

Educational Status of Muslim Women in Malabar Region of Kerala

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Introduction

On the completion of five decades of independence, women in Muslim community face considerable challenges as citizens of India and as members of India's largest minority. Their poor socio-economic status reflects a lack of social opportunity, status and overall context of social disadvantage for most Indian women.

When we focus in Kerala state, there are tremendous changes among Muslims, especially among women. Social status and educational level of Muslim women in Kerala should be a model for other states of India nevertheless some of them are poor and illiterate. As we know the religious activities are bounds with the people who are residing in backward areas especially rural areas of Kerala state. In these places less number of women are active in their day-to-day life.

Logan (1989) has ascertained that the introduction of Islam into Malabar (Northern part of Kerala) might have taken place 200 years after Hijraas said by Zeinuddin. This date or later date may be correct. The Arab merchant who visited Malabar and writes in (A.D. 851-52) "He did not know that there is anyone of either nation (Chinese or Indian) that has embraced Mohammedanism or speaks Arabic.

The turn of the last century saw Muslim leaders and organizations thinking about the educational backwardness of the people and many schools were started working in Muslim areas. Kerala state has taken an effort towards complete literacy helped to narrow the educational gap between Muslims and other communities.

However, educational backwardness of Indian Muslims should be attributed not to any 'religious fanaticism' or 'minority complex' but to the small size of the middle class whose members can be expected to seek educational opportunities (Ahmed, 1981). Lack of adequate number of schools and infrastructural facilities in the Muslim dominated areas was a major cause of educational backwardness of this community (GOI, 2006).

Lack of social opportunities for Muslim women is a crucial issue needing urgent action. An improvement in literacy rates would directly influence Muslim women's

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socio-economic, educational and political status as citizens of India. The acknowledgement of the universality of women's rights by the international community is relevant to the debate on Islam and women's rights, particularly with reference to women's rights in the family. The formation of forums and associations of Muslim men and women's initiatives in the 1990s is an important step towards facilitating public debate on Muslim women's issues.

Muslim women and men must collaborate with individuals and organizations that are committed to the realization of women's human rights. The alliance of Muslim women with the women's movement in India, as well as movements for secularism, democracy and human rights, are crucial for forging a common front against forces opposed to women's self-determination.

According to the 2011 census of India, Kerala is home to 31.84 million people. 56.2 percent of Keralites are Hindus, 24.7 percent Muslims, and 19 percent are Christians. This region of India is very religious and very political. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians alike proudly display religion in homes, businesses, and even in working place. While the rest of India shows a disinterest in electoral politics, Kerala shows a fascinating intersection between religion and politics.

In this special series on Malabar we also look at some new trends i.e., positive and some negative- that will shape the future of this vibrant community of Muslims. The Muslims of Malabar have attracted the attention of historians, ethnographers, sociologists and political scientists ever since the gaze of these disciplines was cast on the southwestern part of the Indian peninsula in recent times.

The increased population of Muslims in the interior regions, such as the Valluvanad and Ernad Taluks of old South Malabar, will have to be explained in a different way- the migration of Mappilas (Malabar Muslims), particularly following Portuguese atrocities, along the rivers and their settling there with agriculture as livelihood. So, the life-world and even social structure of the Mappila peasant of Ernad and Valluvanad differed considerably from those of the Mappilas of Kozhikode or Thalasseri or Kannur. This will stand in the way of a correct understanding of the Muslim peasants of Malabar.

One of the major factors for the high literacy rate among Kerala's Muslims who are among the most educated Muslim communities in India is the vast network of educational institutions that Muslim community leaders have established across the state. Of these, the largest and one of the most influential is the Calicut-based Muslim Educational Society. (Yoginder Sikand. 2009)

Muslim Women are showing interest to join in various courses as the numbers of colleges in private sector are increasing rapidly. In past, education was not an easy task for Muslim women due to traditional restrictions but the scene has reverted in present days.

Objective of the Paper

To analyze the educational status of Muslim women in Malabar region of Kerala.

Literacy rate of Muslim Women in Kerala as per 2001 and 2011 census:

Literacy rate of Muslim Women in Kerala as per 2001 and 2011 census are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Literacy rate of Muslim Women in Kerala

State	Religion	2001 %	2011 %
Kerala	Hindu	77.8	83.6
	Muslim	73.4	78.9
	Christian	83.4	87.5

Source: India Census 2001 & 2011

This can be seen that 2000 onwards the Muslim education system has changed and it is growing to the top. Table 1 shows that about 5 percent of literacy growth is visible among Muslim community as in Hindu community.

District Wise Distribution of Total Muslim Population in Malabar

District wise distribution of total Muslim population and Sex ratio among Muslim population in Malabar region of Kerala as follows:

Table 2: District Wise Distribution of Total Muslim Population in Malabar

Sl. No.	Districts	Total population	Muslim Population %	Sex Ratio Among Muslims
1.	Kasaragod	1,307,375	37.24	1080
2.	Kannur	2,523,003	29.43	1136
3.	Wayanad	817,420	28.65	1035
4.	Kozhikode	3,086,293	39.24	1058
5.	Malappuram	4,112,920	70.24	1098
6.	Palakkad	2809934	28.92	1126
7.	Trissur	3121200	17.02	1036

Source: India Census 2011

As per the 2011 census, Kerala and Puducherry are the only states in India with a female-to-male ratio higher than 0.99. The ratio for Kerala is 1.084 i.e. 1084

females per 1000 males, while the national figure is 944 females for every 1,000 males. It is also the only state in India to have sub-replacement fertility.

Total Population of Different Religion in Different Districts of Malabar Region of Kerala

Percentage of different religion in different district of Malabar region of Kerala as follows:

Table 3: Total Population of Different Religion in Different Districts of Malabar

Sl.No.	Districts	Total population	Total Hindu Population %	Total Muslim Population %	Total Christian Population %
1.	Kasaragod	1,307,375	55.8	37.2	6.7
2.	Kannur	2,523,003	59.8	29.4	10.4
3.	Wayanad	817,420	49.5	28.6	21.3
4.	Kozhikode	3,086,293	56.2	39.2	4.2
5.	Malappuram	4,112,920	27.6	70.2	1.9
6.	Palakkad	2809934	66.8	28.9	4.1
7.	Trissur	3121200	58.4	17.0	24.3

Source: India Census 2011

Malappuram is the Muslim-majority district in Malabar region (70.2 %) and Kozhikode is the second largest Muslim majority district in Malabar (56.2 %). Only 17 percent of Muslims are residing at Thrissur district, considered as the Muslim minority district in Malabar region.

Literacy Rate of Muslim Women in Malabar Region of Kerala

Literacy rate of Muslim women in Malabar region of Kerala as per India Census 2011 is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Literacy Rate of Muslim Women in Malabar Region of Kerala

Sl.No.	Districts	Total Literacy Rate among Muslims (%)	Literacy among Muslim Men (%)	Literacy rate among Muslim Women (%)
1.	Kasaragod	76.26	48.32	51.67
2.	Kannur	79.68	45.42	54.57
3.	Wayanad	77.75	49.87	50.12
4.	Kozhikode	81.02	47.08	52.91
5.	Malappuram	79.27	47.51	52.48
6.	Palakkad	78.82	48.50	51.49
7.	Trissur	80.81	45.51	54.48

Source: India Census 2011

Educationally, Muslims comprise one of the most backward communities in the country. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts and women of all other communities. According to Census 2011, the literacy rate among Muslims in Kerala is 66.27 per cent. The Muslim female literacy rate was 78.9 per cent which is above the Muslim male literacy rate (71.9 %). In Malabar region, Kozhikode has highest literacy rate among total Muslim population (81.02). When we focus on Literacy rate among Muslim women, Kannur district in Malabar region is in the apex level (54.57 %) than the Thrissur district (54.48). Wayanad district secured the highest position in the male literacy rate among Muslims (49.87). Another important point is that Muslim women literacy rate is higher than the Muslim male literacy rate in all district of Malabar region of Kerala.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Previously, educational and employment status of Muslim women were poor because of their precarious economic situation as well as the need for legal reform and greater political participation, and the possibilities of overcoming patriarchal structures within their own communities. Literacy wise Muslim women lag behind their counterparts by 2001 census. But in 2011 census the literacy rate of Muslim women are far better when compared with the Muslim men in Malabar.

Today Muslim women of Kerala are willing to express their problem without any hesitation in public and analyze social problem in their own outlook. The status of Muslim women is higher when we compare with other states of India. Education is the only factor that affects the life style, culture and status of Muslim women in Kerala. Important point noted that Muslim women literacy rate is higher than the Muslim Male literacy rate in all district of Malabar region of Kerala.

Muslim women need to participate in the contemporary discussion on women's rights, duties, social issues, educational backwardness, economic and political

progress, and to build cooperation and collaboration between genders and communities to secure their empowerment.

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