



Education of Muslim Women and its relation to Purdah System in India

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Abstract:

Education has been a part of Muslim women's life since earlier times. Khadijah, along with other women in the history of Islam, conveys an image of Muslim women that is totally different from what can be seen and read nowadays in the press and the media. Far from populist debates on the Islamic veil, her figure reminds us that the emergence of Islam was an expansion of Muslim women's rights. It also reminds us that women like Khadijah, Aisha or Fatima are models of women's emancipation, which must be studied and remembered. In India during the Delhi Sultanate period, there were women who had influenced the affairs of the court. Famous among them were Razia Sultan from the Slave dynasty and Feroz Shah Tughlaq's Gujarati wife. During the Mughal period there were many elite educated ladies who also influenced the education of common women. In the present times also Indian women preserving their religious obligations are pursuing higher education. This study tries to find out the inconveniences if any faced by Muslim women in higher education who practice Purdah system.

Key Words: Education, Indian Women, Islamic Education, Purdah System

Introduction:

Education is essential for every woman. Indian women have achieved significant landmarks in every field. Indian Muslim women have also progressed educationally but still lag behind when compared to other women. In the present times the subjects like Sciences and Mathematics are more suitable in finding jobs. There are more co-educational institutions when compared to all girls institutions. Those in hijab are enrolled in girls' Madrasahs and also in other institutions. Many Muslim women are also pursuing the higher education in Science and Technology apart from other branches of education. Following their religious obligations Muslim women succeed in achieving higher education.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the history of education among Muslim women and in detail especially in India.
2. To find out whether Purdah System is an obstacle for the education of women in India.

Methodology:

This is both a descriptive study and also involves a survey. To study the historical background of education of Muslim Women some secondary sources have been reviewed and to know the opinion of hijab wearing students about the inconveniences of veil, a structured interview was conducted which involved questions regarding the conveniences and inconveniences of purdah system. Results are then interpreted.

Historical Background of Education in Muslim Women:

Education has been a part of Muslim women's life since earlier times. When we look at the Prophet

Mohammad's wives and daughters we come to know that they were one of the most learned women in those times.

Khadija bint Khuwaylid was the first wife of Prophet Muhammad, she was a highly successful and respected businesswoman. Formal education as we understand it today might not have been as prevalent in her time, she demonstrated significant knowledge and skills in business, trade, and even matters of the heart.

Aisha bint Abi Bakr was the youngest wife of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). She served the Muslim community for 44 years after his death.

She narrated 2,210 hadiths throughout her life, on topics such as inheritance, pilgrimage and prayer apart from matters related to Muhammad's private life. Her intellect and knowledge in various subjects like medicine and poetry were highly praised by early scholars. During a time in Islam when women were not expected or wanted to contribute outside the household, Aisha became directly involved in a war and even battles, delivered public speeches and helped both men and women to understand the practices of Muhammad.

Prophet Muhammad's daughters received religious and practical education, with Fatima being particularly renowned for her intellect and scholarship. While the specific curriculum is not detailed in historical accounts, they were likely educated in a traditional Islamic environment, learning about the Quran, faith, and Islamic customs.

Education of Muslim Women in India:

The Delhi Sultanate:

The Delhi Sultanate was based in mainland India between 1206 and 1526. The Delhi Sultanate period saw a complex mix of ruling dynasties, including the Mamluk (Slave) dynasty (1206–90), Khalji dynasty (1290–1320), Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1413), Sayyid dynasty (1414–51), and Lodi dynasty. While not all dynasties had women who ruled, it is important to recognize that women often played a role in court politics and the lives of their families. During the Delhi Sultanate period, several notable women emerged, particularly Razia Sultana of the Slave dynasty and some women from the Tughlaq dynasty.

The Mughal Period:

Many of the Royal Mughal Ladies were quite educated. Babur's daughter Gulbadan Begum, was credited the authorship of Humayun Nama. In it, we find the names of other educated and learned ladies. Gulbarg, Bega Begum, Dildar Begum and Ayishaa Sultan Khanam were some educated ladies during the age of Babur and Humayun.

The curriculum for the education of ladies included study of Persian, Arabic, Theology, History etc. Gulbadan Begum, Bega Begum, Hamida Bano Begum, Maham Anga, Salma Sultan Begum, Noor Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Sati-un-Nisa, Jahanara Begum, Roshanara, Zeb-Un-Nissa, Zinat-Un-Nissa were some learned Royal ladies of that time. Despite the fact that the Royal Mughal ladies remained behind strict "Purdah", on the whole, their contribution towards education has been great.

While formal education was not widespread for women, elite families maintained traditions of female education in their palaces. The Mughal era witnessed highly educated and accomplished women who made significant contributions in various fields, including literature and fine arts. Some examples include Begums and princesses like Jahan Ara, Mehr Angez, and Islam Khatoon.

While there were educated women in the elite, education for women was not widespread on a mass scale during the Mughal period. Formal schooling for girls was rare, and access to higher education seems to be nonexistent. Women were typically taught skills like cooking, spinning, and household management. There

were regional differences in the extent of women's education, with some areas offering greater opportunities than others.

Education of Indian girls practicing pardah in present times:

In Madrasas there is provision of Pardah System. There are only girls' Madrasas where all subjects like English, Hindi, Science, Mathematics, Computer Science and Social Studies are taught apart from Urdu, Arabic and theology. Modern madrasas are integrating modern education with traditional Islamic studies, aiming to equip students with skills for the modern world while preserving their religious heritage. Some modern madrasas are adopting the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) syllabus for general education. The Indian government is planning to establish a Central Madrasa Board to enhance the education system of madrasas.

Results of the Survey conducted to know the opinion of Muslim Women in purdah and pursuing higher education:

A study was done in the city of Lucknow in which 50 girl students who were enrolled in different fields of higher education were interviewed, they were asked questions related to the convenience or inconvenience they faced at their institutions because of wearing Burqa or Hijab. They were pursuing courses like B.Tech, M.Sc, M.A, M.B.B.S, Ph.D, M.B.A and B.Pharm.

Their responses to the questions were, all of them said they were wearing Hijab by their own wish, no body had forced them to do so. None of them said that it was inconvenient to them. They also said they had no problem in their institutions because of wearing hijab. On asking whether they wish to continue it later on in their life, their answer was in affirmative. The intention behind wearing hijab was a religious one. They believed that it was obligatory for every Muslim woman to cover their body including head when they face men. They all believed that they had no inconvenience because of this dress called Burqa. Some of them said they felt more comfortable in this dress as they don't need to spend time and money making many new dresses and it was simple and comfortable.

Conclusion:

The myth was that Purdah system is a hindrance for girls to pursue their higher education. But actually from the survey conducted, it was found that Purdah system was not an obstacle for women to pursue their higher studies or to do a job. But it was economic background of people which was the main cause of educational and other types of backwardness in the Muslim community.

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