

Chapter - 2

Women in Islam and in Muslim Societies of South Asia

2.1. Islam and Women :

The position of women in Islam can be properly understood by taking into account the social situation before the advent of Islam. The social situation of Arab was then in a transitional period of socio-economic and religious changes. When there was certain extent of civilization (i.e. development of commerce and trade and urbanization) the tribal social structure of Arab faced the disintegration process in the social organizations based on kinship structure and complexities in the commercial sphere with clashes and conflicts among various sections or groups of the society and thus existing morality and religious values were degraded. Many scholars agreed that the condition of Arab women in the patriarchal tribal society was comparatively better than their counterpart in the patriarchal feudal set up of Byzantium (Engineer: 1987) The women of Mecca and Medina had right to property, entrepreneurship, to contract marriage, and to divorce. Bibi *Khadija*, the wife of the prophet was its best example. In early life the prophet was employed under her independent business. Mauiya, the daughter of Abzar, was a rich princess of Yemen. It may be due to the reason that some matriarchal characteristics of the tribal society were prevalent among them. But this freedom of women was limited only to the women of higher social status. The condition of common women in different section of the tribal was not such good. They suffered extreme hardship, degradation and complete subservience to survive. Particularly, women among the *Beduin*-tribe were considered as burden of the groups than supporting hands like agricultural society. The situation in the deprived and exploited people like the slaves, poor, orphan, children and other down trodden classes was deplorable.

To overcome the situational crisis i.e. deprivation, exploitation and all sorts of crude custom and conventions, Islam emerged as a new social philosophy of practical life. It gave birth of a new social cohesion and contribution for the new social reformation movement in the history of the Middle East and then spread all over the

world. In its reformative character Islam presented itself as a 'gender friendly' religion obviously distinct from the surrounding world. Islam emphasized on the achieving of humane equality, brotherhood, gender-free love and affection between man and woman and peace of family as the base units of harmonious society. Islam is the first religion which recognizes better status, if not equal, of woman in the man-dominated society. But unfortunately Islam is misunderstood most in the women aspect. For proper understanding, one is to go beyond the apparent meaning of the verses of the Quran, many of which were related to the concrete situation of the period. Hence the classical writers of the Quran emphasise on the sociological and historical approaches of study to have an integrated idea about the position of women in Islam. The notion of Islam towards women is primarily based on four major sources :1) *Quran* - the original text ; 2) *Hadith*, the tradition of prophet (or the story of particular occurrences); the *Sunna* which means the rule of law deduced from the practice or model behaviour of the prophet ; 3) *Qiyas* – a body of opinion determined by the jurists (Qazi). basing on analogous elements ; 4) *Izma*, which means consensus opinion from the community, when all other three sources fail to decide a case.

According to the classical viewpoint, position of women is to be understood by the spirit, intention and purposes of the verses of the Quran. It is undoubtedly true that the purpose of Islam which is the youngest but second largest religion of the world is to improve the status of women by imposing some injunction or restrictions upon the behaviour-pattern or activities of the men and women of the society. One third of the Quran is concerned with women and family implying the importance of women issue. The chapter 4 of the Quran is named *Nisha*. This Arabic word means Woman (Jahangir: 1991) It deals completely with women issue. The position of women enshrined in the Quran reflects the interactive result of humanitarian ideal and the prevailing social customs and conventions of the sixth century Arabia.

a) **Woman's Place Before the Almighty :**

The Quranic pronouncement regarding women's place to the Almighty reveals the equality of sex. Many important verses of the Quran are addressed equally to the men and women. The 'believing men and the believing women', the 'devout men,

and the devout women', the 'chaste men and the chaste women' are equal in the eye of God as they are equal in their place of origin, their abode and their place of return (Jahangir: 1990). So in their religious identity, men and women are entitled to equal rights. Many verses of the Quran put women in high dignity or esteem. They stand on equal footings in relation to the Almighty or in religious obligations. The Quran does not prevent women to come in the mosque and receive religious education. Until the third century of Hijra and even in later period, women used to pray in mosque along with men. Even they interacted with the prophet and his male companion in religious and other matters. The women could exchange their ideas in such gathering. As a result of the freedom of participation, the Islamic history presents some talented women in religious and educational field (Mustafa: 1989).. A woman may go to mosque, attend fair and festivals, participate in the women parts of religious ceremony, visit local shrines and make long pilgrimage. In some Muslim countries, women do participate in congregational worship often but not daily which is mandatory for the men.

b) Woman's Right to Inheritance :

Muslim Women have the right to inherit, possess and dispose of property. This is one of her important economic rights which cannot be denied on ground of sex. The women are generally entitled to 'half' of the share given to men from their fathers and husbands. This provision of 'half of share' does not make her position lower. Justifying this provision, Mustafa argues that a son has the share of two daughters, because a daughter has a privilege of having no financial obligation and responsibility for family members. But it is compulsory for a son who has so many obligations to look after the parents, brothers, sisters and others. In his marriage, he has to give dower money to his wife. A woman is not bound to spend from her *mehr* money or her earning before or after marriage (Mustafa:1989). Thus in Islam, she has exclusive or unqualified rights over her property and earnings. In pre-Islamic Mecca (not in Medina), her right of inheritance was present as a customary law and Islam introduced it as legal rights of woman. She can enjoy this right as daughter, sister, wife, mother, grand mother and

even as son's daughter. "Men have a share in what the parents and relatives leave behind at death; and women have a share in what the parents and relatives leave behind. Be it large or small a legal share is fixed."(quoted in **Moinuddin** :2000) Muslim women had been enjoying absolute right on her property even if it was acquired by succession. The Act of 1939 permits woman to ask divorce if the husband sells away wife's property or prevent her from exercising her legal rights over it. For this unique right of the Muslim women, one can confidently say that Islam stands on better footing in this respect.(**Subbamma**:1989). To protect her right from deprivation, Islamic laws provide some safeguards i.e. limiting the right to 'will'. In Islamic law, no person can make any 'will' of more than one third of one's property. This will work as safeguard for a property holder woman who may be persuaded by the people of bad motive.

c) Her Right to Dower :

Woman has got the right to dower or '*Mehr*' or *Sadaq* before and after the consumption of marriage. Mehr is a sum of money or other property which the wife is entitled to receive and the husband is to pay the amount as stipulated in the marriage contract '*kabin*'. The Quran calls it *Fareezah* or compulsory. It emphasized on the prompt mehr though there is permission for deferred dower. If it is deferred, she can claim it at any time after the marriage. If there is death of husband, it is the responsibility of son to pay it first as promised by his father. In case of divorce she is to be paid fully the amount fixed, so that she can maintain herself with honour. She is the total owner of amount she receives. (**Ghouri**:1990)

d) Right to Consent for Marriage :

In Islam, a bride has right to consent her marriage and disapprove the marriage. If she had been married in the minor age, she has also the right to ask husband for divorce. Consent is mandatory in Islam. As Shushtery observes, "to force her to give her consent is not legal (quoted in **Moinuddin**:2000)

e) Right to Employment :

The Quran (Sura 4.34) grants woman to carry on any lawful occupation or to hold any public office (quoted in **Moineuddin**: 2000). It proposes for ideal relation between husband and wife by making themselves depending on each other; for balancing the two sides i.e. inside and outside; it proposes for the division of labour.

f) Position as Wife :

Nisha (chapter 4) deals with the position of woman as wife. Islam prefers men and women marry and their harmonious relationship built with love and mercy. The marriage tie is considered a protection for both the male and female i.e. ‘They are raiment for you and you are raiment for them’ (Quoted in **Jahangir**:1991). Providing an elaborate list of rights and privileges of women, the Quran (2:228) says that ‘men have a status above’. Because he earns and spends property for the support of women and so men have superior position over women. The verse considering the man as superior is not to be taken in its apparent meaning. Because as Engineer thinks that it is the policy of compromise with the order of tribal society where men have complete control over the resources and the chiefs wielded all power glory and the position of women was servile. So a ‘good woman’ in this perspective is to wait for the gradual change of the society. The Quran has such potentialities for gradual change of society (**Engineer**:1987).

Islam always proposes for cordial relationship between man and woman, but it also cannot deny the fact of strained relationship between husband and wife. On such situation, one of the verses of the Quran has instructed man – “As for those (women) from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to bed apart and scourge them”. The provision of scourging or beating seems to establish man’s superiority and oppression of woman. But the classical writer like Zamakshari claims that the verse only refers to the social existing superiority of men and it has no relevance to control subjugation or oppression of women. (**Lohandwala**:1987) When the prophet was reported to such incidents of beating wives he first reacted against men and so to take retaliation; but he modified his approach and asked women to have patience. Otherwise the reaction will endanger her struggle to survive. So the prophet adopted a practical attitude and advised women to adjust themselves for the interim period only but not forever. So the scholars think that it was an interian decision, not an eternal one. The prophet did not stop only advising the women. He advised the men also not to beat the wives like slaves and he warns them that if one ‘treats a woman to go astray’ he is not in His way. Moreover, this verse intends to provide a means for resolving disharmony

between husband and wife and suggests three steps in sequence before. Wadud observes that three steps are suggested in the said verse : i) Verbal solution between husband and wife (4:34) or with the help of arbiter (4:35,128); ii) If open discussion fails, then second solution comes as separation of bed or physical relation; iii) If this second step also fails to regain the relation, then only the ‘scourging is permitted as final measure.

As Wadud thinks that the word scourge (*daraba*) does not necessarily mean force or violence. It may mean release from bondage obviously said verse (i.e. 4:34) was only response to a concrete situation. It is not meant as final or irrevocable sense. On the question of ‘obedience’, Amina Wadud asserts that the Quran never orders a woman to obey her husband; hence obedience to husband is not stated as characteristics of the better women. Many of the instructions of the prophet insisted on the soft dealing with the womenfolk as well as indivisible relationship between man and woman. It is obvious that scourging, though permitted, should not be in a cruel manner with the intention of retaliation but only for regaining the relation(Wadud:2000).

g) Polygyny and Women :

The Quran permits a limited type of polygyny for men under certain circumstances but under no circumstances polyandry is allowed for women. Polyandry goes against the patriarchal structure of the society. In a patriarchal set up, a family can work under polygamy but disintegrates under *polyandry* in the question of inheritance or certainty of paternity of the child. Though *polygyny* is allowed by Islam, but it is never prescribed as a rule (Engineer: 1987). Hence it is only for exception and never imposed as universal practice. The prophet was in favour of monogamy, but he had to allow polygyny under the pressure of prevailing social situations. At that time, to protect the orphan girls and to own their property, the elders of the family, the tribal leaders or the guardians themselves used to marry their wards. Thus they can avoid conflict with others and maintain complete control over their property. From this situational background, polygyny developed abruptly. To correct this social evil, the Quran limited this number to four; on the other hand the economic responsibility of maintaining the wife would counter balance to access to the wealth of the orphaned female through the responsibility of management (Wadud:2000)

h) Right to ask Divorce :

A Muslim woman has right to ask divorce in limited form of two ways: i) divorce for a consideration (*khula*), ii) delegated divorce. In the pre-Islamic days, she enjoyed the right to divorce by custom. The right to divorce the husband existed in the Pre-Islamic days. An Arab woman simply turned the entrance of her tent facing another direction which indicated her repudiation of conjugal relation with a man. The Quran has no reference of retention of such repudiation by women and at the same time there is no indication that all her power of repudiation must be removed from women. If a woman fears ill-treatment from her husband, there is no harm if she asks divorce for a peaceful settlement and ‘peace is an excellent thing’. One should have fear of Allah who is cognizant of all (4:128). Another verse of the Quran (4:130) says “If both decide to separate, Allah in his largest will provide for them; for Allah is infinite and all-wise.”(Jahangir:1991, Moinuddin:2000). These two verses of the Quran say that a woman can take initiative for divorce when she fears ill treatment from husband, and she can obtain this only by the consent of the man. This kind of divorce is called divorce for Consideration (*Khula & mobara*) (Mondal:2001). The second kind of right to divorce is ‘delegated divorce’. She can exercise this kind of divorce if she is delegated this power by agreement in the Kabinama, before marriage or after marriage or at the time of marriage. She can exercise the said two rights of the Quran without going to the court. Besides, a Muslim woman can divorce her husband under the dissolution of Muslim marriage Act, 1939. It is her right of divorce through the court. On this unilateral power of men, the Quran imposes some conditions or responsibilities upon them i.e. women deserve proper human treatment from the men during the proceeding of divorce as well as after divorce. It prevents abandonment and misuse of women who are subject to the whims of husband in marriage and divorce (Wadud: 2000) It reminds as well as warns men about their obligation to the womenfolk. If one violates the law of God, he will be punished by God.

i) Right to Maintenance :

A woman has right to maintenance. Women deserve maintenance not only during the married life but also after the divorce. For divorced women, maintenance would be provided on a reasonable scale. This is duty on the righteous. The Quran (Sura Bakra,2:241) says, ‘Making a fair provision for women who are divorced is the duty of those who are Allah fearing or pious’ (Sen: 1979, Moinuddin: 2000). Men are instructed to house the divorced women where they live, according to their means; but not to harass them and reduce them to strained circumstances. The Quran is very much specific and sensitive about the women subject to divorce. Men are instructed that if they are pregnant, men should spend on them until they give birth to the child, and if they suckle the child, men should make due payment to them and consult each other appropriately. Iddot period (waiting period) is very much important for the divorced couple in Islam. Thus the *surahs* are very explicit about the welfare of women. Not only as wife, but also as daughter (whether legal or illegal) has right to get maintenance from her father or grandfather. (Sen: 1979, Moinuddin: 2000).

j) Right to be Witness :

Woman has right to be witness in the court. For two witnesses, if two men are not at hand, then a man and two women may be approved as witnesses. If one woman errs, the other can remind her. Here this provision of one man equal to ‘two women formula’ was intended as ‘a safety valve’. This safety valve was required because ‘women were unfamiliar with businesses, or they might have ‘lack of understanding’. Here the verse, as the scholar argues, refers to the social conditions of the time when women’s understanding of financial, commercial and trade relationship was not so sound as that of the men’s (Engineer:1987). Both the women are not called as witnesses. In the wording of this verse, Wadud thinks, one woman is designated to remind the other; she acts as corroborator. Although the women are two, they each function differently. (Wadud:2000, p.85).

k) Pardah and Woman :

The Quran (chapter 33) pronounces, “O Prophet, speak to thy wives and to thy daughters and to the wives of the faithful that they let their wrappers fall now. Thus will they move easily be known, and they will not be affronted”(quoted in **Jahangir**:1991,p.106). The call of this verse is intended to safeguard the movement of women from the unwanted incidents and misshapenness. It is intended to save from evil glance so that no harm would come to them. Thus one of the obligations of women prescribed by the Quran is ‘*Pardah*’. There is no word like ‘pardah’ in the Quran as it is understood today. In Arabic language ‘*Hizab*’ is meant both for men and women. In the Quran (24:30 and 24:31), it is first the men who are asked to lower their gaze in the presence of women and be modest. Then the women are asked to do so i.e. to keep their modesty and restrain their behaviour regarding sex organs. Pardah is meant ‘to dress more modestly’ in a civilized society than that of the previous times. It is through the ‘casting down one’s look, ‘guarding’ one’s private parts, and ‘avoiding’ display of a women’s beauty to any one other than her husband or the near ones. Referring to the two most important *Ayats* (24: 31 and 33:59) **Jahangir** asserts that there is no explicit reference to seclusion of woman from outside activities in the Quran”(**Jahangir**:1991) The real meaning of pardah, as the classical view suggests, is not confinement of women in the four walls of houses or their deprivation from education, job or other kinds of development of life. What Islam recommended was observance of privacy and not seclusion and confinement. The Quran advocates for modesty in physical posturing and outward conduct.

The custom of veiling existed in Arab before the advent of Islam since 1500 – 2000 BC. It was prevalent in the Byzantine Empire. The women were veiled and secluded among the Persian and Roman people in the pre-Islamic days. *Prophet Md.* did not reject this custom but modified it. During his time and up to the time of four Caliphs, only the women of nobility observed limited veiling and it was not observed by the slave girls and common people. The women, as observed by Ibon Batuta, freely interacted with ‘their friends and companions amongst men who are not related to

them. Women's participation in religious discussion was encouraged by the prophet himself. Engineer opines that 'The custom of veiling began during the Umayyad period'. Later, when foreign influences, especially of Rome and Persia, appeared on the scene, women came under increasing restrictions" (quoted in Moinuddin). According to Levy (1957), The practice of pardah was not there until the third century of *Hizra* and even after.

All these things make it clear that Pardah is not something inherent to Islamic civilization and it was adopted from the Europeans in a filtered and modified form but it was misunderstood and misinterpreted by the religious leaders in different socio-economic environment. So it is the Ulemas who used the excuse of the Quran and helped to come down the status of women. (Engineer:1987; Moinuddin:2000).

2.2. Women in Muslim Societies of South Asian Countries :

In the light of the position of women in the Quran and other Texts, here is an account of an exploration on the position and status of women in some south Asian countries. Among 'Seven sisters' of South Asia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Maldives Muslims constitute the largest majority of population in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Srilanka while Muslims are in the minority status of different numerical strength. Very little is known about the Muslim women of last three countries i.e. Srilanka, Bhutan and Nepal. News Bulletins, other sources of information of these countries are very few and controlled by the government; and there are rarely in wide circulation. Although the data problem in these countries seems insurmountable, an attempt has been made to use the available information of women in these countries.

It is well known that most of the south Asian countries are socio-economically backward in comparison to the developed countries of the world. The Muslims of these countries contributes a lot to this fate. The Muslim women being restrained by the community laws, customs and also many other bindings, are doubly backward. Modernization is still not within their grip.

Being constituted by heterogeneous ethno-cultural background, Their response to the change and dynamics of society also varies from country to country and

community to community. The population of the seven regions represents 1.2 billion of the total world population of 5.5 billion and the future of the world lies in the future of the half of the population of these countries i.e., the women about whom very little is being said or written in the world. (**Jung**:1994). Millions of mother and children of south Asia have no access to nutrition, health care, education and proper job facilities. The Muslim women of these countries are historically more deprived section of the population of any country of this region. They are observed as more vulnerable to many incidents like polygyny, unilateral divorce early marriage, dowry and domestic violence along with their usual poverty and illiteracy. The degree of these incidental sufferings depend on the laws of the country and the social practices of the people. The ideal status of Muslim women enshrined in the same text of Quran is reflected differently according to the diverse nature of their practical life. The following discussion is an attempt to touch the gap between the ideal text and reality i.e., the situation of Muslim women specially in South Asian countries.

India

India is one of the South Asian countries where Muslims constitute 13.4 percent of total population (**Census**: 2001) and they are more than 15 crores. As a result of the heterogeneous characteristics of the Muslims of India, ‘their response to socio-economic, political problems varies according to their group interest (**Engineer**:1987); they carry different customs and practices. In the light of this empirical truth, the status of Muslim women in India is to be examined. According to available data, they live in a patriarchal social structure and their aspirations of life are restrained by the customs and convention.

During the medieval period of the Muslim rule, the early marriage of below nine, dowry system and polygamy, free exercise of divorce of man, are the common practices in the community, especially among the richer people. Akbar prohibited these by law but the injunctions were ignored. Pardah or secularism was looked upon as a symbol of respectability. In the British period, the impact of western education and social

reformation movements in the Hindu community created wide social awareness in the Indian society. The upper class Muslim responded to this social awakening. Muslim reformers, both men and women came forward to improve the condition of women. They spoke for education of women, widow marriage, and daughter's share to property as Islamic tenet, her right to *mahr* and consent in marriage, to claim divorce, to inherit property as sanctioned by Islam. Obviously, the reformers spoke against seclusion, polygamy, unilateral divorce of man and other social injustices against women. And as a result of all the movements, some positive achievements were found possible. A series of legislation were enacted in favour of women of India e.g. Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act of 1939. Her right to property in the Quran was highlighted by the reformers. A government college for Muslim women was opened in Madras (at Raya Pettah).

In modern time, Muslim women have been suffering from this historical set backs. "Caught in the vortex of vicious circle of poverty and ignorance and hemmed in by traditional practices, men and women face illiteracy as the single biggest problem (**Women link:** 2000). Muslim women are at the bottom of literacy ladder. It is 19.00 percent, lowest for any community, even compared with 'Dalit women' (**Mondal:** 1997). They have better literacy position in Kerala and Tamilnadu only. Some research study in some villages of West Bengal shows that the enrolment of Muslims girls in Primary level is quite satisfactory, yet in other three levels it is very dismal and negligible. Still among the girls of present generation, there is very negligible number attending higher education. In technological and professional education the number does not deserve counts.

Census: 2001 says that the rate of work participation of the Muslims in India is 31.3 percent. Due to economic pressure, a number of women like their counterpart in other communities, are engaged in economic activities to earn livelihood or to supplement the family income. The working women may be divided into 'Moderate working women' having better secured job and better status in society, and the majority

'Backward working women' are engaged in lower category of works having no job security. In different states of India, the work participation of Muslim women varies according to the socio-cultural values and economic pressures of the people. Among the seven states of the north east region, 36 percent work participation of the Muslims comes mainly from the participation of Manipuri women. In Tripura out of 29.2 percent work participation of the Muslims, women contribute 11.22 percent (**Census:2001**). An empirical study in West Bengal shows that 'more than 70 percent of working women are contributing no less than 50 percent of the total family income...' but in spite of this, they are economically highly dependent on men (**Jahangir:1991**). Even if the women are educated, they are not allowed to take up jobs and their employment does not give them much freedom. A study in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab in Uttar Pradesh conducted by **Sahab Fazal** in 1998 reveals that rural Indian women are bound with social values and traditions that restrict them from asking for their rights and better living condition. Traditional practices in the community hinder the freedom of Muslim women as individuals.

Pardah as seclusion starts in her life in the age group of 11-13 years and perpetuates for lifelong enforcing her dependence and denying her opportunities for proper development of personality. Early marriage is a corollary to pardah for women. Some empirical study shows that the marriage age of girls has increased both in village and town for many reasons, but still it is below the national standard of 18 years of age. The practice of consanguineous marriage prevails among the Muslims of India.

Among the patri-lineal Muslims of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, cash money (dowry) is demanded by the bride-grooms side. Harassment for dowry is one of the causes of domestic violence in north India. Dowry is no longer a one-time payment. A series of demands are made and if these are not met, the bride is sent back or ill-treated even to the point of being killed (**Dube:1990**). In the matriarchal society of Laccadives, domestic violence is avoided by easy divorce. A study on the Muslim Telis of Delhi (conducted by **Ragini Sahay** in 2001) reports that though dower (mehr) is compulsory

for marriage there is also a growing fear that marriage without dowry will not keep the daughter happy.

Unlike the most Muslim countries of the world, instant talaq persists still in India. There is no certainty of the marital status of a Muslim woman, because at any moment she can be thrown or left with no help by a man whether in anger or in intoxicated under compulsion or threat, conviction or necessity. The empirical studies show that polygyny is negligible in percentage. As regards the types of family, the Muslim culture of joint or extended type of family is found decreasing now-a-days.

A study on the cultural determinants of maternal and infant mortality in Madhya Pradesh conducted by **Sarita Sahay** (2001) shows that infant mortality rate is quite high in M.P i.e. 106 in comparison to the national figure i.e. 74. (**Mondal**:2001) in his study in a village of West Bengal i.e. Kawakhali, says that in village population, maternal under nutrition is more common and 40 to 60 percent village children are under nourished.

Lakshadweep where Muslim population is 95.5 percent has 1002 sex ratio. The literacy rate of the island is 86.1 percent; female literacy rate is 80.2 percent. The high literacy as well as the system of matrilineal society has contributed to the better sex ratio in the island. The sex ratio among the Muslims of the sea coast is better in Pandicheery (1097) followed by Kerala (1082), Tamilnadu (1020) and Lakshadweep (1002) than other states of India. Except these few cases the overall situation for Muslim Women in India as very poor. The demographic as well as socio-cultural indicators available at present reveal that Muslim women are in subordinate and disadvantageous position.

The traditional socio-economic life is a hindrance to the political participation of Muslim women. Even when she earns the requisite consciousness in politics, she can not secure the support of the society. So long she is supposed to be unfit for politics and political activism, though she is able to caste her vote in favour of political party dominated by men. However, the situation has been changed with the 73rd and 74th

amendment of the constitution. In many villages of India, they have become able to prove their worth in the political roles in rank and file. Though the number is few, many can earn their inspiration from them. Few empirical studies on Muslim women of India reveals that irrespective of patrilineal and matrilineal, society, high and low rate of literacy and sex ratio, the status of Muslim women in all over India is low in terms of their overall participation.

Bangladesh

The People Republic of Bangladesh came into force in 16th December, 1972. The Muslim constitute 90 percent of total population. The sex ratio is 103.8 in percent per hundred females. The average literacy rate is 36.6 percent. Adult literacy is achieved 37.3 percent in 1993. Only 23.39 percent of total population is urbanized. As regards the family type in Bangladesh, there are 60-70 percent nuclear families and 4.8 is the average size of the households (**Census of Bangladesh:** 2001). Islam is the state religion of Bangladesh and the people are governed by the law based on the *Shariq*. A limited degree of industrialization has taken place in recent time. The position of Bangladesh women depends on this demographic, socio-economic and socio-religious background.

Mere 32 percent urban women are literate and only about 1.27 percent adopted modern occupation. In the village, gender-gap remains high from primary to secondary level of education inspite of the financial incentives offered to them i.e. scholarship for girls students. The low representation of girls at secondary or higher level reflects institutionalized gender discrimination and indicates large number of drop out, early marriage of girls, and custom of *pardah* or seclusion for women. Poverty and dominance of patriarchy in the social organization are two main hindrances for the women in Bangladesh. The working or employed women are deprived from enjoying the fruits of their labour due to dominance and interference of the male members. Poverty has helped to relax *pardah* for a large number of toiler women in Bangladesh. A survey conducted by **Ashan Ulla**:1999 and others on the slums of Dacca city reveals a new kind of struggle for these women living in the slums. In the dominant patriarchal

structure of family, woman has little control over her legal share on the matrimonial property. **Dube** (1990) observed that her right to inherit half a brother's share of matrimonial property is "more formal than real." In family she is accorded a secondary status. Sometimes she is abused in random. In Rangpur district of Bangladesh, wives are used to plough the land instead of oxen and to draw water from a well by making her reined to go around the Persian wheel like an animal. The guardians of the locality choose those brides who are sturdy to do hard tasks for the family's livelihood. Due to this kind of abuse of Human resource, maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Bangladesh is 850. According to this report, it is the highest number among seven south Asian countries (NFHS:2001). Maternal death in Bangladesh like other neighbor states is seen as an individual misfortune rather than a matter of public concern. The marital status of women is obviously low. Most of the marriages go without registration despite the Law for Registration of Marriage. Desertion is more common by man. Yet there is no machinery to guard against this. It is difficult even to trace the number of marriages men have entered into. Though there is dissolution of Marriage Act of 1939, very few women can avail this legal advantage because of educational and economic backwardness. Despite the Child Marriage Restraint Act, marriage of minor age girl is prevalent among the poor people of the community. The parallel or cross-cousin marriage is not very common practice in Bangladesh. A study by Aziz, 1979, (quoted in **Dube**) shows that out of 1,719 first marriages among the Muslims, (it is 9%). (Cousin marriage is found more among the poor and it acts as deterrent to the prevalent dowry custom). A study of Akanda and Sharmin (1985) on the dominance of dowry systems as (quoted in Dube) reveals that since the war of Bangladesh Liberation, the desire to get rich overnight has spread among the people. 'Black money has increased and this unaccounted money has given an impetus to dowry' despite the anti-dowry law.(**Dube**:1990) On the other hand, dower or Mehr which is a religious compulsion for every Muslim has become a mere formal promise. Women are frequently deprived of this right. It is rightly observed by Dube that 'with increase in importance of dowry that of mehr is decreased'

According to the statistical report of Bangladesh, widow is more than widowers. Like Hindu women, widow is regarded as unfortunate. If a widow remarries, her children are to be accommodated in their father's family. (**Dube**:1990) Widow Remarriage remains far away from truth because of the effect of dowry system. So polygamy by men is not uncommon. The dominant nuclear does not ensure women structure of family equality in the conjugal relationship. A man's right to impart physical punishment to the wife is common in Bangladesh particularly at lower level. It is reported that out of 436 deaths of women, 55 were killed for dowry and out of 370 incidents 25 percent are dowry related. The torture and death associated with dowry are more common in villages than in the towns of Bangladesh.

However within thirty years of untired efforts, Bangladesh society is now on the eve of change. In the major areas of property of the human beings i.e. Employment, education and health, the works of the NGOs – local, national and international, have brought some success focusing mainly on women. *Ganashasthaya Kendra* (1971) *Nari Kendra*, The BARC,(Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Bangladesh *Gramin Bank* have achieved success in providing many socio-economic benefits for the women of the country. Still, it is a long journey awaiting for them.

Bhutan

The sovereign kingdom of Bhutan lies in the Eastern Himalayas. It is bounded by China and Tibet in the north and in all other sides by India. This mountainous land along with thick forest remains isolated from the countries and its geographical isolation causes its political isolation also. It is a small state of only 21 lakhs population distributed into two major ethnic groups and a few minor ethnic groups. Female population is 49 percent of total population. Bhutan is a Buddhist State and Buddhism is the state-religion. The minority population consists of mainly Hindus of Nepali origin and a small number of Muslims of heterogeneous groups. The minority people of Bhutan are the migrants of neighboring countries like India, Nepal, Tibet and China in different times of history. The Muslims are as estimated, 3.5 percent of the total population (**Hadiudjamman** 1996, **Mondal**:2001)

In the settlement pattern, Muslims are scattered in southern districts and central region of the country. The Indian Muslims contribute a sizeable number to the total number of Muslims in Bhutan. Under the uniform legal system, Muslims are in a position to join the mainstream of Bhutanese national life and a process of assimilation and integration is going on. The marital bond between Bhutanese woman and Muslim men has contributed more in this process. As regards the position and status of Muslim women in Bhutan, there is lacking of information.

In socio-cultural status, Bhutanese women are accorded a secondary position. Man is believed to be at the apex of the social hierarchy. Women have never been found in the National Assembly or head of the monastery. Illiteracy among women is 95 percent. ‘The gender division is not very clear in Bhutan’ (Sharma:2003). They are destined to frequent pregnancies, anemia, and traditional unsanitary child delivery practices; absence of birth attendants is common to all communities. Marriage and divorce are not rigid in Bhutan. There is free liking of marriage and automatic divorce.

‘But for the Moslem’, as said by Jung, ‘marriage and divorce is controlled by Sharia’. Like other scholars Jung has served no further information about the Moslem women in Bhutan. However, from the above discussion, it can be guessed that the participation of Muslim women in education, employment, and politics is worse.

Like other Bhutanese women, they may have some contribution to the agriculture and livestock but not something significant as the economy of the country itself is largely subsistence level. Men and Women are not equipped in religious education because of the want of muktab and madrasa in the country, and on the other hand, due to ignorance of Islamic culture among the people of the community. Though there is no detail information regarding their marital status, it may be assumed that the marital bond is not very stable in the social environment of free liking of marriage and ‘automatic divorce’. There is no registration of marriage for majority communities in Bhutan. Muslims are not exception due to the mass unawareness of Islamic culture. In the absence of Kabinnama, the question of dower (mehrana) and maintenance of iddat period remains probably negative. Various discriminations are reported against women

but it is known very little by the outsiders due to the lack of public newspapers. The weekly bulletin is owned by the government and the government has no written constitution or any bill of rights. Some discriminatory Acts are imposed upon them. So the mal treatment, ‘the widespread incidents of female abuses and their sexual exploitation remain hidden’. The refugee Bhutanese women have been fighting against the many kinds of humiliation, imprisonment and risk of eviction from the country since the eighties. Recently an NGO namely NWAB, established in 1981, have been carried out social work among them. The BWCO (1990), OXFAM (British NGO) and others are working for the empowerment of the Bhutanese women from the grassroots level.

Maldives

The Republic of Maldives is one of the seven sisters-countries. Maldives consisting of 2000 coral islands is a state of cent percent Muslims. Islam as faith came to Maldives in 1153 via the ocean routs. After its independence in 1965, the constitution of the country is based on the Sharia of Muslim religion. The life expectancy of the people is 66.1 years and infant mortality is 60 out of 1000 (**Monorama Year book: 2001**). Women have constituted 49% of the total three lakhs population of the island. The life expectancy of women in general has increased from 48 years to 72 years between 1978 to 1995. (**Sarma: 2003**) The position and status of women is determined by three important factors of the state viz. its geographical position, the state religion and the prevalent matrilocal system of the society. The geographical isolation of the land has victimized the women more than men. The remote nature of the land dictates their pattern of life – their health, education, and occupations. Women face the disadvantages of an underdeveloped state, its isolated position and late coming of urbanization. Only in recent time modern medical facilities (hospital, health centre) have become reachable to them and infant mortality rate has been reduced now. Still the high rate of pregnancies is affecting the life of women. Many women are out of the means of birth control / family planning. Contraceptives are not easily available; surgical

operation is refused by them on the excuse of religious reasons. Thus, the women remain unaware of their fundamental civil rights. Though education is not compulsory in the state, Maldives has highest literacy rate (93%) in South Asia. The first school for girls established in 1930's as a branch of boy's school. In spite of this, girls can not study beyond seventh class because of the dearth of secondary schools nearby. The only higher secondary school is located at the capital town, Male. It is an expensive transportation. The girls have no facility for Girls' Hostel. Even they cannot avail the training courses because of the troubles of transport facilities. The only easily available education for them is at muktab and madrasa. The girls can recite the Quran and understand the basic rules of faith. Their high literacy is mainly due to their religious education and adult education to some extent. Women are the educators of their children. Religion is not like oppression to them. The common people believe in religious values but in their outward behaviour, there is no visible expression of religiosity. For their religious faith, women are engaged only in traditional occupations which are mainly home-based, But they are not found in the fish-market. They dominate the nursing profession but they are not found as Doctor's or Hakim's (Judge). They never aspire for leadership or presidency of the country. Yet out of 48 members of their Majils (Parliament), eight women are nominated. This gender prejudice dominating their minds is derived from the patriarchal culture. Islam though originated in a patriarchal society has combined itself nicely with the matriarchal culture in this island of Indian Ocean.

Absence of dowry system, freedom of women in marriage and marital relationship are some features of matrilineal system in Maldives. Women are free to choose the mate as well as to divorce when they need. Children remain with mother who is able to keep them in their homes which they inherited as their property right. The women of Maldives enjoy the full right of inheritance. Remarriage for women is not seen as social disgrace. Sometimes there is premarital sex among the girls. On the other hand, some features of patriarchal system in the name of Islam are present in the society. A well-defined gender division, restriction in the social interaction between the sexes, easy process of divorce for man, early marriage of girls, polygamy and man's adultery

still exist in the society. In most cases, it is the man who gives a divorce. He can get a divorce without going to court as *the Sharia* permits him. If he goes to court, he gets it easily while a girl (if she goes to the court) has to face a lot of questions. To adjust with the situation of natural and social environment, the law of the country shows mild liberal attitude to divorce. So," divorce is an important psychological outlet" for the people of the land. (Jung:1994). Though there is no evidence of Women's Movement, 'Maldivian women are the most emancipated women in the Islamic world'. (Sharma:2003).

Nepal

Nepal is a Hindu kingdom where 90 percent are Hindus, 5 percent are Buddhists and 3 percent are Muslims and the total population is 2 corers and 36 lakhs. (Census: 1991). Female population is nearly 50 percent. The kingdom is a land-locked Asian country in the Himalayan range. Nepal is one of the least developed countries of the world and its 75 percent people live below the poverty line as reported by the UN Development statistics. The average life expectancy of people is 58.1 years and for women it is lower than that of men mainly because of their over-loaded hard work without taking health protection. They are to do all the domestic hazards, and on the other hand and simultaneously they work in the field all the day and carry burdens. In the non agricultural sector, there is only 3 percent women still in 1994. Women contribute 30 percent of the total work force. Out of traditional agricultural work they are not allowed to go outside for employment except the very poor women. They have no role in household decision making but head the family in the absence of men. The subordinate position of women is due to their low level literacy i.e. only 18 percent in contrast to men's 52 percent, and due to social psychology and attitude.

There is high discrimination between male-female as regards the access to education. Low rate enrolment, high rate drop out, practice of early marriage resulting high risk pregnancies, infant and maternal death—all these are serious problems to the advancement of women. Thus they have very limited presence in managerial positions and positions in power politics. Family planning is very late in this mountainous country

like Nepal. As a result, infant mortality is very high in the country i.e. 75 out of 1000. One in every ten infants dies before the age of five and forty percent of Nepali children are undernourished. (**Monorama Year Book: 1999**)

Muslims of Nepal are not exception of this (**Mondal:1997**). Mondal says that Muslims of Nepal are considered as caste group with a definite degree of impurity. They are treated as impure though not untouchables. Prior to 1940 and before the Rana government, Muslim children were prohibited to admission in the general schools. Separate primary schools for them were opened by the Rana government and later they were allowed to the general centers of learning. They take Islamic education in the local madrasa of primary level and for higher Islamic study, they come to India.

Muslims of Nepal concentrated in the plains. Muslim women have assimilated themselves in the local cultures. In birth, marriage and death, many of them observe the rituals of the locality. Many women adore deities and pay devotional respect to the ancestors of the Hindu community. Though the large scale Muslim settlement in Nepal is since the 17th century, many of them are ignorant of Islamic culture and knowledge. They are carrying a mixed cultural heritage. Though they are of various regional, ethnic and cultural groups like Nepali, Tibetan and Kashmiri but they all belong to Hanafi School and Sunni sect. Muslims live mostly in rural areas.

In this general background of the country said above, Muslim women have remained more backward in education –both in religious and formal education. They had no opportunity to get general education before 1940. The legal status of Muslim woman is same to that of her counterparts due to uniform legal system. The Muslim Law of inheritance or the property right of women is not practicable in Nepal as the law of the country is based on the Hindu Law. No talaq or divorce also can be obtained without the decision of court and polygamy is a crime under Law. But probably the Muslims who belong to the non Aryan communities enjoy great freedom of divorce and remarriage by the existing customary law. (**Sharma:2003**).

Muslim men in rural areas are engaged in agriculture and various craft production; in urban areas, Muslims are primarily engaged in trade and petty business, rickshaw pulling and wage earning at organized and unorganized sector. The works and activities of Muslim women in Nepal are confined in the home. Like other women, they are also the victim of illiteracy, poverty and gender discrimination.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a south Asian country situated on the coast of the Arabian Sea. Iran and Afghanistan border it to the west, China to the north and India is in the west. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is said as the most conservative of all the Muslim countries. Muslims constitute 97.00 percent of the total population (83.8million). The population of the state is 14 corers and 50 lakhs and the growth rate is 2.8 percent in 2002. The female population is 47.50 percent (1992-93), the percentage of sex ratio is very poor viz. 475 female for 1000 males. (**Monorama Year Book: 2001**). The literacy rate of Pakistan is (45% in 2002) lowest among the seven South Asian Countries. The female literacy was 14 percent in 1983. But the percentage in higher education is hopeful. There are a number of supplemented nuclear families, a number of lineally joint families and joint families of brothers. Women are more victims of poverty and illiteracy than that of man in the State which is an underdeveloped and non-industrial state. As Khawaja (1994) observes that mothers suffering from anemia are 90 percent; infant mortality is 84 out of 1000 and 30 percent children born under weighed. The low sex ratio is very much related with the low standard health care infra structure in Pakistan. The prevailing social customs and conventions and state ordinances come in the way to the independent status of women in Pakistan. The social customs are based on sharp discrimination between the sexes. Some of the discriminatory social customs are: Compulsory Pardah system for girls above than 10 years; Early marriage of girl child; Large dowry system, especially in the rural areas; Custom of man's unilateral talaq and instant pronouncement of talaq three times. As the man pronounces talaq three times the wife is to leave his house instantly often along with her children; Polygamy is indulged by this man-dominate social structure; Women are not allowed to go out for earning

money; men become ashamed of wife's job and hide the fact from the guest; The custom of 'watta-satta' or the exchange of daughter within families for marriage; Various kinds of superstitions against family planning, taking the weight of women/ health care of women and children etc.

Women have been made victim of a conservative ordinance promulgated by the orthodox rules of Pakistan. The *Hudood* Ordinance in 1979 made many women the victim of 'zina' (an offence against the state and punishable by imprisonment). By the ordinance of Pakistan, if a woman even if she is blind, would lodge any complain of rape, but unable to provide any water tight evidence or witness, she will be accused of *zina*. This ordinance also prohibits her from aborting the unwanted pregnancy and she is forced to live, with stigma of bearing an illegitimate child who has no place in the society. By this ordinance, the women are denied their right to choose of their dress, to drive a car or participate in arts and sports. The campaign for Islamic morality in Pakistan was only meant for women (**Jung:1994**).

Because of strict pardah and early marriage, education of girls is very much difficult in Pakistan. Even in non-formal or religious education she is not expected to have it perfectly. Unlike women in Maldives, very few women in Pakistan can read the Quran. So, they are deprived of realizing the meaning of the Surahs of the Quran. The Mullahs take advantage of this. They misinterpret religion and also like to stop women from doing job and having a planned family. Unlike Maldives, "religion has been harnessed as a negative force in Pakistan" (**Jung:1994**).

The Govt. of Pakistan in 1958-69 took attempt to modernize Pakistan by an ordinance of Family law in 1961. This law put a check on Polygyny, encouraged registration of marriage, wife's right to get maintenance and right to ask divorce under particular circumstances. By this law, pronouncement of talaq three times does not mean legal divorce.

The urban population is 20.0 percent of the total population consisting middle class and affluent sections. They remain out of the control of the orthodox rules and their associates. Hence the researcher and activists in Pakistan think that it is the

urbanization rather than religion and socialism will determine the future of Pakistan in the next decades. Various aspects of urbanization have been taken by the governmental planning. The National Development planning of Pakistan has separate financial allocation for the "Development of women" entitled as separate chapter in 1979. Under the urbanization, change has already been started in Pakistan e.g. changed attitude of the people break up traditional structure facially, expression of women resentment against the combined force of religion and customs dominated by men. Women are now found with job education, they have begun to speak boldly against the conservation law/ordinance and underprivileged status of women.

The economic participation of women has improved significantly (**Menon**:1981) since the sixties. The rate of their participation varies in different province. A large number of women skill worker are found in embroidery work, sewing and cutting, in the business of boutiques, interior decoration, jewelry making. Some women of Beluchistan operates shops , under takes agricultural activities, sells milk and even constructs building and houses. Women of Sind and Punjab do agricultural and related works, women of urban areas of Karachi or Hyderabad, work in offices, firms and factories. Their participation in the paid labour force is 5 percent in 1983-88. Due to steady efforts, some positive results have been achieved during 1960 to 1982. A case study of Pakistan conducted by Faizia Aziz shows the different categories of occupations among the women i.e. professional, administrative, clerical, production, sales and services (**Sagra**:1994). They have already made a place in the world of entrepreneurship from the three decades. The AMDISA (Association of Management Development in South Asia) recognized this new role of women as "new entrants" in the work place. As result of this wide participation in the last three decades, participation educational participation has also increased. There is marked increased in Higher Education girls since sixties. They attend college and university without burqua.

A number of reforms in Muslim personal laws have directly benefited women (**Jahangir**:1991). The association of Muslim Marriage Act in Pakistan (with

modifications) gave women the right to divorce on specified grounds. Women in urban areas are 'becoming emancipated from their form their former subjection, although this may be at the cost of family happiness and stability' (**Nazmul Karim**: 1963). Though women are found as Prime Minister, Ministers, Ambassadors and Chairperson Senate, but Political participation in fullest sense is still limited within the elite class of society.

Srilanka

Srilanka is an island in the Indian Ocean and Independent since 1948. The Democratic Socialist Republic of Srilanka is constituted by one crore and ninety one lakhs population distributed into Buddhist, Hindus, Christians and Muslims. All the Singhalese are Buddhist in religion and they are the majority of total population. The minority consists of the Tamils who are Hindus and Christians and the Muslim migrants from Kerala sea-coast. The Muslims constitute 2 .00 percent population of the total. Muslim women in urban areas enjoy more freedom than the women of other south Asian countries, probably because of their Tamil ancestry. The country has high literacy (94%) and low growth rate of population (1.2%). It has solid health infra-structure resulting high percentage of life-expectancy (74%). Women have equal status with men. Women are more than 50.00 percent in Technical colleges and vocational Training. There is no gender-bias and no dowry system. The birth of girl is not considered a threat as it is in neighbour India. Though the new couples are helped by parents to be settled in the beginning, but it is not treated as dowry but gift. The urban people are much developed. The urban women are highly literate and various opportunities or avenues of self expression are open to them. The success story of Srilanka remains in its stabilization of population. Family planning is run by indirect way (**Dube**:1990).

On the other side of the coin, the people being predominantly rural are concentrated in the west-south and south-east region. About fifty percent people are engaged in agriculture. Majority people live in rural side where poverty is coupled with low education. Majority Muslim women are the migrants from Kerala and they live in the

rural side of the state. They belong to the disadvantaged group. Recently some community leaders have taken initiative to organise educational movement for them. Literacy campaign, schools and colleges for Muslim girls established in various parts of the country and a Muslim women's conference in Srilanka have definitely some impact on the Community people.

Findings

The foregoing discussion on the notion of Islam towards Women has made it clear that women are accorded individuality in Islam. It treats women very softly and liberally. Hence, Islam is called as a gender friendly religion. It has tried to change and modify the man-centric values and practices prevalent in the tribal life of the Arab desert. Islam gives importance to the legal and happy union between man and woman and the peaceful family life maintaining a balanced order in society. Men are warned to fear Allah the Almighty so that they can restrain themselves from unlawful and cruel acts against women or abuse of women. Thus women are conferred so many rights which are very much liberal in nature and are relevant for communities, viz. right to education, property, consent to marriage, dower, employment, divorce, maintenance etc. But live Islam i.e. the Muslim society treats women in somewhat differently as it is based on patriarchal social order and male dominated social practices.

When we go through the social and legal practices prevalent in the Muslim societies of South Asia, the gap between ideal and practice becomes distinct in many ways. Though the degree of gap may vary according to the heterogeneous characteristics of the Muslim society but the women share some common experiences there. Marriage is the destiny for all women in south Asian countries e.g. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and also in Bhutan, Maldives and Srilanka. Everywhere they have lower participation in education and politics than that of the men; their contribution in the growth of economy remains often unrecognized in the statistics of the country. Despite of some privileges conferred by the Quran, they are vulnerable to various disabilities and misfortunes. The misinterpretation and misuse of the Personal Law contributes a lot to the misfortune. The socio-cultural conservative outlook of the society leaders and poverty and illiteracy existing in the society aggravates the situation against the women.. Majority women in Pakistan and Bangladesh live in a life full of strains. India is not very exception. The deviation of people from the Islamic scriptures as well as the socio-economic and political reality existing in the country are responsible for the painful conditions of majority women.

The data of poor literacy, poor health and high rate of maternal death, high rate of dowry, early marriage and gender discrimination. Since the childhood and low marital status for Mislim women in Bangladesh is known to all. Change is coming through the works of NGOs and increased rate of urbanizations in the country. The status of Muslim women is assumed to be different from the status of the majority Bhutanese women constituting a separate ethnic and religious group (e.g., the predominantly Buddhist). Muslim women in Bhutan are assumed to live in the patriarchal social structure of the community in the matrilocal society of Maldives the *shariat* law is moderate to adjust with the order of the society.

In the Hindu kingdom of Nepal, Muslims are to follow the uniform legal civil code. Hence no talaq can be effected without the consent of the court. But it is reported that Muslims being the non-Aryan community enjoys customary rights of their personal law. As the overall situation of Nepal goes not in favour of women's equal position to men, it is assumed that the position of Muslim women is also low in the country.

In Pakistan due to extreme pardah custom and some orthodox rules, the status of Muslim women is very low specially in rural areas. Recently, increase of urbanisation, spread of education and government policy in favour of women's entrepreneurship, have contributed to the slow but steady changes in their position in the society. For these the role of NGOs can not be denied. Despite the poorest literacy of women in the low levels the rate of higher education for women is good. In varied employment they are increasing in number. But still, about 80 percent women live in rural areas which lag behind the change of the time.

The women of Srilanka are in better position in respect of marital status, education, employment and also in political participation and there is no dowry custom in society. But Muslim women who live in the rural areas, suffer from illiteracy and poverty as the part of their life. It is reported that the community leaders have come forward taking initiative to organise education movement for the people. Muslim women of urban society in Srilanka are in better status than those in rural areas. In the Hindu state of Nepal, Buddhist state of Bhutan and Srilanka, Muslims are in the process of

the assimilation of culture. Often they remain ignorant about their religious heritage due to the want of Islamic education. Urbanisation, Family planing, health care, modern education are yet to reach the Muslims of South Asian Countries.

The empirical data on the status of Muslim women in India, especially in the north and north east India show that the negative aspect of patriarchy is more dominant than the positive aspects. Patriarchy does not ensure all women a secured home and safety from the hazards of the outer world. Though in literacy rate and sex ratio, the status of women is better among the Muslims of the sea-coasts of India e.g. Lakshadweep, Kerala, Tamilnadu Pandicheery but this does not ensure their marital stability. The high sex ratio might be affected by the fact that men of these areas went abroad for job purpose and settled there. Hence, matrilineal pattern does not necessarily mean high status of women. Among the patriarchal Muslim families of Kerala, dowry-demands and violence against women is not reduced by the humane spirit of Islam.

In comparison to Bhutan, Nepal and Srilanka Muslim women in other South Asian countries have better opportunities for both formal and informal education. Inspite of this, Muslim women have no significant participation in education and other social activities. The least education they receive, has least effect on their status. At last the gap between ideals and practices in the Muslim societies of South Asian countries can not be denied.