancement of a better society in all spheres—political, economic, cultural, and social. Women are unable to advance in many fields due to patriarchal and feudal structures. The struggle to free women from social ills has been more difficult, but they are showing signs of empowerment in a variety of occupations. The emancipation of women in all faiths also reveals the alarming fact that some communities are still being left behind in the contemporary world as a result of outdated taboos about access to formal education, the workplace, and political power generation. Muslim women and men are persistently underrepresented in emerging countries despite being the second-largest religious community in the world. Since they are denied fundamental human rights like education, employment, health care, and sanitation, Muslim women in particular are at risk.

The rise of new Muslim women leaders has been observed in recent years. Both audacious and intelligent. She wants to take part in the democratic conversation happening in the nation and is not

content to be restricted to the four walls of her house. The orthodox clergy are not someone she trusts to speak for her, which is significant. As a citizen and a practicing Muslim, she is aware of her rights.

### Review of Literature

The Government of India report (1974) has defined status as: "A rank in a societal system or subsystem which can be distinguished from and simultaneously related to other ranks via its nominated rights and responsibilities." The vagueness of such a definition is visible when we notice that each status and position in a particular social arrangement can be observed in terms of superiority and inferiority i.e., in terms of authority, privileges, advantages, and disadvantages, thus creating a notion of status that necessarily involves contrast and grading. Sassen (2002) notes that there exist certain determining factors of status which can be termed as „indicators of statuses“. These may be income, assets, prospects, education, and training in skills that provide better chances of employment, state of health, rights, and freedoms. Concerning every set of indices of status, women have been relatively seen as occupying a much inferior

status than that of their male compatriots. This lower standing of women is primarily attributed to the evolution of their biological characteristics. Such characteristics also find their place in social faith and value system that are notorious for promoting the male gender as being socially more significant, while relegating the female to a more submissive role. The stereotypes that result out of these bases validate and further justify the notion that the roles outlined for women are secondary in comparison to those of men. It is also worthy to point out that the rights of women are scarcer and less liberating and the obligations imposed on them have a far more limiting nature on their freedom and self-sufficiency (Sassen, 2002).

Dixon (1978), on the other hand, understands status as a “measure of women’s access to (and control over) material capitals (food, income, property and other manifestations of wealth) and social resources (knowledge, influence, and prestige) within the family, in the public and the society at large”. The question of the status of women mostly revolves around the discussion over the equality of men and women (Agrawal 1988). Gupta (1988) has observed that women appear to be more prone to becoming subordinates to men in almost all the societies and countries of the world and that such disparity can manifest itself in more serious ways in a developing country like India. Women in India have been subject to unjust inequality of status and opportunities in most of the socioeconomic spheres of life resulting in drastically low self-esteem and status. In medieval Indian society, women had a markedly inferior status that was grounded not on individual ability, expertise, and achievement but instead, on hereditary positions in the society. Their existence in the society was nothing more than a subordinate member in a family, a daughter, wife, or mother, who was to be denied the role as a dignified individual with a distinct personality, ambitions, and rights of their own. Uplanokar (1983) suggests that women were deprived of the right to education and were also not permitted to pursue occupations that would require them to leave their households. It is argued that although women from the lower castes and peasant groups toiled in the fields, this fact did not, however, modify their social status concerning their rights and obligations. In contemporary society, numerous factors like illiteracy, traditional values and customs, poverty, patriarchy, the dominant position of males, and the economic dependency of women on men are considered to be responsible for the poor status of women in India.

sible for the poor status of women in India. Any discussion involving the position of women in a Muslim society shall take into account the rights granted to them by Islamic law and the actual ground situation of the given society. The teachings of the

Quran and the traditions (Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad constitute the primary source regarding the status and position of Muslim women. Religion in its true spirit is intimately concerned with the spiritual development of its followers which is not possible to attain in a socially stagnant state of affairs. In India, Muslims are not only a minority but also a community that is tradition-bound and economically as well as educationally backward. Multiple reasons abound as to why Muslim women do not enthusiastically utilize whatever amenities of development are accessible to them. Therefore, the improvement of the social position of women in particular and the transformation of Muslim society, in general, depends much upon the modification of community behavior (Chaturvedi, 2003). Sometimes in the name of religion and other times in the guise of social customs and traditions, women have been socially, economically, physically, and psychologically exploited (Giri, 2006). Despite such a dismal scenario, Muslim women in India have the potential to become a catalyst for sustainable development subject to their emancipation. Their present status is a stark reflection of the supremacy of the traditional outlook. Improving their present-day condition can ensure their contribution to the progress and reconstruction of the community, while also guaranteeing the growth and rejuvenation of the entire nation (Jain, 1988).

#### **MUSLIM WOMEN AND POLITICS OF INDIA**

*Aadil Ahmad Shairgojri, Rashid Manzoor Bhat*

Anyone who infringes on her rights will not be tolerated. Women have rights, according to the Constitution. To give them more authority, various Acts have occasionally been created. Strong attempts are being taken toward positive discrimination in order to mainstream them, and various programs are also developed at the federal and state levels. However, on paper, each of these clauses appears to be flawless. Reality shows that there is frequently a gender divide. Muslims women are particularly hard hit. No of their gender, religion, or other characteristics, residents in a free India were guaranteed liberty and equality under the Constitution. As a result, although legally speaking women and men are on an equal footing, in actuality women's political engagement is lower than that of men. Due to this, despite all of the constitutional protections, they play a relatively insignificant role in both the Indian Parliament and State Legislatures. There are still millions of individuals who do not engage in politics. The primary causes of this include a lack of education, family discord, an unfavorable political climate, a paucity of women in local leadership positions, and the significant financial costs associated with elections. Every political party is constantly faced with fierce competition from male

candidates for seats in the assembly and the Parliament.

### **The Socio-Economic paradigm**

Against this background, it is essential to examine the causes of the backwardness of Muslim women compared to the women of other religious communities in social, economic, cultural, and political fields. Upon the arrival of European traders in India in the 16th century CE, the condition of women had utterly degraded, owing to the stagnation of society by religious traditions and customs. Purdah system, female infanticide, child marriage, the inhuman practice of Sati, and unjust restrictions on widow remarriage were only some of the social evils in vogue when the British colonists entered India with the promise of a new culture and social values based on equality. Several laws were ordained during the British rule in India to eliminate social evils widespread in society. It may be said that only a select portion of women belonging to the upper class succeeded to benefit from the new culture, but the attitude and behavioral patterns of Hindus underwent drastic changes. The Muslims however, could not profit from this novel culture. The Hindu class willingly adopted the western ideals of a humanistic and democratic way of life. On the other hand, the Muslims, despite being endowed with progressive leadership like that of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, remained committed to their narratives and declined to imbibe democratic values or even modern education. This is where the rift between the Hindus and Muslims developed, ultimately giving birth to an inequality of status for which the blame was placed on none other than the Muslims themselves (Sarkar 1991). Being a minority in India further discouraged Muslims from adopting contemporary culture and values. They were skeptical of imbibing democratic culture fearing the loss of identity and preserved ancient customs and traditions, backed by their religious leaders. This attitude adversely affected the progress of Muslim women. The medieval restrictions that were sanctioned upon them constrained them from reaping the fruits of modern tutelage and employment. Their autonomy too was brutally eroded (Azim, 1997). These emerging circumstances call for Muslims to rethink their position being the largest minority community and inhabiting a country with the second-largest Muslim population in the world. Their overall status and contribution vis-à-vis social and economic spheres including education, public services, banking, public sector undertaking, etc., is dreadful. The backwardness of the Muslim society degenerates the progress of their women who have a far greater role to play in the socialization of their progenies. It goes without saying that only an educated mother can be

expected to actively contribute to the physical and emotional development of her children.

The regressive condition of Muslims in India has been identified through various indicators by the Sachar Committee Report (2005). This report attributes the retrograde position of Muslim women to the backwardness of Muslims in the socioeconomic sphere. The primary reason behind this is not religious but factors that are social, such as poverty, low earnings, low rate of literacy, and inadequate avenues of employment. According to this report, apart from being the victims of poverty, Muslims seem to have developed a fatalistic attitude and have silently come to accept inequality and discrimination as their inevitable destiny. Similarly, Muslim women have continued to endure backwardness in most areas of their lives and have generally demonstrated a sluggish nature in taking the benefits of modernization and development. Despite this, recent years have shown us that some primordial signs of change – albeit with several obstacles - are beginning to appear and the self-inflicted isolation is gradually vanishing. Some of these changes have endeavored to take the Muslim women out of the protected milieu of the past into the urgency and complexity of the modern world. Her universe is no longer circumscribed by the four walls of the house; it now incorporates the broader area of civic and national interests, extending even to international relations. (Woodsmall, 1983). Muslim women are consciously availing themselves of the opportunities which every average citizen of India enjoys. These women can be seen in the field of teaching, medicine, the army, and even the judiciary (Roy, 1979). Many improvements have taken place in the arena of education, employment, and purdah for Muslim women, especially in the last three decades. Siddiqui (1987) observes that there is a positive indication showing that Muslims are consciously experiencing change, though the rate and extent of change have varied among the rural and urban areas and the different socio-economic classes. Chaturvedi (2003) writes that in recent years, a changing trend has been noticed towards the traditional status of Muslim women due to the propagation of education, slackening of patriarchal rigidity, vibrant political system, and proliferation of women's organization.

In her study "The changing half: A study of Indian Muslim (1998), Husain noticed that rather than the religious factors alone, other structural and institutional paradigms like customs, traditions, moral systems, patriarchy, the misconception of Islamic principles, lack of self-initiative or inspiration, and lack of support from male members jointly hamper the prospects of women to adopt new values and conform to the changing milieu. Diverse variables like education, age, family structure, income, duration of

stay in town, exposure to mass media, etc. have contributed ominously in altering the attitude of Muslim women towards the course of modernization and social change. Azim (1997) has pointed out that the degree of modernity and backwardness of Muslim women is comparable to that of their counterparts in the various income groups in other societies. The various economic and sociological problems of the Muslims have to be studied in relation to the problems of the general backwardness and poverty of the Indian masses, as the two cannot be isolated. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the backwardness of Muslim women is the result of the absence of a refined culture among the community generally, clearly implying that Islam has not come to their rescue, but it can be misleading to generalize the overall condition of the women by ignoring the inherent problem of class difference. The women belonging to the upper strata have a measurable degree of emancipation notwithstanding the community or religious affiliation, while the women in lower strata are backward and conservative (Azim, 1997). In this cultural context, mere reliance on law or hollow demands of change will turn out to be a futile exercise. What is required is a reform of such proportion which can enhance the educational status of women and increase their participation in economic activities.

#### **Muslim Women's Networks**

Recent decades have seen an emergence and coming into existence of several „networks“ or „coalitions“ of Muslim women's organizations, that strive to develop a dialogue among themselves, with the clerical establishment, and within the larger community on women's issues in general, rather than focusing on individual women. For this purpose, they hold conferences at which resolutions are passed which are then published in the media and organize rallies, often in conjunction with secular women's organizations. They also run „legal awareness camps“ for poor women in rural areas and urban slums and frequently scrutinize and even interfere when an apparently „anti-feminine fatwa (religious ruling)“ is issued by clerics in the country, to draw widespread public attention. SharifaKhanam is the founder of an NGO called STEPS in Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu that aims to support victims of domestic abuse. She currently leads a controversial and widely publicized campaign to construct an „all-women mosque“. She was the tenth child of a poor rural family and had lost her father before she was born. Due to their poverty, her family was never able to arrange her marriage and she has remained unmarried to this day. It is perhaps for this reason that she considers the custom of „dowry“ as one of the gravest problems that Muslim women face in modern times. Rehana Sultana, Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at Maulana Azad Urdu

University, Hyderabad, is another well-known spokesperson for Muslim women's legal rights, compelled by personal misfortune to dedicate her life towards the empowerment of Muslim women. Raised in a stable, religiously vigilant middle-class home, she got married while still in high school. But the marriage was not a happy one and soon ended in divorce. Though her family provided her with little financial or moral support, she was determined to complete her education; eventually, she completed high school, ended up doing graduation, and post-graduation, received her doctorate, and also a degree in law. In addition to her university job, she currently runs a school for girls in a building adjacent to her home in a Muslim-majority locality and devotes her weekends to a small NGO, Bazm-e-Shama-e-Niswan, that provides marriage counseling and legal advice to distressed women. After going through a painful journey, she says, she wants to save others from a similar fate.

#### **The major challenges**

The chronological history of Muslim women and their wide-ranging role elucidates that the Muslim community has been facing varied problems and challenges, primarily as citizens of India and secondarily as members of India's largest minority in an unstable inter-community relationship. Their disadvantaged socioeconomic status depicts a loss and a need for social prospects which, however, is not a characteristic limited solely to Muslim women, but is aggravated by their minority position within an overall framework of a social drawback for most of the Indian women (Kazi, 1999). Studies have revealed that most Muslims in India do not feel themselves to be part of the mainstream due to varied factors. It has also been discerned that Muslims are far more sensitive when it comes to the issues of identity due to their methodical misrepresentations besides inter-community violence and resultant polarization in the past. Reports on the social and economic status of Muslims in India are also variegated. Some specify that in the issues of access to education, employment, and role in public space, the region takes precedence over religion in India. Hence, it is seen that North-Indian women, regardless of their religion, fare much worse than their Southern counterparts (Sen, 2001). However, other studies might suggest that Muslims have lower access to bank credit, are poorer in comparison to other groups (mainly in urban areas), and Muslim women have a lower percentage of economic activity compared to other Indian women. As for the unemployment rates, they are the highest among Muslim graduates. Even in rural areas, it has been reported that villages with a lower Muslim population have a superior infrastructure, medical, and educational facilities than villages which are largely Muslim (Sachar, 2006). Muslim women's experiences

of GBV in India have been convoluted by their religious identity, Hindu fundamentalism, and anti-Muslim communalism, further impaired by the rise of Muslim fundamentalism particularly since the 1990s, anti-Muslim communal riots, and the projection of the Muslim community as „anti-national“ and extremist/terrorist (Gangoli, 2007; Vatuk, 2008). The triumph of the Hindu right-wing RSS led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in the manifestation of Narendra Modi becoming Prime Minister in 2014, has further led to a sense of panic and segregation amongst Indian Muslims.

### CONCLUSION

People often think that Muslim women are strict, socially backward, poor, and culturally deprived, and that they follow strict rules. Why are they that way? Who put them in a box? It can't be their religion, because Islam is the most open-minded religion and has given women equal rights. Women have also broken out of their stereotypical roles and shown what they can do when given responsibility. But it seems that some things, like the patriarchal past and mindset of political leaders, are mainly to blame. Constitutionally, they have the same rights as men when it comes to making decisions, but in practice, this is mostly just for show. In reality, they are always affected by the decisions that other people, mostly men, make. Lastly, macro factors like trade networks, foreign direct investment, national debt, and GDP put them at a disadvantage in the world-system tradition. So, at the current rate of progress, Muslim women will be able to close this political gap in a long time.

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