

Two Days International Seminar
Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-25

On

Mapping the Research on Muslim Women: Retrospect and Prospect

This Seminar is an attempt to create a data base for founding a Resource Centre for Muslim Women. The first question that confronts us is why do we choose Muslim Women and not women in general. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) states that the Indian Muslims lag behind others in development indices and that the condition of Indian Muslim women is worse than that of the Dalit Women. The report's data and analysis shows that in the states of UP Muslim women's education and socio-economic status is pathetic which still remains unchanged besides myriad other Muslim belts round the country. This intricate issue of the socio-economic condition of the Muslims of India and its direct link with their political position is quite intriguing, especially when seen in the light of their steady decline in socio-economic terms. The problem becomes even more complex when we narrow down our focus on Muslim women in North India.

On the question of how to make a database study on Muslim Women, it can be stated that the tendency to view them as a collective or a monolithic entity, integrated mainly through their adherence to Islam and its traditions is largely the cause for their being invisible in historical and socio-economic perspectives. This needs to be changed for a more favourable approach that seeks to look at them in segregated terms, i.e. social class, caste and regions.

The focus on the status of women over the last five decades after independence, both in terms of academic perspectives as well as of policy interventions has yielded important insights. Structural and sociological constraints like caste, economic status and religious affiliations have been identified as key factors in determining and perpetuating the discrimination against women. However, what remains relatively unexplored within the paradigm of women's studies in India is the idea of marginality itself; how this was constituted in relation to religion, community and occupation, whether it has been conflated with caste and status and whether this is a useful way of understanding the problem. These questions become especially important when we choose to consider the problems of specific groups like dalit women, arzal Muslim women, dalit Christian women, as well as of sex workers who historically were regarded as outcastes even as they struggle to enter into complex relationships with the State and its agencies. Since Muslim women are most marginalised hence there is an urgent need to bring forth the

real issues of Muslim women instead of making a hue on cry on legal issues. The most significant survey on Muslims so far has been the Sachchar Committee and Rangnathan Committee Reports and that too is not sufficient from a gender perspective as its main focus is to see Muslims either from a socio-economic or from a caste stratification point of view. Very little academic work has been done on Socio-economic status of Muslim Women that needs to be done by calling for a scholarly work on Muslim Women.

A considerable volume of feminist scholarship in India and abroad has looked at the question of women's agency, of reading strategies to discover the silent and silenced voices with important and impressive results. Interdisciplinary studies using literature and history have generated an important body of work and writings but this has not been able to bridge the gap between theoretical scholarship and policy initiatives.

The problems pertaining to the status of marginalized women in India need to be analysed in the background of status of women in general. Many of the issues and factors impacting upon the status of women are common. The caste factors in the study of status of women in general and Muslim women as religious minority therefore cannot be overlooked. The social structures of Indian society which provided a space for exploitation need to be examined. Hence this Seminar would try to focus on the research conducted on socio-economic status of Muslim women taking into consideration their social stratification and other related social realities.

This Seminar will focus at the need for generating an awareness of the social stratification within the Muslim society and examine the status of Muslim women in terms of their specificity, location and context. It would also draw attention to the tendency that arises from the political orientation of Hindus and Muslims to see themselves as parallel communities and emphasize the need for a change in this respect through adoption of a more favourable approach that seeks to view Muslim women as individuals in their own rights. Efforts need to be vested in exploring the realities of Muslim women's lives without carrying the burden all the while of trying to decide how comparable, similar or better off they are in relation to the Hindu women. It is only after a baseline picture of the realities of Muslim women's lives on their own terms that a meaningful comparison with women of other communities, including Hindu women, should become possible. Therefore, this seminar would also make attempts to understand the status of the Indian Muslims, particularly women, in the context of their own social stratification.

Main Objectives of the Seminar

- Status of Muslim Women in the Colonial Period

- Muslim Women's issues in the Social Reform agenda
- Status of Muslim Women in Popular culture and Literature
- Codification of Law and Women's issues
- Muslim Personal Law and emerging issues of contemporary Muslim Women
- Status of arzal (dalit) Muslim women and their issues
- Muslim Women in Communal Violence: Partition, Post independence Communal Violence
- Muslim Women in Conflict situations: Kashmir and the North East
- Muslim Women and Challenges ahead
- Post-Sachchar Committee and Policy interventions

Important Dates:

Seminar Date: 22-23 September, 2015

Deadline for abstract submission: 30th May, 2015

Full Paper submission: 10th August, 2015

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