

Chapter -10

Summary of the Findings, Concluding Remarks and Recommendations.

This study on the status role, problems and prospects of Muslim women in Tripura is rather a pioneering work so far as the study on women is concerned. The aim of this study is to examine the socio-economic role, status and problems of the Muslim women in rural and urban Tripura. In the foregoing chapters, I have tried to furnish the major facts and findings as well as analyse the socio-economic role and status of women in Muslim societies of Tripura. In this chapter, I shall present a general observation and discussion on the entire study. Some recommendations shall also be made on the basis of empirical findings.

I

The status of women is an indicator of the development of a society. The status of Muslim women in Tripura has been examined through the ascribed position of women in the ideals of religious text as well from their ascribed and achieved position in the perceptual reality of the society. It is also examined from the cross cultural perspective of some south Asian countries as because the status may vary according to the type of government and nature of law of the country. It is observed that though the ascribed status of women is high in the religious ideal but it is low in the social reality. Islamic text never prohibits women from education, employment and administration. Sura Nur in the Quran reveals the dignity of women and many incidents may be cited from the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who had strong desire to educate the women. But in contradiction to the ideal, the Muslim societies in South Asian countries have maintained some reservation about the participation of women in education as free and independent being. In patriarchal societal rule, the Muslim women's social life is regulated by pardah and other social restrictions and these binding forces restrain them from free participation in the

major aspects of life activities. As a result, they have become the victim of illiteracy, poverty, dowry and related domestic violences. In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, their suffering differ only in degree. In Nepal and Bhutan, as well as in Sri Lanka they are usually governed by the customary laws and sometime adjusting with the civil laws of the country. In a matrilineal social tradition like Maldives, the women literacy is highest among the South Asian countries. The Maldivian women are not victim of dowry or so called social pathology of rigid patriarchal rule. In spite of that they do not claim high status in the society. There is highest number of divorce to avoid domestic violences. The divorce and frequent remarriage of both men and women indicates the marital instability of their life. The gap between ideal and practice of Muslim women's status in notice is almost all south Asian countries. This is true both for the macro level of Indian Muslim society and also in the micro level of Muslim society in Tripura.

Like all over India, the low status of Muslim women in Tripura is also the legacy of history. The partition of India resulted the migration of wealthy and educated families from Tripura. It is reported that a few girls of respectable Muslim families were found as college educated in the sixties. The remaining people belong to the agrarian class of the rural community and poor occupational groups. Among the several ethnic and regional communities of Tripura, Bengali Muslims are predominant. No special identity of women is found in any social or occupational groups among the Muslims. Recently some educated and conscious women are using their group identity before or after their names, i.e. Sayeda, Khanam, Khadim, Palwan etc. In the history of the state men were found in different economic pursuits as well as, in politics and administration, but women were not. Though Muslims participated in the educational initiative of the kings, women did not. Though there were mukhtabs and madrasas since the princely rules, the women lag behind in religious education too. As a result of all these things, Muslim women in Tripura have not been found any place among the notable Muslim personalities of Tripura. The

reserved socio-cultural attitude of the Muslim men regarding their women is responsible for this low status of women in this state.

Muslims are the early settlers and largest religious minority of the state inhabiting in most of the villages and towns and even in the interior villages. After the Partition, the poor inhabitants were cornered in the border areas. However they are found concentrated in ten major subdivisions out of fifteen under four districts of Tripura. For the present research, the empirical data have been collected from extensive and intensive field studies at six Muslim settlements (three villages and three towns). The villages are N.C.Nagar, Khilpara and Yeajekhowra of the districts of West, South and North. The three corresponding district towns are Agartala, Udaipur and Kailasahar.

By summarising the physical and demographic features of the study villages and towns, some important features have been identified. All the villages and towns are old by years since the princely period. The villages are medium in size and population. Two of them i.e. N.C.Nagar and Yeajekhowra are dominated by the Muslims. The largest number of the people lives in the rural areas and the least number live in urban areas. Majority of urban dwellers live in Agartala and its sub-urban areas. Recently due to various reasons the number of urban dwellers has increased and it is reflected in the last Census of 2001.

The economic structure of the villages is mainly based on agriculture. Agricultural labour and day labour are the most dominant occupations of the village people. Women also participate in agricultural works. In towns people are engaged in various self employment. Domestic maid is the dominant occupation for women. All urban facilities are available in the towns but not widely in all areas of Muslim settlement. The interior villages are devoid of minimum facilities from electricity and drinking water. Poverty is the main cause for the large number nuclear family units, and educational backwardness of the children. Three villages represent three

diferent features eg. Khilpara is most advance in literacy and employment of women than that of other two villages. While N.C. Nagar is well advanced in political participation of women, the people of Yeajekhowra are strugglling for employment and requisite education of their children hence the socio-economic status of Muslim women is comparatively better in two fringe villages and two district towns except Kailasahar. Inspite of equal urban facilities, the people of all the ward under Agartala (MC.) Udaipur (NP) and Kailasahar (NP) have not responded equally due to the difference of socio-economic background. The empircal data on the gender-wise distribution of population shows that the number of females is lower than those of the males in all the villages and towns. But when they are divided into few standard age groups, the female population is found quite higher in some age categoaries particularly in the earlier age groups in the villages. The case is similar in the context of sex ratio of the Muslims living in the villages . For total population, sex ratio is 913 which is not only below the state level but also national level. In total the sex ratio is higher in villages than that of the towns, specially in the child age-group. But mortality rate of girl child is found more in village than that of the towns indicating their disablility to health care in the rural areas. However, the mortality of female is lower than that of male due to various reasons.

As one of the important indicators of women status, the economic activities of Muslim women of three villages and three towns have been studied from several points of view viz. the number and percentage of their participation compared with men, their position in villages and towns, their rank and status and the range of occupational varities etc. The economic status of women is very disheartening as only a very few among them are earners i.e. 3.08 percent only. The major economic activities of women are government service, cultivation, day labour, domestic labour, petty business, private tution and milk selling. The low economic status of Muslim women is reflected by their highest participation in domestic labour. In the government sector also, except very few school teachers and a hospital nurse, all of them are

engaged in low rank. They belong to low economic status due to their low educational status. Only few women who have higher level of education, belong to the middle rank and status. A considerable number of people belong to BPL category. The women have contributed to the family's income not only by wage-labour but also from different domestic sources of income. This remains invisible.

The matrimonial status of Muslim women is a question of debate and discussion in the society. There is a popular criticism against the matrimonial issue of Muslim women. Monogamy (97.85%) is uniformly accepted type of marriage except a few polygynous marriage (2.15%) both in village and towns. The declining of dower and increasing of dowry, early marriage of girls, desertion of women, have serious impacts on the status of Muslim women in Tripura. It deserves to be mentioned that tendency of dowry transaction among the literate and educated people indicates that education of women is not the sole factor to raise her status if socio-cultural factor does not favour them to enhance their social position.

The empirical study shows that Muslim families are mainly of three types viz. nuclear (elementary), supplementary nuclear and joint. Nuclear type is predominant in all villages and towns. There is a good number of supplementary type of families. Joint family occupies the third place in the order of frequency. The family size is larger in villages than in towns. A number of families under female headship shows that there is a number of widows, deserted and divorced women. The largest number of nuclear family does not necessarily mean the higher status of women. Because dependents are not free to take decisions. They are always under the control of husbands and others. The legal share of property right of women seems to be effective at the time of crisis in their life. The guardians usually give their due share to rescue them from the crisis. They can enjoy their property but can not sell or dispose the property if 'father' or 'husband' do not make any "will" in their name. They are found rare to deal with Bank Account of their own. In family, women have crucial role which determines the character of family health. The women in

villages and towns are found aware about the birth control and planned family except a few who belong to the senior age group. This is an empirical truth that birth rate is decreasing among the young parents of the community.

The query about the educational status among the Muslim reveals that the number Muslim literates(58.72%) is higher than the number of illiterates. Rural-urban factor is found not significant in the primary level of education. Gender bias is not dominant in the primary level. Socio-economic factors are more important to determine higher education for Muslim girls. Muslims are literates and educated. The data suggests that about 58.40 percent literate people live in rural areas while 59.18 percent in urban areas. The total literacy rate for women is 50.97 percent. One notable demographic feature is that the female literacy is higher in villages (51.33%) than that of the towns (50.44%). Majority of women in villages and towns belong to the junior and senior basic levels. Female education start to decline abruptly in the secondary stage and declines consistently in all higher levels. Girls schools are found distant from the residents of Yeajekhoura village. So the other factors like literacy of parents and their socio-economic status may affect them. Khilpara records higher literacy for women due to their parental background. However, the literacy gap between male and female is maximum from secondary level. A few case studies on the enrolment, and drop out of girls proves the above statement. Though a few girls endeavour to get admitted in technical and professional education, but could not continue except one or two.

Political participation of Muslim women in active politics has started in a slow but steady process since 1994 through the election of three tier panchayat system. In three terms elections (i.e 1994, 1999, 2004). The women number in Panchayats have increased considerably. Even in the interior village of Yeajekhowra Grampanchayat, they are increased in number like other two Gram Panchayats of N.C Nagar and Khilpara. N.C Nagar represents the highest number of women participation of the three study villages. The selection of women as Gram Pradhan

indicates their potentiality to govern the community and the place. The prevailing unawareness and apathetic attitude to politics among the Muslim women has undergone a change. The study reveals that they are yet to occupy their position in the structure of political parties. Another important finding of the present study is that education does not always precede political participation at least in the grassroot level; rather the reverse is true. In the upper level of local governance viz urban administration, they lag behind due to their low level of education and low participation in the social associations and organisations. But they are in the path of progress. The study reveals that the Muslim women of Tripura are gradually changing and they are struggling for a new identity. Thus the conventional notion towards Muslim women as isolated, secluded and subjugated social entity has not much empirical validity.

II

In the concluding section, it is first necessary to verify the queries set before the present study. The study reveals that there exists a distinct and remarkable gap between the ascribed position of women in the Islamic text and the Muslim societies. Actually the *Quaranic* injunctions and the notion of Islam dose not creat^e any hindrance towards the status upgradation of women in the society. The data reveals that early marriage^s is rooted both in dower and dowry customs. It is a paradox. On the one hand, the prevalent form of deferred dower (mehr) and the custom of cousin marriage contributes to the easy and early marriage of Muslim girls. On the other hand, apprehending the rate of ^{the} demand (of dowry) parents like to get their daughter married off soon. Besides, the narrow network in social communication of the community having the minority status motivates them to live in the familial circle of Keith and kin and thus the marriage within the kin groups and nearest village is a common practice. This socio-cultural feature is encouraged by the socio-economic factors of the poor people. In this way the negative impact of early marriage affects marital status, employment and education as well as social and political participation of

Muslim women. Inequal social status leads to subjugation of women. Remarriages of men invites polygyny, desertion, divorce and miserable condition for women and children. All these are correlated with the early marriage of girls.

Muslim women are still governed by *Pardah* whether it is exposed or not. A deep and intensive observation confirms that the rules of *pardah* work silently amongst the women of the community. In a study among the Muslims of North India, Shibani Roy (1980) concludes by noting the negative effects of *pardah* on life of the women. The present observation differs from her to the extent that *Pardah* is not so rigid for the women in Tripura. It is observed in the entire study that opportunity is more important factor to determine the position and participation of women. Though *Pardah* rules them internally, but it is not the sole factor to be accounted for their low participation. Rather opportunity determines active participation of women in economy, education, local governance and other spheres of social activities. Opportunity with responsibility makes women active and conscious to overcome *pardah* and other customary bindings. The laws of the country and congenial atmosphere to execute the laws are found more important otherwise educational or political interests may go fruitless in the dearth of supporting base and hence *pardah* becomes an excuse for the purpose. Opportunity offered by government and supports of the community seems more important for the participation of women. This empirical truth of present findings is reflected also in the queries of economic status of women. The gender biased division of labour for women absorbed fully in household occupations, customary restrictions and under estimation about the capabilities of women are responsible for low economic participation of women.

The economic activities of Muslim women in the present study has not focussed any distinct change in her status. Women's participation in economy is the result of sheer necessity rather than to improve their social status. The opportunity for work either by compulsion or situation, brings the Muslim women in a transitional

phase. Employment of women does not always lead to change of work pattern at home. It depends much on the interpersonal relationship amongst the members of the family and their perception towards household works.

The query on the educational status of Muslim women reveals that they need more support from the community and various incentive schemes for girls to overcome their low participation in different levels of formal as well as informal education. The study reveals that education is not the sole determinant factor to measure the rate of economic participation of women. Employment for women is the outcome of bare necessities of life. It is seen that when father or husband is able to afford all members, then the daughter or wife having educational qualification does not care for searching job.

Similarly the enquiry into the political participation of women, this study reveals that higher level of education is not a pre-condition of political participation. Rather the educated women maintain a distance from active politics. Women with a basic level of education, have recorded their interest in the participation of local governance under three tier panchayat system. So long they are consulted very less ^{about} community affairs, ^{and} they have lesser say in public affairs. At present through the institutional involvement and social experience as well as participation in local governance they are gaining political awareness. Their political participation is also gradually increasing. In three terms panchayat election of Tripura, the women have improved their position in a considerable number. The present empirical truth does not approve that education is the sole determinant factor for political participation. Rather it is found that opportunity is more important than formal education. If one gets the chance, she can educate and improve herself.

III

On the basis of present empirical studies on Muslim Women of rural and urban Tripura, following recommendations may be suggested for enhancement of

their social status and betterment of quality of life. The problem of Muslim Women's social life is very complex and complicated. Their problems are more socio-economic rather than religious ideologies. There are various reasons behind their unequal social status and problematic social life. The reasons are historical, social, cultural and the situational. Hence there is a need of change in the mind-set of the people and the social system of the Muslim community.

The prime thing which is needed for overall development of social status of Muslim Women is the awareness of the people and which could only be achieved through motivating them in an organized manner. The issues of awareness building and motivation require community participation and for which Muslims should come forward to provide justice and equality to their women. All these requires adequate social support and dedicated leadership from within the Muslim Community. Responsibility of awakening Muslims for enhancing their women's social status should be shared by community organization as well as by government and non-government agencies. Under such situation role of Panchayat, urban civic bodies, voluntary organizations are very crucial for formulating plan and programmes to improve the social condition of the Muslim women. The study provides us information that there is a need of realistic programmes that could truly meet up the actual needs of the women. Programmes to support economy and employment, literacy and education, awareness building and empowerment may help to improve their social position. Finally, inclusion of women's voices in formulating plans and policies for women's development is also very crucial one.