

**GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION:
MAPPING THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN
IN KERALA**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

SOCIOLOGY

BY

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09 July 2018

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This dissertation is an independent work and does not constitute part of any material submitted for any research degree here or elsewhere.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled '**Gender and Higher Education: Mapping the Experiences of Muslim Women in Kerala**' Submitted by **Ramsheena. CA**, bearing registration number **11SSPH10** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

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A. Published in the following journals:

(2018). 'Education, Employment, and Empowerment: Reflections of Muslim women in Kerala' in *Social Action*, 68(01): 65-79: ISSN 0037-7627.

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Course Code	Name	Credits	Pass/Fail
1. SS600	Advanced Sociological Theory	4	Pass
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My mother, who believed that her daughter, a Muslim woman, should be educated.

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List of Abbreviations

ABVP	Akhila Bharathiya Vidhyarthi Parishath
AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Science
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BBA	Bachelor of Business Administration
BCA	Bachelor of Computer Applications
B. Com	Bachelor of Commerce
BDS	Bachelor of Dental Surgery
BHMS	Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery
BJP	Barathiya Janatha Party
BPT	bachelor Degree in Physiotherapy
B. Sc	Bachelor of Science
B. Tech	Bachelor of Technology
BUMS	Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery
CDS	Centre for Development Studies
CFI	Campus Front of India
CIC	Coordination of Islamic Colleges
CPIM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DHIU	Darul Huda Islamic University
DYFI	Democratic Youth Federation of India
EOC	Equal Opportunity Cell
FC	Farook College
GIO	Girls Islamic Organization
GOK	Government of Kerala
GWP	Gender Work Participation
HDR	Human Development Report
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IFS	Indian Foreign Service
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
INC	Indian National Congress
IRS	Indian Revenue Service
IT	information technology
IPU	Indian Parliamentary Union
IUML	Indian Union Muslim League
IWC	International Women Colloquium
JIH	Jamaat e Islami Hind
KG	Kinder Garten
KMD	Kerala Model of Development
KNM	Kerala Nadvatul Mujahid
KSRTC	Kerala State Road Transport Corporation
KSSP	Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad
KSU	Kerala Students Union
LLB	Bachelor of Law
LLM	Master of Law

M.Com	Master of Commerce
MA	Master of Arts
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MCA	Master of Computer Applications
MD	Doctor of Medicine
MES	Muslim Educational Society
MGM	Mujahid Girls' and Women's Movement
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Members of Parliament
MPL	Muslim Personal Law
MSF	Muslim Students Federation
MSM	Mujahid Students Movement
MSS	Muslim Service Society
M-tech	Master of Technology
MWL	Muslim Women League
NCC	National Cadet Corps
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NEET	National eligibility cum Entrance Test
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NSS	Nayar service Society
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
PG	Post-Graduation
PRD	Public Relations Department
PSMO	Pokker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College
SC	Scheduled Castes
SDPI	Social Democratic Party of India
SFI	Student Federation of India
SHG	Self Help Groups
SIO	Student Islamic Organization
SKSSF	Samastha Kerala Sunni Students Federation
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalan Yogam
ST	Scheduled Tribes
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UUC	University Union Council
WFI	Women's Front of India
WPR	Work Participation Rate

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Chapter-1

Introduction

From the late nineteenth century onwards, with the project of modernity, scholars and reformers have discussed, debated, and negotiated the significance of women education and the roles of women in society and public life. As a matter of common concern, the access of women to higher education is intrinsically known to be an essential mechanism to prepare women independent and confident vis-à-vis men. Indeed, higher education was often thought to be the mechanism that would prepare human beings irrespective of gender, in an orderly and rational manner, for participating in the public. Consequently, there is a visible and procedural growth in the enrolment of women in higher educational institutions. However, some of the recent scholarships underline the fact that, though women's access to higher education has increased worldwide, the promise of equality and women's mobility has not been realized (Esposito 1998: ix).

The role of higher education in the empowerment of women is a subject of critical scrutiny in social sciences. Though higher education is considered a precondition for women to access the material resources and human rights, empirical studies across the states in India doesn't substantiate the argument above an extent. In a multi-cultural and multi ethnic society like India, the parameters of gender, religion, caste, class and region are crucial factors in determining access to education. Gender disparity has been a major issue in India's pursuit for achieving the goal of education from primary to higher education level. In India, where women lags behind men in all sphere of the social life even in the twenty first century, gender discrimination and gender inequality is transmitting from generation to generation through the socio-cultural practices.

Scholars have pointed out that education has always been shaped, indeed constituted, by race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality. Writings which intentionally highlighted and traced those categories attained greater visibility from 1970s onwards (Bailey 2016: 685; John 2012; Bhushan 2010; Tilak 1997). David (1993) analyzes the social injustice in education, specifically issues of social equity and equal opportunities on the grounds of gender. Women's education occupied a central place with the formation of reform movements in the nineteenth century onwards. However, till 1991 the Indian education system was not expanded rapidly enough to meet the rising social demand for higher education especially in professional education.

Globalization and development of information and technology has changed the social structure of the society and changed the world into labor market and brought equality in choices to higher education (Chanana 2007). The performance of women in technical, professional education and in market economy on par with men has changed the status of women in the society. As John (2015) referred there was a silent revolution in the history of women's education in India.

Many studies have focused on women's advantage in higher education but it is important to point out that women's growing share in higher education does not indicate complete gender equality in other arenas of the society. It is thought that the increasing number of women in education, especially in higher education, would change the social structure and social status of women in the society. But still the gender differences remained fairly stable in the education practices, in the families and even in the equity-minded educational committees. Thereby, women lag behind men in terms of financial returns to education, family expectations, labour market participation and representation in politics (Mcdaniel 2009; Pettit and Hook 2005; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Zeher 2007). In other words, contestations on the approach to women empowerment and education need a nuanced and renewed consideration, which will take into consideration various contributing actors, factors and characteristics.

1.1 Context of the Study

When it comes to the issue of gender and women in Islam, the contestations are more complex and argumentative among the scholars. Muslim women are always represented as oppressed by patriarchy, veiled, secluded, subjugated and in need of rescue and reform. The modernization paradigm, in the framework of western values of freedom, equality and self-determination, seemed to be an indictment of Islam that threatened to undermine the Muslim community and Muslim family (Esposito 1998: x). Although there emerged a lot of discussions regarding women in Islam such as veil, role and status in family, economy, law (*sharia*), etc., the question of girls' education didn't attain much attention, although it is central to these discussions.

Many studies on women education in Islamic societies show that there are considerable gender gaps in enrollment, especially at the secondary school level. Various studies have alleged the existence of traditional norms and cultural beliefs as the primary cause for the gap, at the core of which are inhibiting religious values that impede female education in Muslim societies. Implicit in educational and employment

reforms were new or additional roles for women beyond those of wife and mother. These new roles were seen by some as countering traditional Islamic beliefs, namely, that men have the primary religious duty of supporting the family and women have the duty to nurture the family, at home.

Historically, among the Indian Muslims, the girls' education has been a debatable issue and the empowerment of women was not considered as crucial for the socio-cultural development of the community. Minault (1998) has noted that relating women's education to social reform among Indian Muslims is a difficult task. She also acknowledged that Muslim women were even more isolated from the social and cultural changes than their men, and even more invisible in history than other Indian women. The present situation of Muslim women in India is not so different rather it is more pathetic in educational and cultural realms. Muslims are backward community in their social and economic condition and many educational institutions are culturally hostile towards Muslims. Muslim students experience an atmosphere of marginalization and discrimination (Sachar report 2006).

Contradictory to these popular perceptions and intellectual imaginations, Kerala Muslims community can be referred as a reference group to Muslims of Indian society. They enjoy a better socio-political and economic status compared to Muslims across the states in India. Their achievements in higher education, social progress and economic status are far better when compared to Muslim communities in other parts of Indian society. There are many factors like the existence of social and religious reform movements, migration to the Gulf countries and various state policies in the post independent India, which have contributed to the development of the Muslim community in Kerala. According to Sikand (2007) unlike North India, where most of Muslims live, Kerala hosts numerous Muslim educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages and other such community-based institutions. Thus the Muslims in this region achieved better social cultural wellbeing and educational advancement.

Many scholars like Hasan and Menon (2005) are much impressed with the performance of Kerala Muslim women. In their comparative study on the education of Muslim girls in five cities of India, Hasan and Menon (2005: 36) declared Calicut in Kerala as the example of the positive impact of concerted community initiative and state investment in education. According to them, despite the fact that first private Muslim girls' school was established after Independence in 1950s, it presents the best picture of educational attainment for them among the five cities and, indeed, probably

in the country as a whole. Mohammed (2007) is also excited to note the drastic change in the attitude of the community to women's modern education – which was vehemently opposed by orthodox *Ulema* during the early decades of 20th century. According to him, it was made possible by the ceaseless efforts of some social reformers and the plentiful support they received from a few service-minded and dedicated social institutions (ibid: 87). According to him, the process involved educating the community against age-old superstitious beliefs, and making it aware of the un-Islamic nature of the attitude they had adopted in the matter of education, especially women's education and the need to follow a righteous and pious life based on the Quran and Prophetic traditions (ibid: 90).

When we observe the gender and higher education in Kerala, one can see the changes where large numbers of women enrolling into higher education. From the last three-four decades the enrolment level of Muslim women in to higher education both professional and non-professional changed radically. In recent years, newspapers also highlight the photos of many women including Kerala Muslim women who have bagged ranks in public service exams and competitive examinations like engineering, medical¹, including UPSC². It shows that in Kerala, girls' academic performance is gradually getting better and they excel on par with boys in education. The participation of women in higher education shows steady improvement and narrowing the gender gap.

It is interesting to note that the number of girls attaining higher education degrees have increased phenomenally, compared to boys over the last four-five decades in Kerala. It shows development of the community and the positive attitude towards higher education of women. As a researcher I have noticed some of the unanswered questions; what are the choices young Muslim women students' make and why their choices are challenged by the family and what are the reasons which hampers the career prospects of young Muslim women in Kerala despite of Kerala Model of Development and Kerala Muslim Tradition-Modernity project? Hence the more pertinent task is to slowly hint at debating the very question itself. Thus, rather than looking at the material and non-material factors which have paved way for the advancement of Muslim women

¹ P Hiba, a Muslim girl resident of Malabar region bagged first rank in medical entrance and second rank was bagged by Mariam Rafi of Ernakulum district. In another case, Shabnam, a native of Thiruvananthapuram, had secured first rank in National eligibility cum Entrance Test (The Hindu online May 21, 2015, accessed on 23rd April 2017).

² The history of educational development of Kerala Muslims, particularly the educational achievements of Muslim women, shows shining examples like Atheela Abdulla who bagged IAS rank in 2012 and Hamna Mariyam who bagged 28th rank in the Civil Services examination in 2017.

in higher education, this study focus on the higher educational aspirations of Muslim women in Kerala.

Rather than looking at the increasing number of Muslim women in higher education, the current study pause a moment, to understand the changes in other areas stimulated by the higher education. How far access to higher education system reflected the developments in the other arenas of the society? How do the educational outcomes of women interface with gender inequality in the family and community? With the foregoing account, the current study aimed to understand the paradox of the political economy of Muslim women participation in higher education and simultaneous absence in the public sphere, which is visualized through employment and political arena of the Kerala society. The study makes an attempt to analyze the factors which facilitated Muslim women's access to higher education in Kerala and it also evaluates the patterns of access and choices. It also makes an effort to examine the parental motivation to educate their girl, which in turn is linked to different kinds of expectations and experiences.

Gautam (2015) argued that educational choices of women are more constrained when they reach higher education, because, marriageability and social safety become key concerns for the family rather than developing an academic career. In India, girls' do not get the same educational attention as boys and the girl's education and careers are closely linked with family affairs. Mickelson (2003: 374) argues that there is a strong boundary between women's public and private spheres in the society. These public (the economy and the polity) and the private (family and community) exist as continuum for women, rather than as dichotomy. The social structure of the Indian society socializes women to approach their lives combining both public and private roles into a single tapestry. Generally, the educational theory and research focused on social disparities and educational achievements. Gender inequality and disparity in relation to educational achievements received limited attention in the academics. The current study tries to analyze the nature of relationship between gender and religion and its impact in shaping the educational ideals and employment aspirations among young Muslim women and parents.

1.1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the context of Kerala, the reform movements played a significant role in changing the social status of Muslim women. The vitality of reform and revival movements along

with various state policies and gulf migration changed the perception of the community within and outside Kerala. The number of educational institutions launched by Muslim community increased significantly from 1990's, and the amount of education the community receiving also increased drastically from primary to higher education level. Notably during last three or four decades, unlike any Muslim community in India, Muslims in Kerala, particularly women, started entering into higher education by breaking the dominance of Muslim men in certain gendered disciplines. The dramatic changes in the enrolment rate of female members has been doubled from primary to higher educational level, notably in professional courses like medicine, engineering, law and journalism.

The primary purpose of the study is to analyze the outcomes of higher education, in shaping the invisibility and subjugation of Muslim women in the public arena of Kerala society. The 'under-representation' of Kerala Muslim women – its causes, impact, and their significance to both societies and to women's lives – is the focus of this study. This current study argues that the patriarchal structures and socially constructed cultural and religious codes of the Muslim community limit the Muslim women into narrowly defined roles, considering them to be politically and economically inferior. Thus, this study makes an attempt to shed light on the increasing educational progress of Muslim women and relative absence of Muslim women in political and economic spaces.

The current study critically analyzes the question of agency of Muslim women in Kerala by particularly focusing on the seemingly contradictory pattern; the active engagement within higher education and the relative absence in the public sphere of Kerala society. Despite being educated, the visible manifestation of subjugation and under-representation of woman is reflected in all walks of life in Kerala such as social, political and family. The study argues that the parents and the community, who are habituated with the existing social structures, have miserably failed to translate women's educational achievements into employment and public participation. Thus, the scope for mobility of women is limited within the prescribed boundaries of the family and community. The current study argues that the reformist movements among Kerala Muslims have contributed to the improvement of socio-educational status of women, whereas the movements haven't completely shed their patriarchal structure, so as to increase the mobility of women outside the household.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To map out the multiple debates on educating Muslim women in Kerala.
2. To analyze the aspirations of Muslim women students in selection of course and educational institutions.
3. To map out the means and methods of negotiations employed by the Muslim women students in dealing with the family, religion, community and career.
4. To analyze the motivational factors of Muslim parents in educating their girl children and their expectations and experiences with the family and community.

1.3 Conceptual Frame Work of the Study

In the current study, Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital is primarily used to understand the convergence and divergence between the Muslim women aspirations and experiences with higher education. The frame work is used to investigate the similarities and differences, if any, in the possession of capital and habitus while dealing with the educational aspirations and achievements of Muslim women in contemporary Kerala. Also, the study uses theoretical underpinnings from the writings on Islamic feminism to engage with the debates on Islamic texts and practices in relation to the Muslim women.

1.3.1 Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) were the first scholars, who introduced the concept of cultural capital in their book "*Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*" to explain the disparities prevalent in the educational attainment of children from different social classes. It was a straight forward understanding that the economic disparities have crucial influence over the differential achievements of children in school education. Despite accepting the influence of economic disparities to some extent, they are of the view that it is the unequal distribution of certain cultural resources, which are greatly responsible for the differential achievements of children. Bourdieu (1973) argued that one's habitus develops in relation to the cultural capital one possesses. According to him, apart from economic capital, cultural capital plays a vital role in the educational success of children, which is influenced through habitus.

Cultural capital could be appropriated only in some proper conditions and proper settings. For him Cultural capital is "style, taste, dispositions, social grace, etc., which one acquires from family through socialization as a part of habitus" (Harker 1984). The cultural resources include certain dispositions like positive attitude towards

education, motivation, and so on, habitus, competencies and skills. They provide the children with these embodied cultural resources a great advantage or edge over the other children lacking these resources in the attainment of educational success more effectively. Bourdieu calls these cultural resources with special privileges and advantages as cultural capital. Cultural capital is the vehicle through which background inequalities are translated into differential academic rewards and which in turn lead to unequal social and economic rewards, thereby maintaining and legitimizing the process (Katsillis and Robinson 1990).

According to Bourdieu Cultural capital exists in three distinctive forms- 'embodied', 'objectified' and 'institutionalized'. Embodied form of cultural capital refers to individual competencies, dispositions and skills, which could be appropriated by investing more time and efforts and cannot be transmitted instantaneously. The objectified state of cultural capital denotes objects such as material goods, machines, books etc., which can be obtained through economic capital. Material goods or objects become cultural capital, in the sense that they would help in accumulating other two forms of cultural capital. The institutionalized form of cultural capital provides a legally guaranteed value to individuals by issuing credentials in the form of certificates which, in turn, will confer an objective value on its holder (Bourdieu 1973).

The current study used Bourdieu's concepts of "capital" and "habitus" to examine the difference in investment of capital and influence of habitus on children's education, considering the gender disparities among Muslims in Kerala. Social inequalities are more pronounced and discussed in some aspects of the educational systems, but the inequalities on the grounds of gender need to be discussed. The gender inequalities are manifested in different layers; in access to higher education, differences in college selection, home experiences and inequality in the outcome of education.

Bourdieu's approach conveyed new insights to the scholars in order to understand the role of education in reproducing social inequalities, and particularly to analyze the connections between cultural capital and the other forms of capital. According to him, the gap in access to economic capital was not the major reason for the educational disparities practiced but beyond economic factors, two other forms of capital such as cultural capital and social capital are responsible for the reproduction of class privilege (Bourdieu 1996: 243). Social capital, for Bourdieu, is a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Inherent ability is a major factor in influencing a student's success, followed by a

student's habitus and socio-economic background. It is necessary to consider both one's resources (capital) and the orientation one has toward using those resources (habitus) to implement the model of practice in the educational field in the way that Bourdieu intended. One's own habitus, determined by the available opportunity structure or field, shapes the type of class-based capital that men and women have, resulting in gendered forms of cultural capital (Laberge 1995).

However, Bourdieu's approach failed to integrate the relationship between class and gender; the 'gendered habitus' and 'gendered capital' which plays dominant role beyond cultural capital. An infant who learns to be a woman will find that her femininity is both a constraint and an enabler; her habitus is gendered, as is her future. By choosing the forms of education and employment that she does, by adopting the behavior considered suitable for her gender and teaching this to her daughter, a woman plays an important role in the continuation of the existing social hierarchy. It is possible to illuminate the ever changing interplay between gender and education in the society by studying the gendered nature and the strategies employed in the social structure (Ashall 2004). Ashall (2004) argues that it is more helpful to think about gender as central to habitus and as a form of cultural capital. Social and cultural capital combine to form a 'gendered habitus' or predisposition which structures men and women's decisions, behaviors and opportunities (Ashall 2004; Egerton, 1997).

The three forms of capital, as outlined by Bourdieu, interact to structure not only people's life opportunities but also their modes of thought, and gender cuts across all of the three forms of capital. Thus gendered cultural capital cuts across all social groupings and classes; it is a prerequisite for all other forms of capital. As the gender capital of men and women is unequal, men find it easier to transfer their gender capital into the other forms of capital: social, embodied, institutional and ultimately economic.

1.3.2 Islamic Feminism

The current study makes an effort to map the sociological and theological practices within the larger ambit of Islamic feminism. A critical review of Islamic theology primarily represents multiple schools of thought based on the interpretations. Historically, the interpretations are made by Muslim clergies, who largely happened to be men. However, over the last few decades there is a nuanced approach by the Islamic scholars to understand Islam from the feminist perspective. They tried to understand the Islam as a religion which primarily stands for gender equality in principle. The

Islamic feminists try to interrogate the wide gap between text and context, where in they find the problem with the nature of interpretations of the text. To study the contemporary educational status of Muslim women, it is important to trace out the ideological background which formulated and influenced the everyday practices of Muslim societies. Hence, this study will draw parallel adoptions from the interpretative argumentation of Islamic feminists.

The Western feminist debates always project the issue of veil as one of the key problems of the Muslim women, especially in the third world countries and advocate liberating them by denouncing veiling practices. Most of the western feminist scholars ignore the socio-cultural context and experiences of the Muslim women in the third world. There is a need to identify the diverse voices of the Muslim women and the specificity of their lives according to their historical and spatial and socio-cultural context. It is important to argue that the position and the status of Muslim women need not be viewed through the prism of the objectives of Western feminists. Nowadays, educated Muslim women are challenging and questioning the stereotyped representation of Muslim women that governed the way their identities were constructed, presented and circulated.

In the current social order, as a new consciousness and nuanced way of thinking, Islamic feminism has become the focus of intensified academic interest as well as a topic of public concern. It has been a subject of critical enquiry and evolved as debatable topic in the society as well as in academics. Mahmood (2005:1) has noted that the puzzling relationship between feminism and religion is most demonstrating in discussions of Islam. As a matter of fact, Western feminism concerns the role of women in Islam and aims for the complete equality to Muslims, regardless of sex, in both public and private life. According Badran (2009:242) Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Islamic feminist questioned the misinterpretations of the texts and inequalities against Muslim women in Islam by arguing that *hadith* and *Quran* emerged out of a particular critical situation in the history of Islam. The misogynistic principles are enforced through manipulation and interpretations of the texts without analyzing the context (Mernissi 1992). Wadud (1992) argues for new methodology and perspective to read *Quran* and to understand the feminine voices within *Quran* and Islamic tradition. She says that many methods of reading the *Quran* exist; however, she demands to develop a concept

of female-centered and female-inclusive reading which gives more focus on the female well-being.

In the era of modernity, there has been much discussion about the status of women and necessity of female education in the building of community. However in Kerala, the male centric reformism always limited the spaces of women by discouraging their public engagements and misinterpreting it as un-Islamic, and interpreted education as a means for better motherhood and feminine qualities. This contradictions and gender inequality practices lead to the emergence of critical thinking among Muslims. The new approach provided a new wave and consciousness for Muslim reformist thinkers to developed new interpretive and epistemological theories. This scholarship is critically revisiting and questioning the dominant religious interpretations that are patriarchal and discriminatory against women, and aiming to produce new knowledge and interpretation from a feminist point of view by targeting gender equality within Islamic paradigm.

1.4 Selection of the Field Site and Sample

The researcher started the work with a pilot study in Malabar region of Kerala. The research started with a question of the comparative status of Muslim women in higher education with other communities. But after talking to eminent people and through my primary observation, it is understood that the number of Muslim women pursuing higher education increased drastically. As a researcher, the immediate question popped up; where are they disappearing after getting educated? It leads the study to look at the educational aspirations and experiences of Muslim women. From the pilot study, the researcher decided to limit the research within two educational institutions for students and also chosen two towns in the same municipality to collect data from parent respondents. The researcher has used the snowball sampling³ method to conduct pilot study and used open ended questionnaire to collect data from various respondents such as educationist, historians, social activists and religious leaders.

The empirical study has been conducted in two selected historically important colleges from the Malabar region (northern part) of Kerala; Malappuram district and Calicut district in Kerala to analyze the position of Muslim women in higher education

³ The Snowball Sampling is a non-random sampling technique wherein the initial informants who are approached through their social network, nominate or refer the participants who meet the eligibility criteria of the study. This sampling method is generally used when characteristics to be possessed by samples are rare and difficult to find.

and the hurdles they face to achieve their aspirations and experiences in day today life as a Muslim women. Demographically, Malappuram is the Muslim populated district in Kerala, and Calicut hosts second largest Muslim population in Kerala. The researcher selected the student respondents from these two colleges and parent respondents were selected from two towns namely Ramanattukara and Tirurangadi where the two colleges are located. The researcher spent one year and four months in the field to collect data.

1.4.1 Significance of the Field

In Kerala, various communitarian reform movements catered the entry respective communities into the spectrum of modern education. Formation of *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP) in 1903 and *Nayar Service Society* (NSS) in 1914 helped the *Ezhava* and *Nayar* community in attaining remarkable achievements in educational fields. As U. Muhammed (2007: 79) opines, first Christian College, CMS College Kottayam, was started in 1816 while Muslims had to wait another 132 years to build a Muslim management college at Farook, in Calicut. In other words, Muslims are among those groups admitted late into the fold of modern education in Kerala due to many reasons such as colonial encounter, intra-community religious issues etc. Interestingly today there are 164 arts and science colleges and 19 universities in Kerala, out of which 21 arts and science colleges are owned by Muslim managements.

Formation of *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangaham* in 1921 and the subsequent development of reform activities within the community brought drastic changes in the social and educational life despite the ideological differences on the question of reform. First girls High School was established in Calicut in 1956 by the Muslim reformers and it significantly contributed to the development of Muslim women in Kerala (Koya 1983). Sikand (2007) states that the role of social movements in Kerala has lead the people into the fold of modern secular education and other means of socialization compared to other northern states of India.

1.4.2 Farook College, Calicut

Farook College is the first ever Muslim college in Kerala and it is established in 1948 after a long debate within the community and later significantly contributed towards the field of higher education in South India. The College was established by relentless efforts of numerous community and religious leaders of the time to fulfill the aspiration

of community in the area of higher education⁴. Farook College played an exceptional role in contributing to the educational progress of Kerala Muslims symbolizing the desire of the community to open itself to the benefits of modern higher education. Its growth and expansion runs parallel to the gradual emergence of the Muslim community of Malabar from the morals of orthodoxy and superstition to the heights of enlightenment and social prestige. Thus, the history of the college is the history of the community to a great extent; a story full of struggles and sacrifices, determination and unflagging enthusiasm. Through the combination of organizational and institutional efforts, Muslims were motivated at large to acquire secular education and to alter themselves to the changing conditions of the time. Presently, Farook College is one of the largest residential post-graduate Arts and Science institution in Kerala, affiliated with University of Calicut with autonomous status granted in 2015 with 17 graduation and 14 post-graduation departments. Presently more than 3000 students are pursuing their higher education in which more than 70% percent of the students are girls⁵.

1.4.3 Pocker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College, Tirurangadi

The arrival of British in 1659 brought remarkable changes in the socio, political, economic, and cultural spheres of Malabar particularly Tirurangadi, (the center of rebellions) and one of the most important Muslim areas of Eranad *Taluqs* (sub division of Malabar district). From 1792 to 1921, Malabar⁶ witnessed many upheavals lead by Mappilas⁷ against British colonialism and Hindu land lords for their livelihood. The continuous struggles and religiously motivated political struggle for homeland against

⁴ The idea to establish Farook College was initiated by Maulana Abusabah Moulavi who was the founder of Rauzthul Uloom Arabic College, established in 1942 under the Madras University. Community and religious leaders such as, K.M. Seethi Sahab, Khan Bahadoor P.M. AttakoyaThangal etc. formed RauzthulUloom Association later in 1946 and subsequently formed Farook College in order to strengthen the educational activities. It was a laborious task to establish a secular College at times of ideological split among communities particularly between *Sunnis* and *Mujahids*.

⁵ <https://www.farookcollege.ac.in>, Accessed on 28th January 2016.

⁶ The northern part of Kerala known as Malabar is the most Muslim populated region in Kerala. This region consists of five districts; Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Palakkad.

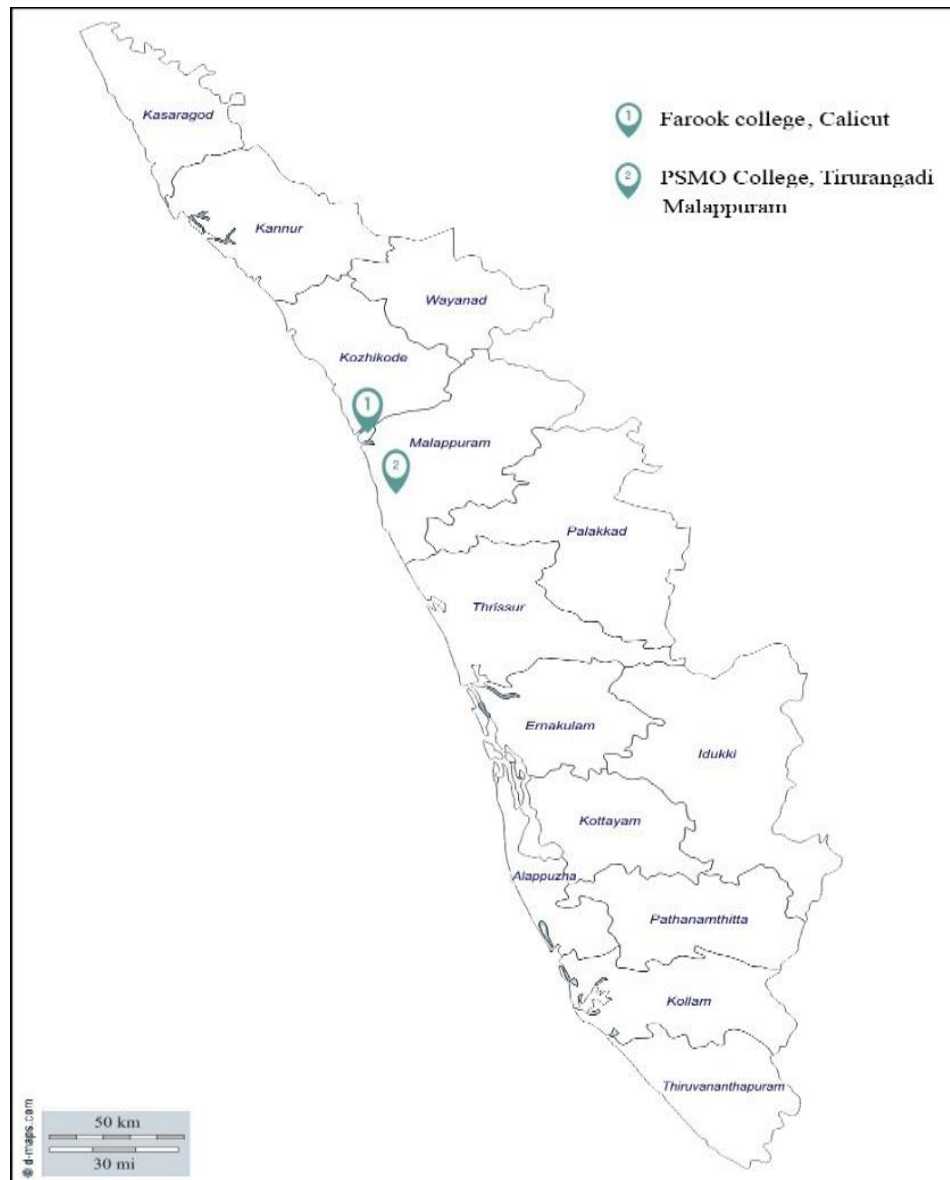
⁷ There are various opinions on the origin of the word Mappila. According to Lewis Moore (1870), the meaning of 'Mappila' is bride-groom or son-in-law. They are descended from Arab fathers who came for trade relations in the Kerala coast and formed marital alliances with women in those regions. The children never appear to have claimed by the fathers and the very word 'Mappila' is said to have been derived from mother, ma and child pillā, showing to whose care the offspring fall into (Day 1863). According to Logan, 'the word Mappila is a contraction of maha (great) and pillā (child), a honorary title (as among the Nayars and Christians in Travancore) probably conferred on the early Mohammadan immigrants' (Logan, 1989 : 191). The Jews and Syrian Christians in Kerala are also called Mappilas. However, the precise development of the term Mappila is applied to the Muslim community in Kerala especially to Muslims in Northern Kerala (Miller 1992).

the colonial powers from the 17th century to the first quarter the 20th century pushed the community into extreme difficulties such as poverty, illiteracy and created space for many blind beliefs and practices against modern education and women's education. There was a strong presence of religion within Muslim community of Malabar in their day to day life since the colonial phase which was crucial in determining their resistance against native/foreign dominations.

The Pocker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College (PSMO College hereafter) was initially started as orphanage in 1943 mainly to help the orphans and widows and the victims of cholera, which then spread across the region. The orphans and widows were mainly the victims of Malabar Rebellion of 1921⁸. Initially the college was intended for the educational development of the orphans within the community, which later was expanded to all sections of the society (Website of PSMO College Accessed on 28th January 2016). The orphanage was expanded as an arts and science college in 1968 under Muslim Management owing to the relentless struggle of the reformist leaders of Muslim League such as K.M. Moulavi, M.K. Haji and K.M. Seethi Sahib. It later upgraded as a first grade college in 1972 and Post Graduate College in 1980. The emergence of Tirurangadi Muslim orphanage played a great role in the social development of the Muslims in Malappuram and particularly in the surrounding areas of Tirurangadi.

⁸ The British administrative and religious policies expressed antagonism towards Muslims. British supported and encouraged the upper castes by completely discarding the lower strata including lower castes and Muslims. The administrative policies by the British government and feudal policies of the Hindu upper caste land lords invited series of revolts mainly from the Muslims after the second half of the 19th Century against both of these forces. The inhuman British policies and the hegemony of the local landlords had created a feeling of bitterness among the Kerala Muslims and eventuated a series of violent outbreaks (often called as 'Moplah Outrages') producing a state of 'perpetual ferment' that occurred throughout the nineteenth century which then culminated in the most tragic event in the history of Kerala Muslims called Malabar Rebellion of 1921. See K N Panikkar 1989.

MAP-1.1
Geographical Location of Farook College and PSMO College



1.4.4 Farook College and PSMO College: An Overview

One of the most interesting factors about these colleges is the higher number of women students than boys. Majority of the students are from Malappuram district, followed by Calicut. The study also found that the numbers of women students are more than seventy percent in the Muslim educational institutes of Malabar region (Calicut, Malappuram, Kannur, Wayanad and Palakkad). According to the admission statistics of Farook and PSMO colleges, the numbers of women are comparatively higher than the men, both in science and arts departments especially after the implementation of

‘single window’⁹ policy in admission procedures. The reason attributed to this increased number of women is, firstly the better marks scored than men and secondly, the increased demand for professional and diploma courses among men, so as to easily fetch jobs in Arabian Gulf countries.

Historically, women were admitted to the college for the first time in 1959 at Farook College. In the year thirteen women students were admitted to Farook College, out of which four of them belonged to Muslim community. The lesser number reflects the hesitation and anxiety along with considerable fear regarding the reaction from the community. There were only a handful of women in the colleges, and they were the pioneers who broke traditional norms and societal pressure to seek a foothold in the education field (Mohammed, 2007:83). Currently women comprise 70% of its total enrolment out of which 61% are Muslim women. The data shows the increasing aspirations of Muslim girls and the community towards higher education while correspondingly changing the perspective on education among the Muslim men.

Similarly PSMO College is one of the most famous centre of higher learning of Malabar region and the college is affiliated to Calicut University. Presently PSMO College has 1345 students out of which 1113 (83%) are girls and among them 62.5% are Muslim girls. The following tables show the increasing number of Muslim women in the higher education in the two selected educational institutions in the study.

TABLE-1.1-Number of Students in PSMO College

YEAR	MUSLIM		HINDU	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2001-02	141	189	51	81
2005-06	140	322	53	111
2007-08	76	238	45	95
2010-11	51	208	18	60
2013-14	42	212	19	69
2015-16	46	243	19	78

PSMO College (total number of departments 10)

⁹ Centralized allotment process for graduation and post-graduation courses is called as Single Window Admission.

TABLE-1.2- Number of students in Farook College

YEAR	MUSLIM		HINDU	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2001-02	432	689	306	392
2005-06	152	265	226	376
2007-08	185	249	53	111
2010-11	165	306	215	395
2013-14	240	384	269	388
2015-16	216	447	355	683
2015-16	129	388	223	587

Farook College (total number of departments 22)

The table (1.1 and 1.2) shows a steady decrease in the number of Muslim boys in both colleges and there is a remarkable increase in the number of Muslim women. The dominance of Muslim boys in the educational institutions especially in higher education started decreasing notably from 1970's after the expansion of gulf migration. The economic imbalances of the Muslim community pushed them to find immediate job and income. The number of Muslim boys started decreasing in higher education and increased in technical education and it provided more seats to Muslim women and the Muslim women are also competent enough to enter into higher education and the gulf migration brought the economic wellbeing to the community. Interestingly these migrants in Gulf were very keen to provide education to their brothers, sisters and children, as they felt that education is an important factor to get well salaried job and to develop the community and individual. The availability of educational institution was a major hindrance for women to attain education and it is still a factor in northern parts of India. In Kerala the migrant's efforts helped to overcome such issues and women could attain education especially from 1980' and 1990's onwards. The gulf migration contributed to increase the number of educational institutions of the community, especially in professional education.

1.5 Methodology

The term higher education has a wide meaning, as it embraces education at the degree level and above, in different branches and disciplines such as general education, professional education and technical education. The primary respondents of the current study consist of two sets of population; young Muslim women students and Muslim parents. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research techniques for data

collection, coding and analysis. The current study has used the questionnaire method and personal narratives of the respondents as a major source of data collection. As promised by the researcher the original names of the respondents have not been mentioned in the study.

1.5.1 Tools of Data Collection

The researcher used various formal and informal methods for data collection. The study has used purposive random sampling method to select the two sets of population such as student respondents (120) and parent respondents (120). The study included the respondents from the various sects of Muslim community in Kerala, such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat*. The data has been collected through structured questionnaire with open ended questions, interviews, personal narratives, group discussions. The researcher also interviewed various social activist, educationists, political leaders, religious leaders and teachers to locate the position of Muslim women in various levels. The personal narratives and lived experience of Muslim women in the Kerala context has been used as one of the major source of the study.

The current study is mainly based on primary data, which collected from Muslim women students who are pursuing higher education in Farook and PSMO colleges. The data was collected from 120 respondents, 60 Muslim women respondents were selected from each colleges. In each college out of 60 respondents 20 students belong to Sunni group, 20 from *Mujahid* and remaining from *Jamaat* background. The study included respondents from all the disciplines such as sciences, social sciences and commerce and from all levels such as graduate, post graduate, courses.

Second set of the data was collected from the parent respondents who resides at Ramanattukara Municipality near Farook College and Tirurangadi Municipality near PSMO Colleges. There are multiple factors for selecting the mothers as respondents in the current study. The willingness of the mothers to provide the data was one of the main reasons and the absence of men due to the gulf migration also provides more chance to Muslim women in different means in Kerala. Moreover the Muslim mothers are the driving force of the families the researcher felt that it is appropriate to capture their insight of the mother on their girl children education.

The top priority was also given to parents who are having girl child pursuing higher education along with their son in different professional and non-professional courses. In this sample 60 mother respondents are selected from Ramanattukara

Municipality and remaining 60 are from Tirurangadi Municipality the researcher also tried to include respondents from various fractions of Muslim community such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat*. In this second set of data nearly 50% of the sample belongs to *Sunnis*, 25% from *Mujahid* and remaining 25% are followers of *Jamaat* ideology. The majority of the respondents, who are mothers, belong to the gulf wife category and managing their family responsibility in the absence of their men. The data collected from the parents through structured open ended questionnaire. Personal interviews, in depth interview, group discussions were conducted for both student and parent respondents.

1.5.2 Data Analysis

The sources of the present study come under the broad umbrella of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from two sets of respondents; students and parents through structured open ended questionnaire and personal interviews. The study also used various secondary sources such as college records, census survey reports, various reports of different commissions and committees, scholarly books articles, magazines, souvenirs and journals used to analyze the position of women in social sphere in general and Muslim women in particular. The study also used various internet sources for providing latest debates and trends in approaching the position of Muslim women in Kerala. The study analyzed data and generated tables in the study with the help of excel.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

The present thesis is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter is intended to provide the background and context of the study, along with a brief sketch of statement of the problem and objectives of the study. It also presents the methodology and various tools employed in the course of this research and selection and significance of the field. The chapter also hints at Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital to understand the convergence and divergence between the Muslim women aspirations and experiences with higher education. The chapter also makes a theoretical engagement to look at Muslim women by analyzing the debates on Islamic texts and practices in relation to women status in the conceptual frame work of Islamic feminism.

The second chapter portrays a sociological over view on Indian Muslim community. The chapter analyzes the heterogeneous nature of the community by

locating the caste and religious practices among Muslim community in India. The chapter discusses the minority and backward status of Muslim community in general and the vulnerable status of Muslim women in particular by looking at their status in education, employment, political participation and other socio-developmental indicators.

Third chapter provides a brief history on the development and evolution of Muslims in Kerala, and analyzed the role of various factors in developing the Muslim community as a model of development to other Muslims in India. The chapter discusses the role of multiple factors such as reform leaders, reform movement and various community organizations in changing the social and economic outlook and attitude of the Muslim community in Kerala. It tries to map-out the experiences and perceptions of Muslim women and response of the male reformers on the question of gender in educating the Muslim women.

Fourth chapter titled 'Higher Education: Introduction to Kerala Muslim Women's Aspirations and Experiences' is based on the empirical analysis with the help of qualitative data collected from the field through the interviews as well as the narratives of the Muslim women pursuing higher education. It sheds light on various themes which emerged from the field study such as Gender and Modern Education; Women and Religious Education; Education, Family and Marriage; Women Education and Social Mobility in order to understand the Muslim women and her aspirations and experiences with higher education in the present context of Muslim society.

Fifth chapter of this study is also based on the empirical data collected from the parent respondents titled as 'The Parental Attitude towards Female Education, Employment and Public Engagements. The chapter discusses the attitudes and expectations of the parents on women education, family, employment and public participation in relation to their sons in the context of Kerala. It highlights the everyday experiences of the inner lives of the Kerala Muslim women who are vulnerable being women on the one hand and the minority group on the other hand.

Fifth chapter is followed by the concluding chapter, which summarizes the findings and main arguments of the research. The explanations of interviews and narrations are concluded with sociological observations. The chapter also replicates the researcher's own experiences as a member of the Muslim community in Kerala.

Chapter-2

Muslim Community in India: Problems and Perspectives

Introduction

Historically the study of Muslims is one of the major objects of sociological/ anthropological inquiry. The emergence of many orientalist studies in these disciplines have not only contested the earlier views of anthropologists who treated Muslims as a homogeneous community but also significantly established the heterogeneous nature of the Muslim community (Geertz 1968; Gellner 1981). The dominant epistemological traditions have not represented the tangible realities of Muslim communities rather the orientalist traditions generalized Islam and Muslim societies as a homogeneous category need to be problematized. One must understand the sociological differentiation between Islam and Muslims, in which the former is a religious category, and the latter is a community.

However, in the recent past, new approaches have emerged in the field of anthropology of Islam which address the heterogeneous nature of Muslim communities. As Fazalbhoy (2005) argues, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that various practices of Muslim communities across the world became objects of theoretical enquiries and sites of academic research. The fact that a religion premised on the belief in a fundamental text the *Quran* that could have distinct practices in different locales generated interest among scholars. The new framework, thus developed, addressed the heterogeneity of Muslim communities from homogeneity to various schools of thought in a given subject which had a resonance in studies on Muslim communities in India.

The new approaches to the study on Muslim communities departed from conventional way of understanding Muslims as a homogeneous entity, and instead relied heavily on empirical realities through field experiences, mainly centred on the questions of regional and intra-group differentiation among Muslims. Indian Muslims received considerable academic attention during the post-independence period; it became an important concern for scholars.

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned context, this chapter seeks to understand the Muslim community as a heterogeneous entity and not a homogeneous community. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the sociological diversities of the Muslim community in India. The second section provides an account of the socio-educational and economic conditions of Indian Muslims and offers an

overview of their political condition in the post-independence period. The discussion in this section mainly revolves around the reports of various commissions and committees formed by the Government of India to study the socio-economic status of Indian Muslims. The third section offers a discussion on the gender question within the Muslim community in India. Through an analysis of review of literature on the gender question among the Muslims, I argue that, Muslim women across the country face discrimination within the community, as it is the case with other religious and caste communities.

Section-1

2.1 Sociological Understanding of Muslims in India

There are numerous academic studies on various aspects of the Muslim community in India such as religious sectarianism, caste and kinship practices, etc. Though Muslims are linked together at a larger level based on their faith, there exists among Muslims in India various sub-divisions depending upon various factors such as sects, region, language, food, dress, marriage and kinship practices. The various studies on Indian Muslims demonstrate that Indian Muslims are not a homogenous community; they are internally divided into different groups based on religious ideologies and school of thought such as *Sunnis* and *Shias*¹⁰. *Sunnis* constitute more than 80% of the total Muslim population around the globe. There exists further sub-divisions among the *Sunnis* with respect to Islamic jurisprudence. There are four *madhabs*¹¹ among Muslims such as *Shafi*, *Hanafi*, *Hambali* and *Maliki*, named after the four major *Imams* the Muslims follow across the world. These various schools of thought were formulated mainly based on regional variations in practices. Most of the Indian Muslims follow the *Shafi* tradition. The followers of *Shia* Islam in India are mostly located in regions such

¹⁰ The Islamic world is divided into two major schools, the *Sunni* and the *Shia*. The word *Sunni* is originated from *Sunnah* and means the one who follows prophet's *Sunnah*. Like all Muslims, the *Shia* believes in the authority of the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. The followers of the Hazrath Ali calls themselves as *Shias* or "adherents", while the faction who advocates the rule of election, adopted the name *Al Ahl-us-Sunnat wa'l Jammaat* (people of the Traditions Assembly). What originated in political and dynastic differences which led to deep doctrinal and wide legal divergences, are retained to date. According to *Sunnis*, the Prophet Muhammad did not appoint a successor before his death to lead the Muslim community. So after an initial confusion, a group of most prominent companions of the prophet elected Abu Bakr Siddique -a close friend and a father-in-law of the prophet -as the first caliph of Islam. But *shia* believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, was the first Imam and the rightful successor to Muhammad and their belief rejects the legitimacy of the first three caliphs (Robinson 2008: 24-5).

¹¹ The Islamic term *Madhhab* means school of thought or school of religious jurisprudence, or *jihq*. Though they differ slightly in practical matters, most *Sunnis* don't consider them to be fundamentally indistinguishable.

as Hyderabad, Kashmir and parts of Uttar Pradesh. The *Shia* Muslims observe strict endogamy and maintain a distinct sectarian identity (Sikand 2004; Hasan and Menon 2004; Robinson 2008).

In the case of North India, there are different religious schools such as *Deoband*, *Barelvis*, and *Ahl-i-Hadith*. The *Deoband* school conforms to the scriptural Islam of authoritative religious texts as defined by urban, madrasa-based religious elite. *Barelvis*, another religious seminary founded soon after the Deobandi, follow the custom-laden or *Sufi* tradition of Islam, which seeks the mystical possibility of Islam. The *Ahl-i-Hadith* is another group which deny the legitimacy not just of all practices lacking a basis in scriptural texts, but even of the classical schools of law, stringently insisting on the Quran and Hadith as the exclusive and directly accessible sources of guidance where there is no place for *Taqlid* (Zaman 304:1999; Sikand 2004; Metcalf 2007; Alam 2011).

In Kerala, the Muslim are divided into *Sunni*, *Jamaat* and *Mujahids*. The *Sunnis* are further divided into *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Wahabis* popularly known as *Mujahids*. Interestingly, all of them, the *Sunnis*, *Mujahids* and *Jamaat* followers compete in their claims of being the real patrons of Islam. Intra-religious ideological competitions are common among these groups to prove themselves as authentic followers in their pursuit of religion (Miller 1992; Samad 1998; Osella and Osella 2008). (For a detailed discussion please refer to the fourth chapter).

Other major discussions on Muslims in India are based on the caste system practised among them. G.S. Ghurye (1957) observes that the “caste in India is a brahmanical child of the Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganga and Yamuna and hence transferred to other parts of the country”. Srinivas (1978) confirms that the caste system is prevalent among all religious communities in India in a distinct form. Though the caste system prevailed among Muslims, mostly in North India, such as *ashrafs* (superior), *ajlafs* (lower strata) and *arzals* (converted from Hindu untouchable castes), it is not manifest amongst Muslims based on occupation as is the case with Hindus (Sikand 2004; Robinson 2008). Many other academic works also explore the same hierarchal caste categorization of Indian Muslims.

The diversity or the social stratification among the Muslim communities in South Asia is clearly depicted by Imtiaz Ahmad’s in his fascinating study titled *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslim*. According to him, there are two broad perspectives on caste among Indian Muslims—culturalist and structuralist. The

culturalists negate caste among Muslims while structuralists stress the presence of caste among Muslims. But the caste practices exist among Muslim exactly like the pattern of Hindu social order. Ansari (1960) in his work *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Culture Contact* observes four caste divisions among the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh such as Ashraf, Muslim Rajput, clean occupational caste, unclean castes. He further divides *Ashraf* into *Sayyad*, *Sheikh*, *Mughal*, and *Pathan*. According to him, caste practices among Muslims are followed based on occupation, as is the case with Hindu caste system.

Ahmad (1978: 15) as a structuralist, argues that “caste among the Muslims in India owes itself directly to Hindu social influences, but it has been reinforced by the justification offered for the idea of birth and descent as criteria of status in Islamic law”. As for this, “it is clear that caste exists as a basis of social relations among Indian Muslims, but its form has been greatly weakened and modified and it differs from the Hindu caste model in certain details” (ibid: 12). The basic features of caste system in India such as endogamy, occupational specialization, the hierarchical gradation of status groups, ritual considerations in social gradation and commensal restrictions are minimal or absent among the Muslims. The caste practices among the Muslims are not based on the notions of purity and impurity; and there is no ritually pure caste as Brahmins with dispensations and obligations which may be peculiar to them. Hence, Muslim castes observe social distance based on difference, privileges and descent. *Sayyids* enjoy a prominent place among the Muslims because of their claim to Prophetic descent. Scholars on Muslim hierarchy argue that the social stratification among the Muslims is not comparable in any respect to the Hindu caste system, but they view that caste system exists among the Muslims to a certain degree in different forms (Ahmad 1978).

As mentioned earlier, the caste system is a product of the Hindu social structure in India, and one way or the other Muslims are also part of that Hindu-ized social order. As Louis Dumont (1970; 1980) remarks, Indian society culturally a Hindu society and caste system is the foundation of the Hindu society. Practices of caste system were consciously adopted by the Muslims in India as a compromise which they had to make in a pre-dominantly Hindu social environment. Examining the processes of conflict and accord among the two communities, Dumont (1970) observes that Hindus and Muslims in India entered a sort of tacit and reciprocal compromise. He further argues that Indian Muslims’ are contaminated by the caste spirit, although they have not absolutely

succumbed to it. Dumont finds that caste among Muslims is “weakened or incomplete, but not lacking altogether” (ibid). Jairath (2011) similarly observes that, although the caste system is weakened among the Muslims to some extent, it determines the social relations among the Muslim communities in India.

Generally, Sociologists who study the caste system, observe two features of Hindu caste practices among Indian Muslims. The former is ‘endogamy’ and the latter is ‘hierarchy’ (Siddiqui 1973). In the case of South India, the scholarships reflect that caste system was prevalent among the Mappilas. D’Souza (1959) points out that caste hierarchies were practised among Mappilas of Kerala, and they were divided into five caste categories according to their origins such as the *Thangals*, the *Arabis*, the *Malbaris*, the *Pusalars* and the *Ossans*¹². He argues that the social distance among these castes is very high and all these caste groups strictly practice the system of endogamy. They have separate mosques, separate religious organizations and separate burial grounds.

Ahmad (1978) and Saidalavi (2017) discuss the existence of similar social hierarchies among Muslims in Malabar and the social practices comparing it to the Hindu caste system. They argue that Muslims in Malabar are divided as *Thangals*, *Mappilas*, *Ossans* and *Pusalans*. Generally, these social groups among Muslims in Malabar follow endogamy, though marriages do take place between the Muslim social groups, these marriage alliances are mostly hypergamous¹³. The caste system is not the main indicator among the Muslim social structure as Hindus, because there is no ideological or religious basis for these practices. As of this, the system of pollution and purity does not exist among Muslims as much as Hindu social order.

Srinivas (1966) proposes two interrelated concepts sanskritization and westernization to explain the specific means by which mobility is achieved within the

¹² The *Thangals* are in the top rank and claims to have kinship relations with the Prophet and his family. They have been highly venerated by people and their religious and political leaders and widely accepted by the Mappilas in colonial and post-colonial social order. *Arabis* are next to *Thangals*, who claim to descent from Arab men and local women and have retained knowledge of their Arab lineage and adopted patrilineal descent. The majority of Mappilas are *Malabaris*; people of Malabar, and then *Pusalars*, who have newly converted to Islam from fisherman caste and were given low status. The *Ossans* (barbers) are at the bottom of Mappila Muslim strata due to their lower occupation.

¹³ Hypergamy (anuloma) is a social practice in which a boy from upper caste can marry a girl from lower caste (Ahuja, 2008:124-131). Dumont (1970) says that the term hypergamy can be used either loosely of a marriage, or of a union wherein the man is of higher status than the woman, and it can designate a strict rule of marriage.

caste system in India. According to him, both sanskritization¹⁴ and westernization¹⁵ are processes of status mobility. It is an attempt to move towards the upwards within the context of the caste hierarchy for both Hindus and Muslims in the Indian society. Ali (2002) and Mayer (1997) discuss the practices of caste system amongst the urban Muslims societies focusing on the case of Hyderabad. The studies found that the practices of caste and endogamy are still quite prevalent in the society. However, it was justified more in terms of cultural differences among the different caste groups or class positions than the occupational caste rank. Ali (2002) points out that in the matters of marriage, the major consideration was the income, educational qualification and occupational status of the families. Here one can easily argue that caste is no longer prevalent among them, but the class and cultural position in one way or other, stabilize the caste position. As Beteille (1965) argues, modern urban India remains status-conscious based on education, occupation, income, and wealth. He further argues that the meaning and practice of caste is not just an urban phenomenon, but it is strikingly visible in villages where caste stratification has been structured historically.

As against the common view that caste among Muslims is a product of Hindu culture, Lindholm (1985) has argued that the Muslim social stratification found in India is an extension of the system found elsewhere. And many of the social features found in Muslim society are like those found among Muslims in other parts of South Asia. According to Lindholm (1985: 132-33), despite doctrinaire pronouncements of equality, "Islamic history shows much evidence of ranking. Even during the era of Muhammad himself, the Qureish tribe claimed first place among all Arabs, while contemporary Arabs divide themselves between the pure Asilin (pure) and the inferior people of mixed blood. In the era of expansion during the Umayyad dynasty non-Arab subjects were held to be markedly inferior to their conquerors; inferiority that did not cease with conversion to Islam". Lindholm (1985) argues that there is a gap between ideology and reality in Islamic claims of egalitarianism, and the caste practices among

¹⁴ The concept of Sanskritization was first explained by M.N. Srinivas (1952&1966) to describe the process of cultural mobility in the traditional social structure of India. According to him, Sanskritization is a process of cultural mobility in the traditional social structure of India. It is "the process by which a low caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice born' caste". However, the mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in 'positional changes' in the system but does not lead to any significant structural changes. The concept helps us to explain the social change in Indian society.

¹⁵ M.N Srinivas (1966 &1976) defines Westernization as "the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of the establishment of British Raj in India, the term subsuming changes occurring at different levels of Indian society technology, institutions, ideology, and values."

Muslims are not particularly of Indian origin but it is an inherent to Islam. Bhatta (1976) says that, the structure of the Muslim society in India did not in any time exhibit the Islamic ideal of social equality. An elaborate system of social stratification had been in practice in the very beginning of Muslim rule in India.

Muslims in India are one of the communities which are socio-culturally complex and display enormous varieties of religious beliefs, attitudes and values, family relations. Ahmed (1976) in his seminal work *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India*, brings together a body of empirical data on the actual patterns of these institutions among different Muslim communities in different parts of India according to the structure and functions of their religious and social environments. He argues that the pattern of kinship and marriage prevalent and practised among different Muslim communities, and those embedded in the doctrine of Islam are distinct in nature. Ahmed (1976) further dealt with the kinship and marriage among various Muslim communities in Assam, Delhi, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, and Uttar Pradesh. He challenges the idea of uniformity in the lifestyle and practices of Muslims in India by arguing that each group's practices are more specific to regional, cultural and linguistic patterns and each of them have evolved its own set of customary practices than maintaining strict adherence to Islamic law.

The tendency of the scholarships to present Muslims as a monolithic or homogeneous category in political arenas and academic discourses has no empirical validity. Mondal (2003:4892) explains that the Muslims in India form merely a homogeneous religious community sharing basic Islamic precepts, but they do not form a 'community' in anthropological or sociological terms. They are differentiated into various groups and sub-groups along with the ethnic, social and cultural lines and are organized in stratified social order. He further argues that no proper empirical study has been conducted on the socio-political dynamics of these theoretically monolithic and empirically diversified Muslim communities. Hence, the community is facing a serious challenge in recent times owing to the emergence of the perspective of understanding Muslim society from below.

Fazalbhoy (2005: 500) views that there was a worldwide realization among anthropologists that the Muslim societies were not simple reflections of the textual religion. One of the major areas of Indian scholarship from 1970s and 1980s was caste studies, inspired by Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1981) and the framework also developed to look at the heterogeneity among Muslims in India. Against the popular

notion, the scholars like Ahmad (1976) Engineer (1985) and Jairath (2011) argue that Muslims are not a homogeneous community and are horizontally and vertically divided into various regional and cultural groups on the one hand, and into various castes and classes on the other. They began to study the nuanced diversities such as region, language, cultural differences and customary practices among the different groups of Muslims. Despite its religious egalitarianism, the scholars found the heterogeneity is the striking feature of the Muslims in India (Ahmed 1976; Engineer 1985; Jain 1986; Ahmad 1993; Hasan and Menon 2004; Jairath 2011; Jayaram 2012).

To a great extent, this general notion of a homogenous Muslim community prevents the possibility of understanding the actual realities of Muslim communities in India. Muslims should be read according to the different contexts with which they are associated such as region, language, customs and cultural specificities. The aforementioned studies also stress that caste system among Muslims in India is a fact but cannot be equated with the Hindu caste system which is validated with a sacred text based on the principles of pollution and purity. Islam, as a religion, never endorses any caste practices, but the cultural syncretism with Hindus, one way or other, leads to caste practices among the Muslims, even though in a structural model.

Section-II

2.2 Social, Economic and Educational Condition of Muslims in India

India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. According to the 2011 census, Muslims are the largest religious minority community in India and constitute 14.23% of the total population. The following table (2.1) shows the state-wise population of Indian Muslims, as per the 2011 census data.

TABLE -2.1-State wise Muslim population in India

STATE	Population in %
Lakshadweep	96.56
Jammu and Kashmir	68.31
Assam	34.22
West Bengal	27.01
Kerala	26.56
Uttar Pradesh	19.26
Bihar	16.87
Jharkhand	14.53
Uttarakhand	13.95
Karnataka	12.92
Delhi	12.86
Maharashtra	11.54
Gujarat	9.67
Andhra Pradesh	9.56
Rajasthan	9.07
Tripura	8.60
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	8.52
Manipur	8.40
Goa	8.33
Daman and Diu	7.92
Haryana	7.03
Madhya Pradesh	6.57
Puducherry	6.05
Tamil Nadu	5.86
Chandigarh	4.87
Meghalaya	4.40
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	3.76
Nagaland	2.47
Himachal Pradesh	2.18
Orissa	2.17
Chhattisgarh	2.02
Arunachal Pradesh	1.95
Punjab	1.93
Sikkim	1.62
Mizoram	1.35
India	14.23

Despite being the largest minority community in India (14.23%), the Muslims continue to be the most deprived community in terms of social, economic, educational and employment fields. Since Independence the Central government has appointed various commissions and committees such as Gopal Singh committee (1980), Mandal commission (1979), Sachar Committee (2006), and Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007) to study the socio-economic conditions of minorities in India.

All these committees' reports highlighted the social and economic backwardness of Muslims in India. The above-mentioned committees pointed out that Indian Muslims are deprived of social opportunity due to a lack of access to education, healthcare, employment and other public services. The Muslim population is largely left behind in the developmental and modernization process of the society. The absence of a strong community-based political organization has been one of the major reasons for the deprivation of the Muslim community. The existing political parties have been using Muslims as a mere vote bank rather than according them equal citizenship rights. The "suspicion" around their religious and national belongings/loyalties and the low socio-economic status have left them far behind in comparison to other communities.

According to the 2011 census, Muslims have the highest percentage of illiteracy (42.7%) in the country, as against the 36.4% of Hindus, 32.49% of Sikhs, 28.17% of Buddhist and 25.66% of Christians. These statistics are based on the level of education with respect to different religious communities from the age of seven years and above. The illiteracy rate of Muslims is higher than the national average of 36.9% (Census report 2011). The data clearly indicates the socio-educational situation of Muslims in post-independence India. Muslims constitute, demographically, the largest and sociologically most significant minority community in India.

Jayaram (2012) points out that to understand the different forms of diversity among Muslims, it is necessary to look at the historical context and socio-economic structure of the society. It is not just the numbers, but the socio-political factors also, which make them a significant minority. He further raises an important point that the Muslims are different from other minority groups and they have become a minority by will or force. It is further argued that due to their minority status and growing insecurity, they do not want to be assimilated into the mainstream society (Jayaram 2012). Against the general view that the major reasons for the backwardness of Indian Muslims are their doubtful attitude towards modernity, westernization, and their orthodox religious attitude towards various socio-cultural issues, Jayaram (2012) holds that it is the insecurity that does not allow them to be integrated into the mainstream society as they feel it would harm their social existence. He further marks this as the reason by which the Muslim community could not improve their position and catch up with the opportunities provided by the changing society and economy.

Similar opinions were put forward by many scholars about the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India. The Muslims' response to these socio-economic and

political problems vary according to their affiliations with specific groups based on regional and cultural specificities. This must be carefully studied in this order to conform to empirical approach to avoid assumptions (Engineer 1985; Hasan and Menon 2005). Engineer (1985: 269) argues that the Muslim problem in India has its own history. To understand the real issues, one must begin from the post-mutiny period and the developmental agenda proposed by British which brought about the sharp conflict between the two major religious communities: Hindus and Muslims. Indian Muslims suffer from a sense of insecurity and they are obsessed with the feeling of threat to their identity.

Hasan and Menon (2005) also have discussed the regional disparities among Muslims in India by comparing the Muslims of north and south. They clearly indicate that Muslims of urban- south had achieved better socio-economic status than the urban-north. This is due to the educational investment by the state governments and by the strong community initiatives towards education in the urban- south. The work also shows that the problems of Muslims are different in southern and northern parts of the Indian states. However, the study ultimately proves that the Indian Muslims are the most disadvantaged community of the country (Hasan and Menon 2004).

As mentioned earlier, all the commissions and committees appointed by the government showed the vulnerable conditions of minorities, particularly that of the Muslim community even after seventy years of independence. The following part of the chapter discusses the findings and recommendations of various commissions and committees such as Gopal Singh Committee (1980), Mandal Commission (1979), Sachar Committee (2006) and Ranganathan Misra Committee (2007), which were appointed by the Union Government of India, and had come up with crucial findings on the socio-economic and political conditions of Muslims in India.

2.2.1 Gopal Singh Committee

A High Power Panel was set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in 1980 to understand the social and economic conditions of Indian minorities, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The chairman of the committee was Dr. Gopal Singh along with ten members. The panel submitted their report on 14th June 1983. The Committee found that Muslims and Neo Buddhists are the most backward communities of the country. And they also observed that there was a clear sense of discrimination prevailing against the minorities and it must be eliminated from the

foundation itself to make them an effective part of the mainstream. The committee revealed crucial findings which stated that the data regarding the benefits accruing to the religious minorities were not available in any public office. The committee collected data from 80 districts in different parts of the country and it observed that the major reasons for their backwardness were their poor socio-economic status. The Commission also stressed the invisibility of Muslim women in all respects of the society (Gopal Singh Committee 1980). The committee found that Muslims are increasingly being excluded educationally, economically and politically than any other communities. The worst part, according to the report, is that most of them live in ghettos across the country with a sense of fear and insecurity; and the community suffers from a perception of discrimination and a sense of alienation. The committee made two recommendations to the Government which are necessary to end the discrimination against Muslims. They noted,

“wherever the government has to make appointments through nominations, as in the case of governing bodies of banks and other public undertakings, utmost care should be taken to have a fair number of the minorities’ representatives, especially at the decision-making levels. Similarly, every recruiting agency or services commission must have an adequate number of their representatives, so that the sense of discrimination now prevailing may end” (Gopal Singh Committee 1980).

The committee found that in the central government offices, Muslim employment rate was just 4.41% of the total population, but in class-I it was an abysmal 1.61%, in Class- II it was 3.0%, in Class- III, the posting was 4.41%, and in Class IV employment rate was 5.12%. On the other hand, in the state government offices, Muslim constituted 6.01% of total employees, class- I it was just 3.03%, Class- II 4.62% and in Class IV the number was 6.35%. The Commission also found that only 4.52% of all judges were to be found among the Muslims, and interestingly there was not a single Muslim judge in the High Court of any state.

2.2.2 Mandal Commission Report

The Mandal Commission was appointed by the Janata Government in 1979, with a mandate to identify the socially or educationally backward communities in India. The first backward Commission of 1955 popularly known as Kaka Kalelkar Commission, could not make much impact on the status of the backward classes and it was rejected by the Union Government on various grounds. One of the major reasons for the failure of Kaka Kalelkar Commission is that it understood the crude realities of the Indian caste

system. They believed it is objectionable to democracy and was inimical to the creation of casteless and classless society.

The Mandal Commission was headed by the former parliamentarian Bindheshwari Prasad Mandal, with five other members, mainly to consider the question of reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination. The Commission submitted their report in December 1980s, after the extensive survey in the 405 districts of the country, with a lot of laudable recommendations which shook the political atmosphere of the country. According to their observation there were three indicators, social, educational and economical, for determining the backwardness of the community. The most sparking observation by the Commission was caste as the major criteria to identify the backward class, and they also equated caste with class (Mandal Commission Report 1980).

The Commission found that there were 3743 castes, approximately 52% of the population, across the religions, which come under the category of Other Backward Castes (OBC). This includes the lower caste Hindus, Muslims and Christians who are socially, educationally and economically backwards; though caste was not the sole criteria to select Muslims, Sikhs and Christians as OBCs, as these religions are egalitarian in outlook. However, non-Hindu minorities are living in predominantly Hindu social and cultural influences, thus, caste among non-Hindu communities received continuous sustenance and stimulus (ibid 55).

Muslims in the Malabar region, popularly known as Mappilas are categorized under the OBC list by the Commission. In Kerala, almost 90% of the total population are included as OBCs in the central list. The Muslims from Haryana, the major Muslim population of the state, falls under the OBC category, and most of the Muslims from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan fall under the OBC category. However, in the two most Muslim populated states, West Bengal and Assam, the proportion of OBC were minimal.

The Commission recommended for an affirmative action through 27% reservation in government jobs and for the extension of reservations in universities and colleges. The Commission also suggested that the government should make necessary legal provisions for implementing these recommendations. The Commission's recommendations were accepted by the V. P. Singh Government in 1990, and a notification was issued on 13th August to implement the reservation policy. The government insisted that various departments fill their vacant seats through direct

recruitment (ibid). The findings attracted a wide range of criticism not only from the upper caste community organizations but from the caste minded civil society too. There were several nationwide agitations which claimed many lives, including that of students from different parts of the country which resulted in the Supreme Court's stay over the Government order to implement reservation. After a decades, the Congress government decided to implement partial reservation for the OBCs. And later, the first United Progressive Government (UPA) of 2006 implemented 27% of reservation in higher educational institutions. Despite the 27% reservation for OBCs, the condition of Muslims in India is far behind when compared with that of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in some areas.

2.2.3 Sachar Committee Report

The first UPA government appointed an exclusive high power committee in March 2005, under the chairmanship of Justice Rajinder Sachar and six other members, to prepare a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. The Committee's report is popularly known as Sachar report. Robinson (2007), rightly points out that the Sachar Committee report brings together a wealth of data which is of immense value with respect to the development and marginalization of different socio-religious groups, the Muslims in particular, in the country. The report clearly establishes that Muslims suffer from deprivation in almost every front in life. It is after the Sachar committee report that the government started looking into the problems of Muslim minorities about policy formulations to improve their condition in various areas such as education, employment and women empowerment.

The commission found crucial evidences which pointed out that even after sixty years of independence, Muslims remain an extremely underprivileged community in India in terms of education, social and economic status. According to the commission, the Muslim community exhibits "deficits and deprivation" in all dimensions of the developmental process (ibid: 237). The report summarized that the status of Muslim community in India is relatively backward than any other socio-religious community and is slightly better than that of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Surprisingly, in some areas of development such as higher education, public employment, etc., Muslim representation is lower than that of the scheduled castes (Sachar report 2006).

The literacy rate is the easiest method and widely used indicator of educational achievement of a community. According to 2011 census report, the literacy rate is 59.1%, lower than the national average of 64.8%, amongst Muslims. The NSSO report says that, 25 percent of the Muslim children in the 6-14 age groups have either not attended schools or are dropped outs (Sachar report 2006: 58). There is a significant improvement in the enrolment rate in recent years, but still the rate of drop outs and the number of children who have not attended school are also comparatively high amongst Muslim communities in India. Sachar report views that children are forced to drop out after the first few classes, particularly Muslim girls, mainly due to poverty. According to the report, only 4% Muslims have completed graduation, and only 2% Muslims are able to complete post-graduation (Sachar report 2006: 64).

The probability of pursuing higher education also varies depending on the socio-religious communities. It is completely dependent on the economic factors and other opportunities available to the communities. Out of these, the significant proportion of the population remains deprived of the benefit of higher education and Muslims are the most deprived of them. In many states, especially in the urban areas, Muslims are even behind scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in attaining higher education (Sachar report 2006). According to the Sachar Committee Report, in case of premier higher educational institutions in India, such as IIMs and IITs, the representation of Muslims was very meagre. In IIMs, the number of Muslim students can be rounded off to 1.3 percentage and in various IIT's the number of Muslim students amount to a bare minimum of 3.29 percentage of the total Indian Muslim population (Sachar report 2006: 67-68). At the degree level, Muslim student representation is only four percent and in the Post-Graduation level it is only two percent. When it comes to the area of management studies, Muslim representation is only one percent and in the Medical-dental and nursing colleges the total number of Muslim students is only four percentage (Sachar report 2006: 68). Sachar committee report reveals that, in India, one out of 25 undergraduate students are Muslims and one out of the 50 post-graduation students are Muslims in premier colleges.

Indian Muslims have lagged behind other religious communities in education as well as in economic terms (Sachar report 2006). Ahmed (1970: 43) writes about a widely held belief that Muslims have remained largely unaffected by the process of economic development and social change that has been taking place in independent India and their general economic condition has been deteriorating. Moreover, Muslims

have felt social insecurity and became the targets of continuous economic discrimination. The prevalence of poverty is higher among Muslims in comparison to Hindu communities. One-third of the Muslims live below the poverty line as against one-fourth among the Hindus. Muslims living in urban areas are more likely to be unfortunate than others, as well as their counterparts in rural areas (Sachar report 2006). The main reason for the increased level of poverty among the Muslims is mainly due to the unemployment. The participation of Muslims in labour force is also lower compared to other religious communities which obviously lead to higher rate of unemployment. Sachar report (2006:163) observes that, “in a pluralistic society a reasonable representation of various communities in government sector employment is necessary to enhance participatory governance.”

Most of the Muslims are engaged in self-employment or are working in informal sectors, and their participation in salaried and regular employment is minimal. Sachar report shows that in India, only 13% of the Muslim population is engaged in salaried jobs; the number is less than the other socio-religious groups, but slightly better than SCs and STs. The share of government employment among Muslims has never exceeded more than five percent. In the public sector, the job rate of Muslims was less than 24%. Other socio-religious groups hold a better position in this sector, it was 39% among scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, 37% for Hindu upper castes, and among OBCs the rate was 30%. The percentage of Muslims in central government jobs is only 6 percent while that of Hindu upper castes is 42% and SCs, STs and OBC communities constitute 23%. The presence of Muslims in high profile government jobs has been very less, only 3% in the IAS, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS. The representation of Muslims in Indian railways, one of the largest public-sector employments, was only 4.5% in which 98.7% of them are working at lower levels. Muslims working as police constables amounts only to 6%, in health 4.4% and in transport sector 6.5%. In any of the government sectors, their employment representations are much lower than that of their population (Sachar report 2006).

In fact, the under-representation or representational absence in the government sector is the common features of the Indian Muslims since Independence. The low representation of Muslims in public or private sector employment and the perception of discrimination in securing salaried jobs make them less important to formal ‘secular’ education in comparison to other socio religious communities. At the same time, the community, especially the educated Muslim middle class, finds itself unsatisfied and

alienated because of the lack of presence and opportunities in administrative, policy and political spaces (Sachar report 2006: 15-16). According to the commission, a wide variety of policy initiatives and programmes have been launched by the governments to promote the economic, social and educational development of the minority communities in India but the outcome was very poor. Many scholars have clearly stated the pathetic social conditions and the discrimination against Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, in the educational and allied fields (Ahmad 1987; Jayaram 1990).

The Sachar report also found that the participation level of Muslims, both in the state and central legislatures, were significantly low which shows the absence of Muslims in the decision-making process. The Commission observes that, “given the power of numbers in a democratic polity, based on universal franchise, minorities in India lack effective agency and political importance” (Sachar report 2006). Furthermore, “minorities do not have the necessary influence or the opportunity to either change or even influence events which enable their meaningful and active participation in the development process” (ibid). Out of the 543 Lok Sabha members, only 33 are Muslims, and the commission warns that such low participation definitely will have an adverse impact on Indian society and polity in the long run” (Sachar report 2006: 241). The report also states that the situation is almost the same in state assemblies, except for few cases.

The Committee recommends that an effective governmental mechanism should be adopted to ensure equity and equality of opportunity, and to eliminate the chances of discrimination. The Commission also stressed on the need for affirmative action, especially in the form of reservations to solve the socio, economic and employment problems faced by Muslims and suggested that the government should constitute Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) to investigate the grievances of the deprived groups. (Sachar report 2006).

2.2.4 Ranganath Misra Committee

The UPA government appointed the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, popularly known as Ranganath Misra Committee, under the chairmanship of Justice Ranganath Misra with three other members in the year 2007. The Commission submitted their final report on May 2007. The major tasks of the commission was:

- to suggest the criteria for identification of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities
- to recommend measures for the welfare of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities, including reservation in education and government employment and
- to suggest the necessary constitutional, legal and administrative modalities required for the implementation of its recommendations.

The Commission found that there are approximately 18% of religious minorities in India. A large proportion of them are Muslims (13.4%), followed by Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%) and Parsis (0.0069%). According to the Commission, Muslims have been backward compared to all other religious communities in the areas of literacy and education, industrial promotion and economic pursuits. They lack technical and vocational education as well as training in trades which are in demand. In many of the states, Muslims lack the facilities for entrepreneurial ventures and markets for their products. The work participation rate among Muslim women has been found to be low, affecting the quality of their life, and are very poor in socio-economic status (ibid: 12-30).

According to the commission's observations, the under representation of Muslims, partially or completely, can be considered a reason to regard them as a backward community. And the commission recommended a total of 15% reservation for the linguistic and religious minorities in which 10% should be reserved for Muslims in central and state government jobs in all cadre and grades, as their population remained high (73%) among the minorities. The commission also suggested that the remaining five percent should be allocated for all other minority groups of the country (ibid: 153). They further suggested that, in case of non-availability of Muslims to fill the 10% of their quota, these may be made available to other minorities. However, the commission categorically points that in any case, in the absence of minorities, this 15% should not be transferred to the majority community (ibid). Apart from these commissions and committees appointed by the Union Government, there were many other committees and commissions appointed by the respective state government to study the backward conditions of caste and religious minorities¹⁶.

¹⁶ Kumara Pillai Commission in 1964 and Damodaran Commission in 1967 by Kerala Government, Sattanathan Commission of Tamil Nadu 1969, K.N. Anantharaman Commission in 1970 and Muralidhar Rao Commission in 1982 of Andhra Pradesh etc, are few in this category. Apart from the Narendran Commission of 2001 the Kerala government also appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Paloli Muhammed Kutty in 2007 to study the conditions of backward caste groups especially after the Sachar

Sachar committee report was considered as the blueprint of Muslims community's situation in India, which reflects both internal and external problems faced by the community. However, it is important to note that there has been little improvement in the representation of the community even after ten years of the report, although the Muslim population has increased from 13.43% to 14.2%. In 2005, the Muslim representation in Indian police forces was 7.63% and in 2013 it was reduced to 6.27%. Subsequently, the government stopped releasing religion-based police statistics. The Sachar Committee recorded the percentage of Muslims in the IAS and IPS as 3% and 4% respectively. According to the Home Ministry these numbers were 3.32% and 3.19% in 2016 respectively. The number of Muslims in the high level of the state is significantly reduced from 7.1% of the same in the Sachar Report to merely 3.82% at the beginning of 2016¹⁷.

Several scholars have mentioned various reasons for the backwardness of Muslims post-partition. On the one hand, religious traditionalism, backwardness and psychological crisis of their identity, and on the other, deliberate negligence and discrimination by the larger society are the reasons by and large. The root of the problem lies in the shaping of Muslims as a minority and in the socio-economic structure of the Muslim community (Jayaram 2012). Though the governments have implemented many policies and programs for the benefit of the Muslims and other marginalized groups, it did not make much difference about the problems they face as community. Most of the commissions mentioned the difficulties while collecting data, where state governments do not have adequate data pertaining to Muslims. To solve the problems of Muslims and other minorities, the government should strictly follow the affirmative action with a legal aid. Since independence, Muslims in India have been victimized in the name of genocides and communal violence, and most of the time government missionaries had failed to solve the issues as they feared it would invite political set back from the dominant religious groups. The only possible way to solve the problems of minorities in India is by treating Muslims as equal citizens rather than as vote bank. To understand the backwardness of Indian Muslims, one should look at

commission report. The committee suggested many recommendations including reservation in private sector, establishment of more schools and colleges for Muslims and to constitute a minority welfare department (Paloli Committee Report 2007).

¹⁷ Indian Express December 26, 2016, accessed on 26th March 2017.

the historical contexts, geographical location of the community, government attitude, and other cultural factors, rather than simply focusing on the religious constraints.

Section-3

2.3 Muslim Women in India: Problems and Perspectives

The socio-economic, political and cultural milieu of women in India is a subject of academic discourse. The study, at large, observes that the Indian society and culture is gender biased with strong patriarchal tendencies (Kazi 1998; Chanana 2001; Kirmani 2013). Other than their numerical equality with men, the women are marginalized in all respects of life. Indeed, the empowerment of women is one of the key indicators of development in any nation or society. However, the condition of women lags in developing countries. After the independence, the Indian constitution attempted to improve the condition by enacting laws of equal rights for women. Furthermore, the women are treated as second class citizens due to the inherent patriarchal structure of the society.

In India, women from the minority communities are not adequately aware of their rights and are many a time not empowered to exercise their inalienable rights. The lower social status of the women denies their access to various resources such as education, employment, health and political participation. Muslim women in India tend to suffer not just from the disabilities attached to the female status, but also those disabilities which come with being a minority in the country. Sachar Committee (2006: 12- 13) aptly points out that,

...to the exclusion of all other aspects of a Muslim woman's life (income, jobs, education, security and even caloric intake), the rules of marriage, right to divorce and maintenance have become the benchmarks of a gender-just existence. The obsessive focus on select cases of Muslim women passionately discussed in the media results in identifying the Muslim religion as the sole locus of gender injustice in the community. Consequently, the civil society and the State locates Muslim women's deprivation not in terms of the 'objective' reality of societal discrimination and faulty development policies, but in the religious-community space ... Their lives, morality, and movement in public spaces are under constant scrutiny and control. A gender-based fear of the 'public', experienced to some degree by all women, is magnified manifold in the case of Muslim women.

The Muslim women in India are the most disadvantaged section among other religious community in India. They are marginalized and excluded in all walks of their socio-political lives. Engineer (1994: 297) clearly points out that Muslim women are

faced with three-fold disadvantage: first as a woman, second as a member of a minority community, and finally as a poor woman. Social indicators such as literacy, economy, health and gender statistics reveal that women in the Muslim community are economically, politically and socially more disadvantaged than the women in other communities. Engineer (1994) further points out that there are certain factors for which Muslims are responsible, like imposing restrictions, which does not concern Islamic principle. These restrictions are rooted more in social customs and religious traditions of the past and they are legitimized in the name of *Sharia*.

According to Hasan and Menon (2004:1), in the post-colonial period stereotypical misunderstandings have dominated the academic discussions and debates on Muslim women in India. Moreover, it has become a common practice among the policy makers and public intellectuals to view Muslims and Muslim women as a monolithic category. This kind of reductive thesis is based on a complete misunderstanding of Islamic history, culture, and politics in India. The misunderstanding totally conceals the rich and diverse tradition that forms Muslims and Muslim women discourses. In India, the social and cultural position of women in every religious community is lower than men, and among the Muslims it is lower than scheduled castes and tribes in some areas of development (Sachar report 2006). Muslim women suffer from both internal and external sources of oppression. They are differentiated in terms of gender, class, caste and community while they are subjected to the dichotomy between gender and community (Kazi 1998).

With few notable exceptions, the spotlight has always been on the role of religion in Muslim life and culture, which has largely produced sociology of religion rather than a sociology of Muslims. In this perspective, Muslims are typically seen as a monolithic entity in terms of an Islam that is all-pervasive and primarily prescriptive, ignoring the heterogeneity of Muslim communities, their culture, and their social positions. As Nayar (2007) observes that any discussion about the condition of minorities will be meaningless without looking into the condition of women in their society and community. Women and girls of the disadvantaged and minority communities are the most deprived members in our present society. She further points out that in the specific case of Muslim women in India, Muslim men practice and interpret what they believe is Islamic and oppress and exclude their women and refuse to entertain any thought of modernization. Mathur (1992) argues that the seclusion of women among the Muslims is an extreme form of segregation; Muslim women are not

allowed to perform a separate role. They face restrictions upon their free movement outside home.

As discussed, scholars in the field of social sciences in India such as Jairath (2011), Hasan and Menon (2004), Kazi (1998), Ali (2002), Mondal (2003), and Saidalvi (2017) challenged the stereotypical notions regarding the position of Muslim women by bringing into light their heterogeneous character in terms of regions and classes. There are prominently multiple causes responsible for the backwardness of Muslim women. The causes vary according to their regions such as north-south and east-west.

However, it is conceived that religion is the prime institution in determining the role or status of women in the community; the role of other institutions have not been studied in detail. Particularly, the social institutions play a dominant role in deciding the socio-economic status of a community along with other issues. Scholars urge that rather than generalizing, the social scientists need to develop new approaches and methodologies to study the problem of Muslim women in India, who are a minority within the minority (Hussain 1998; Ali 2002; Khan 2004; Kirmani 2013).

Several studies also illustrate about the developing character of Muslim women both in urban and rural areas. Sheik (1997) analyzes that despite several drawbacks and restraints, the status of Muslim women is changing for the better in recent years. These changes take place as part of the process of transformation in traditional beliefs and practices. Abidi (1986) observes that in India, urban Muslim women have better access to educational and health facilities and exhibit greater change in their social attitudes as well as practices. The religious orthodoxy is neither increasing nor it can be taken as an important cause of denial of access for women to developmental facilities.

Jain (1988) also discusses the changing perception of Muslims regarding the issues of employment, education, and control over household's activities and finances. She analyzes the process of modernization in India and the changes that it has brought about in the status of Muslim women. The study argues that the Muslim women are favourably marching forward towards economic independence.

2.4 Education of Muslim Women in India

Education is often used as an indicator to measure the progress and development of a community and the society in general as education is linked to social mobility and cultural capital. An educated woman can improve the quality of family life as family is

considered to be the major unit of the socialization. However, low enrolment rates, high rate of dropouts and low achievements are major trends visible in the educational scenario of Muslim women. The social problems such as poverty, lack of female teachers, a separate school for girls, attitude towards secular education for girls, early marriage and conservative attitude are considered as important factors for the backwardness of Muslim women in education (Hasan and Menon 2004; Nayar 2007; Samiullah 2012).

As mentioned above, it is a common belief that religion is the main impediment for Muslim women in acquiring education. However, many scholars argue that the socio-economic status of the family is also equally responsible for the backwardness of the Muslim community in India. Engineer (1994:297) argues that more than religion, patriarchy is the real culprit for women's inferior status as it relegates them to a secondary position. By supporting this argument, Hasan and Menon (2004:235) argue that more than religion and customs, patriarchy is the most susceptible factor behind the backwardness or the low representation of Muslim women in education and employment.

According to the 2011 Census, literacy rate among the Muslims in India is 59.1%, below the national average of 64.8%. The literacy rate of Muslim women is 50.1% as against the national average of 67.6%, with a gap of 17.5% (Census report 2011). The literacy rate of Muslim women is significantly lower than any other religious communities of the country, though it is slightly better than that of the SCs and STs. Contrary to popular perception that holds religious conservatism as the key factor in educational backwardness, the Sachar report (2006: 20), through an empirical study, established that poverty and financial constraints are the major causes that prevent Muslim women from accessing modern/secular education. Muslim women often face overt discrimination from school authorities while trying to get admission or in availing scholarships for their children.

Hasan and Menon (2004) in their detailed field survey of 42 districts in different states of India, observe that more than 75% of the Muslim women in the country remain to be illiterate. In rural North India 85% Muslim women are illiterate, but the rate is better in urban South India where 88% women are said to be literate. There is a wide gap between the education of boys and girls in every community in India in general, but the disparity is much higher among the Muslims. The lack of facilities such as adequate number of women teachers, separate schools for girls, transport and

scholarships are the major reasons that discourage women from accessing education. The study further argues that the representation of Muslim girls who complete 8th standard was 17% and it is less than 10% in higher secondary education, which is below the national average.

The enrolment rate of Muslim girls in schools is only 40.6% and the proportion of Muslim women in higher education is only 3.56% which is even lower than that of the Scheduled Castes, which is 4.25%. However, the recent Educational Statistics of 2015-16 shows the declining rate of dropouts among Muslim children. According to the report, over 4.34% students enrolled in classes I to V drop out. Similarly, over 3.7% of students enrolled in classes V to VIII drop out. The dropout rate at the secondary level is 17.8%. All these statistics indicate the fact that the dropout rate has been higher for girls (HDR 2006: 8). It is important to note that though the dropout rate is less, it has not significantly reduced among the Muslim community.

According to the Ranganath Misra committee (2007: 17) the participation of Muslims is 65.31% at the primary level, but their proportion goes down to 10.96% as we go to the secondary level and it plummets to 4.53% further at the senior secondary level. The high dropout rate affects the Muslim community significantly in their higher education and employment. As is the case with many Indians, the main reason for the educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children are forced to drop out after the first few classes and this is particularly true for Muslim girls. The report further talks about the co-relation between the place of residence and education, the lack of educational institutions in Muslim-dominated areas which discourage girl children from enrolling (Sachar report 2006).

An interesting finding of the Sachar report is that the educational and employment status of Muslim men influences the opportunity provided to improve the status of women in the community. The report says that 26% of educated Muslim women have illiterate husbands. Majority of the Muslim men are engaged in self-employed activities which do not demand any professional qualification. The low educational status of Muslim men negatively influences the Muslim women from getting educated and ultimately leads to early marriages. Apart from this, the orthodox mentality of parents towards the education of girl child, proneness to early marriages, and the practice of conventional outfit are the main factors which obstruct the educational progress of Muslim women (Sachar report 2006).

Hasan (2003) observes that the educational backwardness among the Muslims is a product of poverty as well as the negligence of the state. Due to their structural location in the economy and the perception of discrimination, only few Muslims can afford or aspire for higher education. The only possible way to uplift the conditions of Muslims in India is through affirmative actions. Hasan and Menon (2005) studied the condition of Muslim women's education in five cities in India: Delhi, Aligarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Calicut. They argue that to improve the poor condition of Muslim women's education there is a special need for the state to take a pro-active role in this regard which, according to them, will promote social justice and empowerment, while removing the barriers that systematically reinforce their marginalization.

The major reasons for the educational backwardness of the Muslim community in India, especially in the North are unemployment and poverty. Compared to the North Indian Muslims, the South Indian Muslims have strong presence in education and this is because of their socio-economic empowerment. The strong economic disparities among the north Indian Muslims segregate them as different social classes where the lower-class people cannot get equal access to education and employment. The absence of such strong class divisions, mainly due to the flow of Gulf money, particularly in the case of Kerala, and the active engagement of socio-political organizations from within the Muslim community in South India helped them to achieve a better educational status.

2.4.1 Economy and Employment

The status of Muslim women is to be studied in relation with the socio-economic and political structures. As mentioned above, most of the Muslim women are illiterate, and economically and politically marginalized. Muslim women have lesser possibilities in relation to their economic participation. They have constantly lower probability of taking part in the labour market both in rural and urban areas, and the participation is less than the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. It is to be noted that the religion and social status play an important role in determining labour force outcomes. Due to their responsibilities in the family, their active participation in the economic and political life is being regulated and restricted.

Hasan and Menon (2004) observe that in some areas such as the socio-economic status of Muslim households, occupational distribution, asset structure, the standard of living, and education, the Muslim women are not equal to the Hindu women. The

situation remains the same in both rural and urban areas. The absence of proper education and restricted cultural norms not only prevent their entry into the public domain but restrict their visible presence even in the family. Nabi (1992:81) explains that the disadvantaged condition of Muslim women in the labour market is mainly due to the socio-religious restrictions imposed upon them. Bordia (2002) points out the two main reasons for non- participation of Muslim women in the economic activity is due to their low educational status and cultural norms.

As against the general view, Hussain (1998) analyzes that despite all their social hindrances Muslim women enter into different fields of employment, though it is less as compared to the women of other communities. In her study, most of the women respondents have criticized the idea that the employment of women outside their home is un-Islamic. But she argues that employment allows them to contribute to the economic affairs of their family. Bhatti (1976) analyzes the status of Indian Muslim women in the context of the modern idea of equality and justice. She observes that the Muslim society is slowly moving towards equality of opportunity between men and women. According to her, education is the main source to improve the status of Muslim women for making them aware of the modern values and their rights. The study shows that there are considerable changes in the status of Muslim women in India as they are adopting new roles as well as participating in socio-economic activities and attaining education.

The social and educational backwardness of Muslim community in general and Muslim women particularly contribute to the low participation in employment both in private and public sectors. This economic disparity is prominently visible when compared to other communities. The cultural practices and religious beliefs are also some of the important reasons for the poor participation of Muslim women in public spaces. According to the Sachar report, the average participation of Muslim women in the employment area is only 25%. The employment rate in the rural area is only 29% as against the 70% of Hindu women. Their condition of poverty, lack of education and technical skills, low-income play a dominant role keeping the Muslim women away from mainstream society (Sachar report 2006). Sachar points that the Muslim women are mainly engaged in the self-employment such as sewing, embroidery, zari work, chikan work, readymade garments, agarbatti rolling and beedi rolling. Their work conditions are characterized by low income, poor work conditions, absence of toilet and crèche facilities, lack of social security benefits like health insurance and the absence

of bargaining power. The participation of Muslim women is very minimal in Government micro-finance programmes such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), watershed programmes and Panchayatiraj. This restriction of mobility, based on social and cultural factors, restricts their employment opportunities and earning wages. They do not have independent access to credit facilities, opportunities for skill upgradation, or access to markets (Sachar 2006).

According to the Ranganath Misra Report (2007) the work participation of women from religious minorities in India shows that the Muslim women have the second lowest work participation status, and it was 14.1% and preceded by Jains (9.2 %). But if we see the work participation among all the religious communities, the Muslim men's work participation was 47.5%, which is the least participation compared to any other communities. It is a fact that in the major government and private sector enterprises the number of Muslim women is lower than that of any communities in India. Their invisible role is not taken into the consideration by government committees and commissions. According to the 2011 census the total work participation rate of women was 53.3% and it included 39.8% rural women and 53.8% urban women. 71.8% of the women employed were in primary sector, 21.7% in tertiary sector and the remaining in the manufacturing sector.

The work participation of men in India was 51.7 in the year 2011, where the Muslim work participation constituted only 47.5%, lower than that of the national average (Census report 2011). However according to the recent census data, the work participation of Muslim women has increased by a very small proportion from 14.1% in 2001 to 14.8% in 2011 (ibid). According to the Human Development Report (HDR) of 2011, the rural and urban poverty is higher amongst the Muslims than any other religious group, even more than the non-Muslim other backward classes (OBCs). One-third of the Muslims in the country were living below the poverty line (HDR 2011). The absence of women's participation in contributing to the economy of the family is one of the main reasons for this deplorable condition of the Muslim community in India.

The marginalized status of the Muslim community is visible in all the development sectors of the Indian social system such as education, employment and politics. The lower socio-economic status of Muslim women results in their low participation in educational and employment sectors. They have very limited mobility and no-decision making power in the society as well as in household activities. As White (1978) argues that illiteracy, patriarchy and traditional norms and beliefs are the

major factors hindering Muslim women from social and economic developments in India. The lack of women participation in economic activities is always showed as one of the key reasons for the backwardness of Muslim women in India, and their educational backwardness denies them from getting into professional career.

It is hard to believe that the Muslim women are denied employment due to their religious identity. But it remains to be the fact that they are denied indeed. Some women who interacted with the Sachar committee informed how the *hijab*¹⁸-wearing Muslim women in the corporate office were finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs. Muslim women in *burqa* complain of impolite treatment in the market, in hospitals, in schools, in accessing public facilities such as public transport and so on (Sachar report 2006: 12-13).

However, to ensure participation of Muslim women in employment and nation building there must be a significant initiative from the state, religious, as well as civil society. It is believed that educational backwardness and economic impoverishment are inter connected. Providing necessary education will subsequently lead women into the workforce which would benefit both the community and the nation.

2.4.2 Political Participation

In the aforementioned literature, it is noticed that women are one of the largest excluded and marginalized part of the society. The range of such exclusion and marginalization in Muslim countries is much higher than any other nation. Because religion, which the Muslim countries use as an excuse, plays a major role in preventing the women enter the public realm. Mohan (2014) argues that unlike the Hindu and Christian communities where religion does not act as a barrier to the advancement of women, the conservative character of the Muslim community, its patriarchal nature and its desire to maintain religious identity imposes restrictions on its own women in the public space. She argues that in the case of Muslim women, religion restricts women's participation and the religious *fatwa* (decrees) believes that women's entry into public spaces is *haram* (religiously forbidden). But ironically, many Islamic regimes have seen Muslim women as their premiers such as Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh) and Megawati Sukarnoputri (Indonesia) among others.

The reviewing of literature proves that the exclusion and the subjugation of

¹⁸ The current study observed hijab as a garment of clothing that covers the head and chest which is worn by Muslim women as a part of their religious obligation, identity, modesty and modernity.

Indian women in general, and Muslim women particularly, is a common phenomenon of everyday life. Social indicators and gender statistics reveal that women in the Muslim community are on average more disadvantaged economically, politically and socially than the women in other religions and communities. As Singla (2007) argues that one of the major reasons for the deprived status of Muslim women in India is their ineffective participation in the political domain of the society. It is considered that the political participation is a major component of empowerment. However, the deprived educational and social status of Muslim women limit them in engaging with the main stream politics and society. The term empowerment, Singla (2007) observes, has multiple inter-related and inter-dependent dimensions which cover the socio-economic, cultural and political areas. They have greater contribution to the women welfare, development, affirmative action and reservation.

As a matter of fact, the Indian constitution guarantees equal rights to both men and women in the country. Article 14 of the Indian constitution proclaims “right to equality” which prohibits all sorts of discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, gender, etc. However, the position of India is marked 148th out of 227 countries in terms of representation of women in government and parliament. This is shown in a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women in their annual global statistics of women in politics (IPU Report 2017). The general trend of Indian political scenario shows that the women representation has never crossed 12% of total elected representatives in parliamentary elections from 1952-2014. The number of Muslim elected representatives were 22 in the first Lok Sabha, but there were no women. It is noted that women representation as Member of Parliament (MP) is only 62/543 (11.4%) in the present Lok Sabha and the number is just 27/245 (11%) in Rajya Sabha (Election Commission of India).

Particularly the number of the representation of Muslim women in Lok Sabha never exceeded more than three members, and at many times their presence was zero. And in the entire history of Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 2016, the total number of Muslim women were below twenty (Parliament Secretariat). In terms of the presence of women cabinet ministries, India is ranked at 88th with only five (18.5%) ministers who are women in the cabinet. Though the number is high when compared to the Indian average of 11%, it is lesser than 25.6% women representation in Indonesia, the largest Muslim populated country (IPU Report 2017). In the last two United Progressive Government (UPA), the representation of women ministers was ten and nine respectively. It is

reduced to seven out of 44 in the present National Democratic Alliance government led by Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP), wherein Najma Heptulla is the only the Muslim candidate. India has faced 16 general elections in the last seventy years, however, the country has witnessed only a single female Prime Minister and a President, and neither a Muslim Speaker nor a Chairman of Rajya Sabha (Lok Sabha Secretariat). It is interesting to note that the prominent Muslim women leaders elected in the parliament such as Najma Heptulla, Mohsina Kidwai, Mehbooba Mufti and others are from higher socio-economic and political backgrounds, and clearly the presence of lower class Muslim women are always absent.

Muslim women's participation in all public realm is low in terms of higher education, employment, and political engagements. Enhancement of their democratic participation and role in policy making is highly important. This would facilitate their meaningful and active participation in the development process of the country. Equal participation of women in political life, to be meaningful and effective, should start from the grassroots level. One of the aims of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) is to provide training and practice in the process of decision making to empower the rural Indian women. Participation in the local government institutions is viewed as essential in promoting women's consciousness and development at the local level as well as for participation in the wider politics. The report further demonstrates that the Muslim women have almost no presence in decision making positions from gram panchayats to the parliament. They even fail to find a place in minority welfare institutions set up by the government. One of the reasons for the low efficacy of these programmes is the lack of Muslim participation in political processes and governance, especially at the local level (Sachar report 2006). Muslim women's entry into the political field is largely determined by the will of the male political and religious leaders and the cultural attitude towards women involvement in public society. The negative cultural attitudes of the society, the family burden and the media prejudices towards women in politics are prominent reasons for the less involvement of Muslim women in politics.

It is also interesting to see that all laws related to women such as marriage, divorce, property etc., have been drafted by the male-dominated parliamentary structures. The agency of women is completely negated even in the present context too. The eleventh Lok Sabha in 1996 drafted the women reservation bill which reserves 33% seats for women in parliament and state legislatures. However, the male

parliamentarians over the years have been opposing the bill showing the misogynist attitude of Indian societies. Though in theory every political party support the bill, they show their masculine attitude. In India, women from all communities suffer from patriarchal dominances, and no one is there in parliament to support the bill.

Kazi (1999) observes that in modern India, the socio-economic status of women in Muslim communities, along with their political participation rates and the need for legal reform, are the causes of concern and need attention. Indian society and culture are strongly gendered biased where the patriarchal cultural and social practices exclude women from the mainstream. In a male-dominated society, women face various problems, both specific to their religious group and specific to their sex. In India, it is always perceived that the politics is exclusively the domain of men and women are considered not to be fit to the post. This patriarchal tendency of all political parties is the greatest hindrance for women in the decision-making process and policy formulations. This misogynist tendency can be transformed only through strong legal support.

2.4.3 Gender Rights and Family Law

The questions of gender rights and family law have been a major area of academic and political discussions in India in the post-independence era. While the question of gender relations has implications for various religious communities, the discussion on this issue is often confined to the question of Muslim community in exclusionary approach. The question of Personal Law has become an important issue for the Muslim women in India. It is worth noting that the Muslim Personal Law (MPL) in India is connected to women's rights such as maintenance, divorce, polygamy, etc.

The Muslim Personal Law (MPL) is concerned not just about the relationship between men and women in terms of the questions of family, marriage, maintenance, etc.; but it also signifies a much-complicated relationship between Muslim women on one side and the state, including the court, on the other. Hasan (2000: 284-86) observes that as far as the question of gender equality, enshrined in the constitution, is concerned there is no policy to support or enhance this equality. Rather the equality for women is stalled in the light of the conflicting claims of women's rights and those of a cultural community. She further argues that "by privileging community rights over the principle of equal rights, minority rights often reinforce existing hierarchies and gender

inequalities within the group by restricting individual choice in the name of cultural integrity.”

Many Islamic scholars point out the complex nature of the *sharia* law, especially with respect to the question of Muslim women. The Islamic law is grounded in various theological sources such as the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, which, according to many Muslim scholars, cannot be taken for granted. These scholars argue that the *sharia* law reinforces patriarchy in many contexts such as marriage, divorce and family maintenance. There is a wide gap between the text and the context as far as Islamic ideology and Muslim society are concerned. Islamic feminists argue that the male interpreters of Islamic texts define Islam in such a way to protect their misogynistic attitude instead of producing the actual content (Mernissi 1991; Hassan 1996; Wadud 1999; Hosseini 2003). The text is always misinterpreted resulting in gender biases of the personal law which is a major reason for the secondary status of women in the Muslim community.

The debate around Muslim personal law has thrown light on the relationship between the Muslim women and the Islamic law, which resulted in an increased awareness about their right. There has been wide debates and discussions in the functioning of Muslim Personal Law in India. Engineer (1994:298) argues that the arbitrary manner of divorce which is against the Quranic principle is the main cause of the misery of many Muslim women in India. The Quran explicitly stresses on gender justice and equality, especially in the matters of marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, and custody of children. As Hasan and Menon (2004: 1-2) observe that the Islamic personal law is always interpreted as an oppressor or saviour, and most of them attribute women's low status to ignorance, traditional beliefs, and inequalities are due to the practice of personal laws. These studies and debates on Muslim women in India are not on women *per se*, but on *Shariat* and the legal codes that are biased against women, and so too, the appeasement is of religious leaders rather than of women.

Scholars engaged in comparative study of different religious personal laws of the country argue that the Muslim Personal Law is better than any other religious laws in operational level. As Agnes (2011: 47) argues that it is worth noting that the present socio-political debates and discussions depict Muslim personal law as backward, oppressive and discriminatory towards the gender justice. But in fact, historically, Muslim laws on women's rights have been far superior to the Brahmanical Hindu laws and Christian matrimonial laws.

The MPL has been a major cause of concern since independence as the law was a byproduct of British government. It ignited a major political and constitutional debate after the Shah Bano case¹⁹. Shah Bano's demand for maintenance is seen as one of the legal milestones in the battle for protection of Muslim women rights in India. Her claim for maintenance from her ex-husband after the divorce was accepted by Supreme Court of India. After the intense political debates, the parliament passed the Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Divorce Bill – which denied Muslim women the right to maintenance under constitutional law. The bill passed by the parliament constitutionally denied the rights of women, which sparked intense debate and discussion about the women's rights. As a result of this decade long battle, the Lok Sabha recently in December 2017, passed a bill which is termed as 'triple *talaq* bill'. It is considered that the triple *talaq* is a criminal offence drawing a jail tenure of up to three years. It was the follow up of the Supreme Court judgement on 22 August 2017, in the case of Shayara Bano Vs Union of India. The court, in their historic judgement categorically said that the practice of triple *talaq* is "void, illegal and unconstitutional". The Court also pointed that it "is not integral to religious practice and violates constitutional morality"²⁰.

Recently the ongoing discussions and debates are on Muslim Personal Law and arguments for Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It is being propagated that the Muslim Personal Law Board is merely a tool of oppression for the Muslim women. It does not treat them with justice and equality, particularly in the matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance, polygamy etc. However, the Uniform Civil Code is not a solution to deliver justice to the Muslim women. It is mere political game to appease the dominant section of the people of country to gain political power on one hand. On the other hand, Muslim patriarchy see this challenge to the Personal Law as a threat to the divine law and community's rights. Thus, women fell trapped in a contestation over the larger issue of the relationship between the community rights and the state. The Personal Law of any community should be based on the principle of justice, equality

¹⁹ The Shah Bano alimony case is seen as a milestone in legal battle for the protection of rights of Muslim women. In 1978 an elderly Muslim woman Shah Bano filed a case to claim alimony in the Court of Judicial Magistrate when she was thrown out of her house after thirty years of Marriage. Her husband was not obliged to pay her any maintenance after divorce under Muslim personal law. She was granted a minor sum by the Madhya Pradesh high court, which her husband disputed in the Supreme Court as a violation of Muslim personal law. The Supreme Court ruled that Shah Bano was in fact entitled to claim alimony under the criminal procedure code as well as the *sharia* law. For more see Nida Kirmani 2013; Asgar Ali 2000.

²⁰ The Hindu; Indian Express and Times of India 23 August 2017, accessed on 5th January 2018.

and human rights, in tune with the changing nature of the society. Further, it should not be in accordance with the political turmoil of the country especially, in a secular state which India aspires to be as the constitution provides equality and equal opportunity for all irrespective of gender. As Agnes (1999: 209) argues that laws in society are not static but it moves due to the dynamic interaction between the legal order and evolutionary social process. However, “any suggestion for reform in family laws which sets out to redefine gender relations within marriage and the family, would have to take into consideration the social, political, legal and economic realities”.

Summary

The study mainly tries to analyze the socio, cultural, economic, and political problems and perspectives of the Muslim communities in India, particularly in the post-independence scenario. The study argues that the Muslims in India are not a single homogeneous community but is constituted of heterogeneous ethnic groups. They are divided into many groups based on religion, caste and class though the caste is inherently formulated according to the Hindu social order. However, the study proves that the caste system among the Muslims cannot be equated with the Hindu social structures as it is not based on pollution and purity in the Muslim community. The major issues face by the Muslims in India are not caste oriented as Hindus but something more important. Since independence, the Muslims are not considered to be the equal citizens of the country by various governments. They treat them as a mere vote bank, as proved by the various commissions and committees. They have been always the victims of various communal genocides and targeted as an untouchable religious minority. Muslims in India have been facing serious socio, economic and political discriminations both by the state and other dominant communities, and the processes of development are yet to be generated in the Muslim community.

Muslim women sufferer the most in terms of depravity and unequal treatment. Women are neglected not only as women, but also as a minority. This two-fold discriminatory treatment to Muslim women are pushed into miserable conditions, sometimes worse than the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Muslim women also face discrimination within the community itself, wherein the patriarchal structures of the society treat them as subordinate to men. In the socio-political context of the country, Muslim women are subjugated category of the society. The discussions related to Muslim women are restricted to issues like Muslim Personal Law, but unfortunately

the major issues such as education and employment are given secondary importance. There should be a proper government mechanism to ensure the development of the Muslims, particularly the Muslim women in socio, economic and political status.

Chapter-3

Reformism, Migration and Kerala Model of Development: Mappila Muslim Women's Perspective

Introduction

The socio-economic and political history of the Muslims of Malabar began centuries ago, thanks to the maritime trade relations with Arabian/Gulf countries, which led to the advent of Islam in the region. There are different accounts on the origin and spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent²¹. However, it is widely believed that the emergence of Islam in Kerala happened during the life time of Prophet Muhammed (C. 570–632 AD). According to historian Bahaudheen (2004: 35-6), Islam appeared in Kerala shortly after the rise of Islam in Mecca. The cordial trade relations that existed between Kerala, and regions like Arabia and Babylonia, since the first century AD accelerated the growth of Islam in Kerala. It was the Arab traders who first propagated Islam in Kerala, and from Kerala, Islam spread to other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Thus, due to this contact with Arabia, the culture and tradition of Kerala Muslims have much in common with the Arabs which is not the case with Muslims in other parts of the subcontinent.

There are many factors which contributed to the spread of Islam in Kerala. It is believed that the two major Hindu empires, the Zamorins of Calicut and the Chera Empire at Kodungallore²² played a significant role in the early expansion of Islam in the region. Most of the first generation people who converted to Islam were mainly from the native Hindu community, resulting in a syncretic culture with a mixture of both Hindu and Islamic characteristics.

²¹ A group of scholars argue that the emergence of Islam began in seventh century, i.e., during the life time of Prophet Muhammed, the second group opined that it was started only in ninth century, and the last group argued that the advent of Islam tracked in 12th century. For more details to understand the debate on this account, see Logan (1989); Kunju (1989); Makdum (2009); Miller (1992); Bahaudheen(2004).

²² The Zamorins of Calicut, a predominant Hindu dynasty of pre-colonial Kerala, encouraged the Arabian traders enormously for the trade revenue which was the chief financial aid to the Kingdom. This cordial relation with the Arabs and native Mappilas resulted in the expansion of Islam. C.A. Innes stated that “the Zamorin of Calicut, one of the chief patrons of the Arabian trade, is said to have directed that in every family of fishermen in his dominion, one or more of the male member should be brought up as Mohammadans” (Innes 1908: 186). Chera Empire was situated in the center of present Kerala state. Some scholars are of the opinion that his main location was Cranganore then a vast territory presently located in the Trichur district. He had a good relation with the Arab traders, and it is assumed that he visited Mecca and believed in Islam. For more details see Kunju (1989) and Miller (1992).

The social inequalities, rigid caste system and hierarchy among the Hindus was another major reason for the spread of Islam²³. Makdum (2009: 46) stated that “in the case of Hindus embracing Islam, other Hindus do not, as a rule, put any impediments nor do they harm by any means. On the other hand, they were treated with respect along with other Muslims, even if they were converted from lower caste.” The arrival of Sufis, starting with the arrival of Malik- Ibn- Dinar and his companion from Mecca (probably during the seventh or the eighth century), played a crucial role in the origin and evolution of Islam in Kerala. They propagated the egalitarian view of Islam among the people which eventually led to the mass conversion of lower Hindu castes to Islam and expansion of Muslim population in Kerala. They also built several Masjids in different parts of Kerala which later paved the way for institutionalization of Islamic religion in Kerala. At the end of the 16th century, the trading activities associated with Muslim population spread across Malabar. The major reasons can be traced to immigration, intermarriage, missionary activity, and the support of native rulers (Miller 1992).

The socio, political, economic, and cultural spheres of Kerala were remarkably changed with the arrival of colonial powers: the Portuguese in 1498, the Dutch in 1663, and the British in 1659. The British administrative policies and the hegemony of the local landlords created a feeling of bitterness among the Kerala Muslims and eventuated a series of violent outbreaks producing a state of ‘perpetual ferment’ that occurred throughout the 19th century which then culminated in the most tragic event in the history of Kerala Muslims often called Malabar Rebellion of 1921. From 1792 to 1921, there were 83 major and minor outrages against the British in Malabar in which hundreds lost their lives. Most of these outbreaks were under the piety or sacred leadership, often called *Ulama*, and they played a crucial role in shaping the religious and political identities of the Muslim community in Kerala.

The commanding power of religious leadership and the community affinity then nurtured a new form of socio-political formation among Muslims in which religion employed an essential role. According to Panikkar (1989: 60), the role of traditional

²³ The Brahmins were the dominant groups in the caste hierarchy followed by Nayars. The condition of lower caste people were miserable as they were untouchables and considered equivalent to slaves under the structure of Hindu caste system. There were many groups of people belong to this lower strata including Thiyyas, Cherumas, Pulayas and Pariahs, and the system of ‘pollution and purity’ was strictly followed between the upper and lower caste people, and there, the dominant castes sometimes killed the lower caste people if they violate any caste rule. See for details S. F. Dale (1990); Miller (1992); Logan (1989).

intellectuals is very crucial in shaping the outlook of the rural Mappilas against the British. The revolt weakened the community and pushed them to the edge of misery and illiteracy and further kept them away from the modern discourses especially the educational scenario.

Based on this brief background of Muslim history in Kerala, this chapter intends to understand the social, economic, religious and cultural dynamics of Kerala Muslims, and accounts for the effects of these dynamics on Muslim women. Initially the chapter focuses on the role of socio-religious reform movement among Muslims in general and its influence on Muslim women, and their experiences and challenges to engage with the public domain of Kerala. The second part discusses the Kerala Model of Development and its impacts on women in Kerala to analyze the processes of unique developmental activities of the state. The third part discusses the Gulf migration and its impact on Muslim women in Kerala.

Section-I

3.1 Religious Reform Movement and Muslim Community in Kerala

The British administration had a tendency to brand the Muslims of Kerala as less civilized due to their involvement in anti-colonial and anti-landlord struggles. The colonial efforts of educating and civilizing the Muslims was initiated at the end of the 19th century, and the ‘civilizing mission’ was imparted through formal education while the general principles were informed through administrative institutions. On par with the colonial efforts to educate the Muslims, various socio-religious reform movements gained momentum within the community. From these activities, a distinctively articulated ‘reform movement’ among Kerala Muslims emerged. There were different socio-religious reform movements that were active among other communities such as Ezhavas.

Due to the impact of orthodox *Ulama*, modern or secular education, particularly women’s education, was considered a taboo. English was considered as “the language of hell” and modern education as “the passport to hell”. They had conceptual issues with Malayalam as Malayalam or Aryanezhuthu was termed as the mother tongue of Hindus. This resulted in the invention of the Arabi-Malayalam²⁴ as a substitute for

²⁴ Arabi-Malayalam is Malayalam vernacular with adapted Arabic script was exclusively developed by Mappila Muslims as a result of centuries long Arab settlements. This is properly modified and innovated with a number of new letters, even from Arabic and Persian, to include all Malayalam sounds. This method was developed to learn Malayalam through the Arabic script to prevent the use of Aryanezhuthu

Malayalam script/Aryanezhuthu and this script was in use for a long time. Another reason for rejecting British education was that the Bible was compulsorily taught in the schools and the Muslim girls were forbidden to veil their heads. The activities of the missionaries, policies of the government, and domination of the western culture were against the religious sentiments of the Muslims. A parallel education system based on traditional religious concepts and beliefs emerged in response to the British education. This education system tended to remain within the parameters of religious ideology which was widely perceived as a “negative, defeated, and closed society” in the 20th century (Miller 1992; Muhammed 2007).

On the other, the proponents of parallel education system also argued for the benefit of Muslims’ education in general and women’s education in particular. During the colonial period, specifically till the 1920s, socio-political development of Mappila community was determined by many eminent personalities. Most of them were religious and spiritual leaders who were at the forefront of activities ranging from political resistance to cultural rituals. Therefore, the reformers played a remarkable role in changing the impression on Muslim community in the colonial period, especially with regard to women’s education.

The observations of Metcalf (2005: 3-6) about the nature and the importance of Muslim reform organizations in North India are clearly applicable in the context of Kerala.

“There is no single convenient rubric under which to place these movements. Depending on what has been central to them, the movements have been named as resistance, rebellion, social reform movement, peasant, working class or nationalist movement, movement of religious syncretism, accommodation or modernization.”

Metcalf further adds that

“the movements have been alike in being led by religious leaders, men of learning and piety who symbolize the aspirations of the community and who come to the fore in what are seen as times of crisis.”

in the process of learning. Both the vernacular and the script were used for the literary works and there are many songs, called *Malas* (songs which praises the miraculous powers of Saints, Muhyuddin Mala and Nafeesath Mala) developed in Arabi-Malayalam. Arabi- Malayalam was used in Madrasas and *Dars* (religious learning center) as a medium of language and as a means to write.

The characteristics of such movements can be classified as socio-religious, resisting, reactionary, religiously syncretic, and accommodative or modernizing in their historical trajectories, most of them were inspired by their religious leaders.

The early socio-religious reform activities among Muslims was strengthened mainly by the individual leaders with their personal capacities and networks. Sanaullah Makati Thangal (1847–1912) was one of the prominent figures among them. He opposed many un-Islamic practices²⁵, *Kodikuthu*, *Nerchas* (offering to the graves of Saints) and *Maulud* (celebration of the birth days of prophet and Saints), of traditional Muslims as he found out these practices are not based on Islamic rituals or beliefs and in fact most of them defy the Islamic beliefs. This way, his ideas for the regeneration of the Mappilas brought him into conflict with the orthodoxy. He fought against the traditional notions of *Ulema* which was against English and Malayalam languages, and strongly advocated for secular education system in place and women's education for the development of the community. He openly challenged the missionary's negative articulation of Islam and their proselytism into Christianity.

Chalilakath Kunhamad Haji (1856–1919) was another social reformer, who introduced the modern *Madrasa* system in Kerala. He wanted his students to be up to date in the current affairs and wanted them to acquire modern knowledge. For that, he encouraged his students to read newspapers and journals whereas the orthodox *Ulema* were against it and prohibited their students from doing the same. The rationale behind sending his daughter to school was to promote modern secular education and work for the progress of women's education. Vakkam Abdul Khadar Moulavi (1873–1932) desired to improve the life of the Muslim community, who were ignorant and superstitious and living in deplorable conditions. Keeping Travancore and Cochin as the centre for his activities, Vakkam Abdul Kadar Moulavi worked hard for the educational development of the Muslim community to wipe out the age-old superstitious and un-Islamic practices that prevailed among the Muslim community. He argued that without educating the Muslim women, progress would be unattainable to the community. He was the proprietor of a daily called *Swedeshabhimani* which was

²⁵ The Muslim community of Kerala was religiously bounded by traditional *Ulama* and they followed certain practices, such as *Nerchas* or *Nerccas* (offering to the graves of Saints), *Chandanakudam*, *Malapaatukal* (Arabic-Malayalam mixed song to memorize the saints), *Mawlud* (celebration of the birth days of prophet and Saints), *Ratib* (recitation in praise of Devine) etc. All these practices were considered as *Shirk* (Polytheism) by Sangam and the Islahi ideas.

well known for writing against the unjust ruling system of the British government. He also published various books, both original and translated works, for advocating reforms. He submitted a proposal to the British government for the promotion of Muslim education. His demands were met as the government approved religious instructions in schools and appointed Arabic teachers.

There were many other social reformers like K. M. Moulavi (1886–1964), Abdul Qadir Moulavi (1873–1932), Sheikh Hamadani Thangal (d.1922), Muhammed Abdurahman Sahib (1898–1945), and K. M. Seethi Sahib (1898–1961) who have promoted the Muslim community towards modernity and facilitated for women's education and fought against the superstitious beliefs²⁶. The restless efforts of these leaders further facilitated by *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham* in 1922, the first organized reform movement amongst the Muslim community in Kerala.

Concurrently some community and cultural organizations in the Malabar region also focused on the educational and social development of the community. Prominent among them were *Himayat ul-Islam Sabha* in Calicut (1891), *Ma-unatt ul-Islam Sabha* in Ponnani (1900), *Lajantt ul-Muhammadiya Sangam* in Travancore and Alleppy (1915), and *Jamaat- Davat-i-Tabligh-i-Islam* (JDT) in Calicut (1921). JDT emerged as an organization to look after the orphans of the rebellion 1921. Later, they adopted orphans affected by the flood in 1924, cholera in 1943, and smallpox in 1958 which devastated Southern Malabar. Currently, it is one of the most premier educational institutions in Kerala (Ibrahim Kunj 1989: 225-66).

Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam was formed at Kodungallore in 1922, in the southern part of Kerala, with the effort made by many educated leaders among the Muslim community such as Manappattu Kunju Muhammed Haji, K.M. Seethi Sahib, K.M. Moulavi, E.K. Moulavi and E. Moidu Moulavi etc. The important philosophies of *Aikya Sangam* was inspired by the religious philosophies of the global Islamic reformist leaders, who backed up the ideas of puritanism and modernization of Islam with the Western outlook²⁷. *Aikya Sangham* was the first organized initiative of Muslim intelligentsia to discuss the socio, religious and educational aspects of the Muslim

²⁶ For more readings about the individual reformers see Abdul kareem (1988); Gangadharan (2007); Ibrahim Kunj (1989); Muhammed (2007); Miller (1992); Samad (1998).

²⁷ The reformist idea of 'pure Islam' is adopted from the thoughts of global Islamic leaders such as Ibn Taimiyah (1262- 1327); Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1563- 1624); 1624), Shah Waliyullah (1702- 1763); Muhammed Ibn Abdul Wahab (1703-1792); Jamaluddin Afgani (1839-1897); Rashid Rida (1865- 1935) etc.

community in Kerala. The objectives of the organization were to unite the Muslims under the banner of ‘true Islam’ to fight against superstitions, un-Islamic beliefs and practices by the traditional Muslims, and to call them back to the path of Quran and Sunnah (traditions and the way of the prophet).

One of the main aims of *Aikya Sangam* was to promote religious and secular education for both men and women to empower the community with a progressive outlook. Despite facing vicious criticism from the orthodoxy, they conducted many programmes and conferences as they stood for the un-compromising benefit of the Muslim community (Samad 1998; Kunj 1989). Following are the main aims and objectives of the *Aikya Sangam*:

- to unite the whole Muslims by removing their internal differences, for the general welfare of the community;
- to educate people through tracts, pamphlets and public lectures;
- to establish a forum consisting of selected members from the *Sangam*, to settle the disputes among the Muslims and take all-round efforts to dissuade Muslims from such disputes and
- to reform the religious, moral and economic conditions of Muslims by removing anti-Islamic practice (Samad 1998: 81).

These reformers were basically against the ritualistic, spiritual and customary Islam of that period practiced by the *Sunnis*, the traditional Muslims, and termed all these practices as *shirk* (polytheism). On the other hand, *Sunni*’s reaction to this forced modernity by the reformists was calling the actions of reformists as *Wahabism*²⁸. *Aikya Sangam* later became the driving force behind the formation of a scholars’ organization namely *Kerala Jamiyytul Ulama* (KJU) which also worked as an independent organization for the benefit of Muslims in religious affairs.

The *Kerala Jamiyytul Ulama* made significant efforts to attract Muslim towards secular education, through pressurizing the government to make arrangement in government schools and board schools to impart religious education, to appoint separate religious teachers in Mappila Schools, to sanction fee concession to Muslim students, and also for the appointment of the Muslim members in the Board of Education (Abdul Samad 1998: 110).

²⁸ The term to address the followers of Muhammed bin Abdul Wahab (1702-1793), who introduced the ‘puritanian’ concept of Islam in the mid-18th Century, is Najd, Arabia. He started the movement called *Muwahiddun* (Unitarians) with the idea of pure or textual Islam, but the movement was later renamed as *Wahabi* movement by its opponents. *Wahabi* Movement was well received across the world in short span of time (Samad: 1998:33-5).

After twelve years of socio-religious services, both the *Aikya Sangam* and *Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama* (KJU) abandoned its activities in Kerala in 1934 due to the strong oppositions from the *Samastha* (*Samastha* is an association of eminent Sunni scholars). Political differences emerged among the leaders after the formation of All India Muslim League (AIML) in the Malabar region²⁹. These political differences resulted in the abandonment of *Aikya Sangam* and KJU. However, the guidance and support of the *Muslim Aikya Sangam* inspired the emergence of many other socio-religious and political organizations under the banner of *Samastha*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat- e- Islami*. In addition to this, *Aikya Sangam* became an inspiration for the formation of many educational institutions like Farook College (1948), Muslim Educational Society (MES- 1964), and Muslim Service Society (MSS- 1980) etc. (Miller 1992; Samad 1996; Osella and Osella 2008).

Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (SKJU), the supreme religious authority of Kerala Muslims, represents nearly sixty percent of the Muslim population of the state. The organization was established in 1925 in Calicut under the leadership of Varakkal Mullakoya Thangal and Pangil Ahmed Kutty Musliar (Kurup and Ismail 2008:273). The organization is popularly known as *Samastha* and the people associated with it are called *Sunnis*³⁰. *Samastha* adopts both a resistant and a reactionary mode of operation against the *Wahabi* ideologies of puritanical Islam. The primary intention of the *Samastha* was to lead the people through the path of *Ahlu Sunnah-Wal Jamma'ah* (Prophet Muhammed), which gives equal importance to both the text as well as the traditions (Kerala Muslim Directory 626-28 1960; Kurupp and Ismail 2008).

The religious debates concentrated on the grounds of intracommunity level. Specifically, the debates were on the question of 'tradition' vs 'modernity' between *Sunnis* on one hand and *Mujahid* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* on the other. The idea of modern Islam proposed by the reformists was a much-contested and debated topic to the *Sunnis*. After being static for many years due to the 'modernity trap' advocated by the reformists, *Sunnis* came back with the full strength of cultural Islam, which were rooted

²⁹ The *AikyaSangham* stopped its activities in 1934 due to the differences among the leaders mainly on the political issues. One of the prominent leader Muhammed Abdu Rahman Sahab argued *AikyaSangham* should adopt the political line of Congress, but on the other K. M. Seethi and some others extended their support to Muslim League (Samad 1998).

³⁰ The word *Sunni* is derived from the term *AhluSunnah-walJamma'ah*, which means those who adhere to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammed and his righteous followers. *Sunnis* argue that they are the real patrons of Islam. In the broader perspective both *Mujahid* and *Jamat- e- Islami* comes under the banner of *Sunnis* in India. But in Kerala, *Sunnis* considers others as *Wahabists*. Both by *Jamat-e-Islami* and *Mujahid*, *Sunnis* are considered as traditionalists and as a real threat to reformism in the community.

in the notions of traditional rituals and beliefs, they believed in. The *Sunnis* in Kerala are in close association with the local culture and traditions which were interlaced with their routines and practices, as Imtiaz Ahmad (2004) calls 'syncretic culture'³¹ of Islam in the context of Muslims in India.

The Idea of Islam in Kerala is immediately associated with the idea of conversion. The early generations of Muslims in Kerala are Hindu converted, mostly from the 'lower' castes such as Tiyyas, Cherumas, Pulayas, and Mukkuvas (belongs to SC and BC category). All these castes are traditionally rooted and are idiosyncratic in nature. Therefore, the cultural syncretism can be found in the religious practices of *Sunnis* in various aspects of their life. Osella and Osella (2008) point clearly that the diversity of Islam in Kerala must be understood in the global and local context.

Kerala reformism must understand as being simultaneously part of a global Islamic impulse towards purification and also as a deeply locally rooted and specific phenomenon, which produces itself on the ground through practice and through dialogue with significant others, Muslim and non-alike. Indeed, public debate in Kerala between 'reformist' and traditionalist' Muslims produce shifts in practice and works continually generate and redefine the focus of 'reform' and anti-reform.

The *Sunnis* argue that the *Wahabist* ideologies are widely divergent from *Tawhid* (oneness of god) and hence accuse that they *Wahabis* are against the actual principles of Islam. On the other, the major criticism against *Sunnis* by the reformist organization was directed towards the regressive approach of *Sunnis* when it comes to women's education and their entry into mosques. The 'traditionalist' groups of *Sunnis* were unwilling to address the issues related to women, such as women's education and their entry into public space etc. The traditional *Sunnis* fail to have an organization led by women, while they succeeded in forming students' wing to scholars' wing for the men of the community. In their fourth-anniversary conference of *Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulema*, the scholars' wing of traditional *Sunnis* passed a resolution in the matters of women's education. According to this resolution, *Samastha* arbitrated

³¹ In the work, *Lived Islam in South Asia*, Imtiaz Ahmad (2004) defines the idea of Syncretism Culture, which means the dynamics of cultural and political mobilization of collective identities broadly typified under the categories of religion, language, caste, class, race and region etc. He explains the mutual social economic and cultural adjustment between the social groups of Hindus and Muslims. These two groups must be comprehended through the notions of competitive sharing, dynamic acculturation and antagonistic tolerance. These three forms are the basis of dynamic exchange, viz. accommodation, cultural innovation and sometimes violence. He points out that different cultures cannot be watertight compartments; they are the product of dynamic processes and working with mutual adjustments. However, this environment is not always supportive as well as have opposing nature too.

women's education to write as *Makruh*, something which is de-favored or disliked under Islamic law. The same reappeared in the pages of Al-Bayaan Monthly, the mouthpiece of *Samastha*. They furthered the argument to the point that it may come under *haram* (the forbidden-laws of Islam).

While they are compelled to compromise on many of these guidelines to adapt to the transformations of the society, *Samastha*, officially, did not come forward to change their attitude towards women's education and public entry. Nevertheless, gradually the Sunni's attitude towards women's education has totally changed. The changes are echoed in number of educated Sunni women, as they have increased significantly to match the groups of the community. Currently, *Samastha* has two fractions, known as AP *Samastha* and EK *Samastha*. The formation of the two fractions was followed by a split within its rank and file in 1989. Nonetheless, the split was not because of any theological issues, as in the case of Mujahid and *Sunnis*, but was based on economic and political reasons.

Kerala Nadvatul Mujahidin (KNM), which was established on 20th April 1950, is directly related to *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam*. The *Mujahid* movement was an expression of struggle across the Islamic world to oppose the attempts of European reform and renaissance movements from late 17th century to stop Islamic expansion. The organization is popularly known as *Mujahid/ Salafi/Islahi*, and it is the second major Muslim group after *Sunnis*. The history of *Mujahid* movement in Kerala will not be complete without acknowledging 'K.M. Moulavi'³². As *Aikya Sangam* proposes, the main objective of the organization was to return to *Quran* and *Sunnah* (the Prophet's precepts) and fight against *Shirk*. The policies and programmes of *Mujahid* does not differ much from the *Aikya Sangam* when we take an account of both religious and social reform.

Jamaat- e- Islami in India was also formed during the same time, 1941, by Sayd Abu-ala-Maududi³³ and started operation in Kerala in 1948 under the leadership of P.V. Muhammed Ali with different religious and political outlook. *Jamaat-e-Islam's*

³² Tayyil Muhammed KuttyMoulavi also Known as K.M. Moulavi (1886-1964) was born in Malabar region. After the Malabar Rebellion, he escaped to Cochi. He later joined the activities of *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam* and *Kerala JamiyyatulUlama* (Abdul Jabbar, *ISM Vicharam* SVR, 2001: 22- 40).

³³ Abu- Ala Maududi (1903- 1979) was an Islamic reformer and writer in a Seyd Family. He learned many languages like Arabic, English, and Persian and engaged in streams like religion, philosophy, social sciences and politics. He worked as editor of many Islamic publications like *Al-Madina*, *Al- Jam-e-Yat* and *Taj*. He also wrote more than hundreds of books and died in 1979. In Kerala, V. P. Muhammed Ali was the founding figure of *Jamaat- e- Islami* (Samad 1998).

constitution reinforced its main objective as *Hukumat- e- Ilahi* (rule of God) and later changed to *Ikmathudheen* (establishment of Islam as revealed by God) in context of India. They also focused on the idea of ‘true’ Islam and tried adhere more to the Mujahid line of understanding Islamic theology (Samad 1998; Miller 1992).

The ‘reformist’ groups such as *Mujahids* and *Jamaath-e-Islami* have taken a more sophisticated and an open-minded attitude towards the issues concerned with the Muslim women. They not only encouraged women’s education but also supported the entry of women into public space. Both these groups have their own women’s wings such as Mujahid Girls Movement (MGM) among *Mujahid* groups and Girls Islamic Organization (GIO) Among *Jamaat-e-Islami* organizations (kindly refer to the fourth Chapter for a detailed discussion) with a firm intent to impart secular education without compromising true Islamic knowledge and culture (Samad 1998: 114-5). Though *Mujahid* considers *Jamaat-e-Islami* as a reformist organization, interestingly, both *Mujahid* and *Sunnis* are against the political ideas proposed by *Jamaat- e- Islami* in their initial stage. However, both the “*Sunnis* and *Mujahid* in Kerala believe that the religion and state are separate entities and religious state is not required for the social reform” (Kurupp and Ismail 280: 2008).

There is also the presence of *Tablig- e- Jamaat* and *Shia* Muslim in Kerala but not much as in the case of other splinter groups. However, all these groups come under the broader category of *Sunnis* in the context of Kerala, because all of them follow the *Shafi* School of Islamic jurisprudence³⁴. Interestingly, each group, *Sunnis*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat-e-Islami*, argue that they follow the original path of Islam and accuse others of misinterpretation of Islam. As Metcalf (2005:265) observed in the case of North India, where Muslim groups are classified under three groups such as *Deobandis*, *Barelwis* and *Ahle-Hadis*, it resembles the divisions of Kerala Muslims.

“The differences each of the three traditional groups saw in others were defined primarily in a legal idiom. *Each accused the others of faulty jurisprudential principles and of mistakes in the domain deemed subject to legal scrutiny*”.

Mujahid group is as close to *Deobandis* and *Ahl-i- Hadith* as *Jamaat-e-Islami* to a certain extent. *Barelwis* is similar to the *Sunni* sect, who follows the *Sufi* or believes in the mystical possibility of Islam³⁵.

³⁴ For comprehensive reading see Francis Robinson (2008).

³⁵ To understand more about the theological differences of these groups, *Barelwis*, *Deobandis* and *Ahl-i- Hadith*, see Barbara D Metcalfe (2014) ‘Islamic Revivalism in British India: *Deoband*, 1860-1900’

One of the major challenges to overcome while discussing the Kerala Muslim reformism is that the scholars have created a binary in which they have placed *Mujahids* as modern and *Sunnis* as traditional. Though Osella and Osella (2008) agree to the fact that Islamic reformism in Kerala is not only foreign-inspired or Wahabi-inspired but also deeply local in nature. However, they further argue that “there is a concomitant contemporary association of orthopraxy traditionalism with ‘backward’, superstitious, and un-modern practices, trooped as being located in rural and low-status locations.”

Miller (1992) also conforms to the same notion about the binary of ‘modern *Mujahid*’ and ‘traditional *Sunnis*’ and further says that the reformism among Kerala Muslims was contributed by the *Mujahid* movements and *Sunnis* by and large and are still in the hangover of traditional form of Islam. Interestingly, many scholars failed to address how the *Sunni* community became anti-western/ modern. Primarily, it was due to the continuous religious and political encounter with the British raj from their advent to the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 to protect their homeland. Instead of reading the *Sunni* community into their specific context of that time both of them framed *Sunnis* through the western lenses of modernity.

The emergence of the reform activities laid the foundation for a strong criticism of various existing socio-cultural activities and practices of Kerala Muslims. The organizational vitality and broad range of their activities are the most striking features of the Kerala Muslim society (Mujeeb 2015). Indeed, the reformism paved the way for the development of many religious and secular educational institutions among the Muslims of Kerala.

The establishment of *Rauzthul Uloom* Association (RUA) at Farook in Calicut brought about tremendous transformations in the Muslim educational scenario of Kerala Muslims, and later they opened the first Muslim College, Farook College, at Calicut in 1948. At present, it is one of the premier educational institutions in the state of Kerala. Pokker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College (PSMO College) was another attempt to advance the educational facilities for Mappila community. Initially it was an orphanage in 1943 to help the orphans and widows. Gradually, the orphanage developed into an arts and science college in 1968 under a Muslim management owing

and Yoginder Sikand (2005) ‘Bastions of The Believers: Madrasas and Islamic Education in India’, and Arshad Alam (2011) ‘Inside a Madrasa: Knowledge, Power and Islamic Identity in India’.

to the relentless struggle of the reformist Muslim League leaders (see fourth chapter for details).

The Muslim Educational Society (MES) was another major product of the Muslim reformism, established in 1964 by Dr. P. K. Abdul Gafoor, for the educational developments of the Muslim community³⁶. Abdul Gafoor vehemently attacked the Mappila community's opposition to modern education and in his view, the eradication of blind and superstitious beliefs existed among the Muslims in Kerala is only possible through good and integrated education. He also strongly supported the women's education. He pointed out that, Mappila women were living in "ignorance, darkness and diseases" and, he asserted that it is not Islam but something else that separated male and female education (Miller 1990: 218-9). Miller (1992: 282) draws attention to the development of the MES that brought new insights into the Mappila community and threw open the door for discussion of Mappila self-understanding in the context of community progress and thus released many in the silent minorities from discrimination to an extent.

Other than focusing on women's education, the reformists like Makthi Thangal (1847-1912) and Vakkam Moulavi (1873-1932) not only involve much in the women empowerment but also supported the male domination in the society. In Makthi Thangal's words, women are created for the sake of men, and thus, women should be governed by men and men should act as their saviour. By bringing many examples from *Quran* and Islamic history, he further argued that, women are never equal to men at mental, physical, and intellectual capabilities. He also spoke in favour of polygamy (Kareem 1988: 641-666).

The reformers severely condemned the traditional customs and rituals which prevailed among Muslim women such as *marumakkathayam* (matrilineal family), which endorse superior power to women in the family. The matrilineal system was a peculiarity of Kerala society compared to the patrilineal system in the other parts of the country. The attitudes and approaches were more or less similar with the other

³⁶ MES work hard for the development of education among Muslims of Kerala. In 1967 MES founded their first college in Mannarghat and later years they established number of educational institutions throughout the state such as Ponnani, Mampad, Crangannore etc as well as outside the state. Thousands of students study in MES Institutions in different disciplines of medical, engineering, arts and science fields. Within that MES Medical College, Malappuram, MES College of Engineering at Kuttippuram and MES arts and Science collage at Mampad are considered as some of the premier educational institutions in Kerala. Most of these institutions are located in the Malabar area.

reformists' leaders as well. To them educational development of women meant the enhancement of their moral and religious character, which should sanitize her soul, refine her conduct, maintain and manage the domestic affairs and its resources suitably, and get training for nurturing children in an appropriate manner. As discussed, the so-called reformist movements among Kerala Muslims did not "liberate" the women from the traditional bonds, rather they have effectively side lined the concerns of women. The reform movement among Kerala Muslim community was an apolitical agent of Muslim women.

3.1.1 Reformism and Womanhood: Tracing the Experiences and Challenges of Muslim Women

In order to understand the conditions of women empowerment in the state of Kerala, particularly in relation to the Muslim women, one must understand the socio-cultural conditions or backgrounds in which they habituated their life spectrum. Even though Kerala Muslims in general and Muslim women excel in socio-educational field, compared to their counterparts in India (as per Sachar report 2007), the subordinate role of Muslim women in the public arena is visible in the contemporary Kerala society. It is a fact that, like Muslims in the rest of the world, Kerala Muslims also experienced popular religious resurgence during the past few decades and the visible manifestation of this resurgence is mostly reflected on women, both in 'private' and 'public' life (Ramsheena 2011). It is important to understand the harsh reality of the inner lives of the Kerala Muslim women who are vulnerable being 'women' and being the 'minority' population of the country. Hence it shows how Muslim women in Kerala construct their self-image in relation to their womanhood and emphasizes on how the male-dominated religious reform and revivalism significantly and continuously shape and reshape Malayalee Muslim women's notion of self.

Historically, the Mappila community in Kerala was characterized by the colonial administrators, and by both nationalist and Marxist scholars, as 'closed', 'negative', 'fanatic', 'turbulent' and 'uncivilized' (Ansari 2005). They also portrayed Mappilas in very punitive language such as "blood-thirsty bigoted ruffians", "criminals, selfish, ignorant and vicious priesthood" (Panikkar 1988; Ansari 2005).

Viewed against this backdrop, the term 'reform' and 'revival' would signal attempts from within the community to embrace a progressive, civilized and even 'secular' face. As we discussed in the previous section, trajectories of reform and

revivalism among Kerala Muslims commence with the modern period, with the work in particular of Sanaullah Makati Tangal who is often recounted as the pioneering spirit behind the efforts at religious changes in the context of Kerala Muslim and followed many Muslim reformers. The effort is taken by all these male reformers mainly in the field of educational development of the community, including women's education, focused on their empowerment as well.

However, in the present context, Kerala Muslim women are explicitly marginalized or subjugated in the mainstream socio-political sphere. Muslim women access to the socio-political and cultural sphere, including access to the field of literature, is either denied or minimal. Shamshad Hussain (2009) clearly observes, the male-centered Muslim reformism symbolized women as a “*subject*” rather than as an “*agent*.” The educated male reformers emerged as the saviour of both the community and the women. Eventually, they started to assert their authority (or agency) over the reformation of the community and particularly, over the womenfolk of the community. The major vision behind the ‘reform’ of womanhood at the individual and organizational level were to retreat the womanhood for the sake of community by linking girls’ education with the stability of community (Hussain 2009: 22). In this ideology, the Muslim women were considered as mere subjects who lack agency in the process of defining themselves. This visible manifestation of ‘subjugation’ of womanhood is vastly reflected in all walks of women life, from their perception on social and family life to their routines such as dress codes etc. (Ramsheena 2011).

According to Devika (2006), the Malayalee Renaissance of the early 19th century was undoubtedly male-dominated in which various community leaderships sought to control the bodies of women in those communities. Devika tries to explore the delineation of gendered space in her work and adds that the Malayalee public sphere promoted and focused on how the modern domestic realm and the public domain are constituted as distinct, if interrelated spaces, and how this was made to appear as though following ‘natural’ divisions defined the genders. According to her, the re-imagining of ‘women’s space’ means extending it, without necessarily compromising the ‘womanliness’ (ibid).

It was also similar in the case of Muslim renaissance movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like any other Malayalee renaissance movement, the ‘reform movement’ among Muslims was also overwhelmingly hegemonized by Male reformers. The ‘issue of women’ developed as a matter of

concern among them and as a part of the project of “reforming” the community. As Devika notes (2006:45), in various discursive realms, questions of the interrelations of caste, class, gender came to acquire ever-greater primacy. But women participants tended to be drawn towards questions of defining the womanly domain. There, the appearance of women seems to be in the public sphere which was already a structured space that promoted ‘gendering’ in its very structuring, and the circulation of new ideals of gendered subjectivity within it. These ideals are explicitly manifested alike in the writings and speeches of both early and later generations of Muslim women reformers in Kerala such as Haleema Beevi and Ayesha Mayan.

Haleema Beevi (1920-2000) was one of the most inspiring images among the early Malayalee women writers³⁷. Her contributions were in the fields of social, political, cultural, and literature. Haleema Beevi and her sisters were fortunate enough to complete their primary school education up to the fifth standard, despite severe restrictions and resistance from the community to allow Muslim women in public domain and for education. Her family had supported her in this endeavour while others had a tendency to intervene and resist such progressive steps to the extent that physical assault was involved. She got married at the age of sixteen and with the support of her husband she became actively engaged in the women reform activities. She started a number of journals such as *Muslim Vanitha* (Muslim Women) in 1938, *Bharatachandrika* in 1940, and *Adhunika Vanitha* (Modern Women) in 1972. She was the first Muslim woman to become a municipal councillor in Kerala. She was also an active member of *Muslim Majlis*, a patriarchal political movement during those days. She held the presidentship of the *Tiruvalla Muslim Women’s Association*. Haleema Beevi was jailed for participating in the liberation struggle against the first communist government organized by Indian National Congress during 1958-59 (Hussain 2009; Devika 2005).

Haleema Beevi was a polemic orator and was a strong critique of the standpoint of traditional religious *Ulemas*, who insisted that women should be restricted to the private/domestic domain of social life. In 1938, eighteen-year-old Haleema Beevi addressed a public gathering of Muslim women held at Trivandrum and scrutinized the

³⁷ Haleema Beevi was born in Adoor in Trivandrum District of Kerala. Her father was Peer Muhammad and mother Mytheen Beevi. For more detailed account of her, see *Kerala Muslim Directory* 1960 and Devika 2005.

views of *Ulema* and argued that their conventional attitude was the root cause of regression of Muslim women in Kerala. She identified the obstinate attitude of the religious leaders and their misinterpretations of religious text which are the main reason behind the regression of Muslim women.

To garner the support of women as well as religious leaders, she strengthened her arguments with the support of Quran and Hadith. She could point out the Muslim women leaders in the history such as Kadheeja and Ayisha (Prophet Muhammed's wives) and the role they took part at the time of Prophet Muhammed. She explained how Ayisha led a battle called '*Jamal*' against non-believers. She remarks that Islam never meant to intervene in women's rights adversely rather Islam has granted right to education for everyone, which includes women too. On the basis of *Hadith* and *Quran*, she questioned the group of people who restrained the broad ideals of knowledge (*ilm*) within the strict boundary of theological ideology. She explored the ontology of the term *ilm* and established the fact that Islam never advised or promoted the categorization of human life as "materialistic" and "religious". Instead, in her words, what Islam meant through *ilm* was that the whole life of a true Muslim is entirely religious, and thus, all kind of his knowledge also entirely religious (Hussain 2009: 41). In one of her inflammable speeches, she warned that the community will never progress if its women are shallow and treated as insignificant, and bear the ill fame of being weak³⁸. She emphasised on the point that women are the very source and essence of all the advancements in the world.

Haleema Beevi, stressed on the need to establish women's associations in every taluk, every *kara* (a local geographical sub-division) to empower the Muslim women not only in the field of education but to familiarize the girls with hygiene, nurturing children, domestic management and literary pursuits for the spiritual pleasure, self-refinement. She took efforts to make the government aware of the deplorable conditions of the women (Devika 2005: 172). In another article, she further strengthened her argument that "community will not attain development, until and unless the reformation of women"³⁹. She was a strong willed woman who had a never-ending quest for knowledge in all the unfavourable situations she went through in her life. Instead, what

³⁸ Welcome speech at women's conference of the Travancore Muslim Women's Association, Tiruvalla, 15 Edavam (May-June 1938). Reproduced in Devika (2005: 168-173)

³⁹ For more see Shamshad Hussain (2009). Cited in M Haleema Beevi's article (1961) 'Streekale Samudharikkathe Samudayam Purokamikkukayilla' (Community will not Attain Development until and unless the Reformation of Women), *Ansari Monthly* (p-22).

we can understand from her life is that all the harsh situations were the driving force of the Muslim women for their endeavours.

Ayesha Mayan (1914-) was one of the major figures among the Muslim women reformers⁴⁰. From the Malabar region, she was one of the earliest Muslim women to earn a university degree. She had worked in Malabar as an instructor of the women teachers' training school and as a Mappila education officer in Malabar and South Canara. She stood for women's education and headed the *Kottayam Mahila Samajam* in Southern Malabar (Devika 2005: 165). Like Haleema Beevi, Ayesha Mayan also used journals and public platforms to spread her reformation activities. She used such public platform to address the gathering and to share the messages for women's progress and enlightenment with them. She made sure to speak about how it is important to prioritize education, among others fields, to enlighten the womenfolk. In her article *Nammude Karttavyam* (Our Duty) in the Journal of *Muslim Vanitha*,⁴¹ Ayesha Mayan warned the community on the adverse impact of the depressed condition of womankind upon all humanity and suggested to follow a constructive programme to overcome it. According to her:

Womenfolk must necessarily acquire extensive Knowledge. Our duty in the matter of education does not cease with arranging for the schooling of young girls. Sisters who wish to serve society, who desire the well- being of the nation must work to educate the older women. As long as a mother who brings forth the citizens of the future remain steeped in ignorance and superstition, other reformist efforts are bound to prove unproductive (Devika 2005: 166).

Emphasizing on the rights of women as per Quran and Islamic tradition, she demonstrated that women are not the instruments of male whim, but rather, she argued that, women are capable of undertaking all the activities performed by men. She insisted that:

Womenfolk must realize that just as the husband is obliged to support the wife, the wife is also bound to support the husband, partake all in his activities. We know that women are capable of understanding all the activities performed by men. If, until now, we are used to employing our hands to caress men's feet, we must now apply them to cool his brain and wipe his sweat. In the future we are not slaves, circumscribed or frail. We must prove ourselves co-workers ready

⁴⁰ Ayesha Mayan born at Talashery in the northern parts of Malabar. She studied in Queen Mary's College, Madras and St. Joseph's College in Bangalore. She was a well-known public speaker and an accomplished tennis player. (For a brief introduction to Ayesha Mayan, see Devika 2005: 165-167).

⁴¹ For a brief note see Devika (2005). Cited in Ayesha Mayan's article (1938, July-August), 'Nammude Karttavyam', *Muslim Vanitha*, 1:5 (133-34).

to help man in any field... I have a request to make to my sisters. You must organize and work to uplift the womenfolk of your land (ibid).

Nilambur Ayisha (1938-) is a talented artist from Nilamur in Malappuram district. In 1953, at the age of fifteen, she began her career as a drama artist and received wide criticism from the community. Her public appearance received wide criticism from both inside and outside the community. "It was even worse if you were a girl belonging to the Muslim community and yes, there were all kinds of pressure to take me off the stage, but I was determined to act," she adds that "for two years, my entire family and I were ostracized at Nilambur, but I did not budge"⁴². The public sphere, especially in Malappuram, was a gendered space where it is one of a kind for a woman, for Ayisha, to enter that space without the agency of a man. Her share of stage time was equally lengthy as of a male actor. The theatre she was part of used dramas as a tool to fight social evils such as casteism, landlordism, women's degraded position and promoted the importance of education, especially women's education. Later her courageous attempt as a public figure further strengthened many artists and social activist to enter the public space. Even today the Muslim community does not encourage many women to be a part of the public realm.

Justice Fatima Beevi (1927-) is another important public figure in Kerala⁴³. She was the first woman Judge in the Supreme Court of India. She assumed her position in 1989 and resigned from the post in 1992. Vina Mazumdar (1993:2) rightly remarks that Justice Fatima Beevi condemned women's illiteracy, ignorance and lack of awareness. Justice Fatima Beevi has not simply excelled in her official responsibilities, but at the same she used the space for the development of the women, particularly, Muslim women. In her writings and speeches, she recurrently refers to the importance of women's education and women's role in other social and family affairs by referring to Quran and Hadith. In one of her speeches, she draws attention to some of the important issues concerning women

Women continue to be the most exploited segment of the society. Women need to make the more sustained effort to secure themselves their rights to equality,

⁴² The Hindu Aug, 15, 2008, accessed on 30th December 2016.

⁴³ Justice Fathima Beevi born in Pattanamthitta district in 30th April, 1927. She successfully completed the Bachelor of Law in Trivandrum Law College. She began her career as an advocate in 1950 and travelled through many posts such as Munsiff in the Kerala Sub-Ordinate Judicial Services in 1958, promoted as the Sub-ordinate Judge in 1968, promoted as the Chief Judicial Magistrate, later promoted as District & Sessions Judge in 1974, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal in 1983 and became the permanent Judge of High Court 1984 (official website Supreme Court of India).

education and employment opportunities. Women continue to be victims of exploitation, discrimination, subjugation and abuse in home as well as outside. Many of the women are still facing the problems like dowry, marital maladjustment family discord and various other kinds of molestations. Many of the problems that women faces today arise out of her ignorance of law as well from lack of will to assert her right. One of the main problems of such atrocities that the most of the women educated or uneducated mainly depends their husband for day to day needs and more they are more emotionally linked with children. How the Muslim women can have better prospects? For growing such, she has strived hard for economic independent and more she has to get educated and trained to stand on her on legs if need be (Fatima Beevi 1993: 7-10).

Apart from these personalities, there are many writers and reformers such as Thankamma Malik, Rajamma Yousaf, Nesiya, B.S. Saida, P.K Zubiada, Ansar Beegum, Fathimakkutty Madaniyya etc who spoke in favour of Muslim women's education and their empowerment.⁴⁴ Major part of the writings of these reformers appeared in the journals such as *Ansari*, *Al-Manar*, *Muslim Review*, *New Ansari* during the 1950s and 1960s. Hussain (2009: 40-41) observed that, though all of these writes do not share the same ideological view point nor do they reacted in the same way against the existing social system, all of them were united in a sense of the common notion of 'Muslim women' and raised their voices for the women's rights and needs. The anxiety and hope amongst the early women writers were reflected in the following generations of women activists and writers. Almost similar perspective can be observed in the arguments of these writers too emphasised on the acquisition of both modern and religious education; to enlighten women of various social sins such as dowry.

However, it can be observed that the later generation of women writers and activists were bounded and hampered by ideologies and notions of patriarchal male reformers compared to their earlier generation of women reformers. An evident reification of a 'false-consciousness' of patriarchy among womanhood is underpinned in their opinions and writings (Ramsheena 2011).

There are many women organizations which actively engage with the community on various women related issues such as Muslim Personal Law, etc. *Nissa* is one among such organizations lead by V. P. Zuhara⁴⁵ who is one of the premier

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive view on these early writers see Hussain (2009), particularly chapter-3

⁴⁵ Zuhara is a social activist. She heads *Nisa* organization that gives voice to Muslim women silenced by age-old practices like polygamy and indiscriminate talaq. A full-fledged activist, Zuhara has come a long way – her indomitable spirit and courage bear witness to a life of struggle, threat and challenges.

activists in this group. There is a strong resistance towards this organization and its activists from the orthodox and fundamental segments of the community in Kerala. She brought to light how the Muslim Personal Law in the country denies the Muslim women the very basic right including the right to justice, freedom and equality enshrined in the constitution.

Nissa conducted a campaign demanding codification of the Muslim Personal Law to solve the problems such as marriage, divorce, property rights, adoption, custody, and guardianship which are unresolved problems of the Muslim women in the legal sphere. The campaign may not have yielded the desired results, she admits, but it has at least created awareness among the community members that certain issues such as polygamy and triple *talaq* (divorce) need to be addressed and questioned.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, among other malpractices, the activities of *Nissa* includes conducting public campaigns and protests against the archaic practices, such as *talaq* and polygamy, existed in the community. V. P. Zuhara became a distinguished figure after the founding of *Nissa*. She became the spokesperson for the helpless victims of polygamy, divorce and unequal rights in the Muslim community. She protested with public support against the gruesome practice known as *Arabi kalyanam* (a system of wedlock involving a local Muslim girl and an Arab national that usually ends in a few weeks or months). *Nissa* filed a case which is pending in the High Court seeking equal rights for Muslim women (Hasan and Menon 2005:142).

Hussain (2009:58) noted, all these women writers, to an extent, could not disagree completely with the male-centered reformists' perception on women. She argues that the main reason for this is that their major intention was not to attain the individual liberation, but rather, as middle-class women they are trying to attain a refined status in both domestic and community strata simultaneously. They seek to establish new 'self' or 'identity', where the dichotomy between 'domestic sphere' and 'social sphere' became more or less blurred. Devika (2006:46) argued that the social space of Kerala, during the early twentieth-century community reform movements, enjoyed the influence in the formations of modern gender identities. In fact, here, it was precisely at this time that the state was called upon to legislate in order to transform the 'inner-most' social spaces, those of marriage and family, by community movements whose major agenda was the transformation of internally-heterogeneous, loosely-structured pre-modern caste groups into internally homogeneous, strongly bound and mutually exclusive modern communities.

The transformation of the ‘inner-domain’ is identified to be the core subject of this project, and the terms for such change, the goals that were set for it, and the means advocated, were all strongly informed by the ideology of gender. However, Devika (2006) argues, this did not mean the undoing of patriarchy, but it’s re-doing, in ways that were complex and perhaps more difficult to resist. This “re-doing” of patriarchy among Kerala Muslim reformism is particularly reflected in all walks of women’s life, and they detained their control over entire social space of women.

The reformism in Kerala society in general and Muslim community in particular was limited within the world of men. Other than the formal education attained, the reformists did not take any possible determination for the overall development of the community and prevented women’s entry into public realm. Especially they denied women the roles of a decision maker or a policy maker. To start with the traditionalists, they did not support the formal education in its initial stage and considered women’s education as something that is against the ethos of Islamic tradition. They had a tendency to treat women as a mere family property. When it comes to the traditional *Ulema*, it sometimes used religion as a tool to substantiate their arguments to suppress women’s visibility. According to the reformers, women’s education was crucial for the development of the family and not for the empowerment of the women.

Section-II

3.2 The Kerala Model of Development

The ‘Kerala Model of Development’ (KMD) is considered as a unique developmental model initiated in the state of Kerala during the 1970s. It has been widely acknowledged by scholars, at both national and international level, because of its successful performance in the key areas of human development, particularly in education, health, and social welfare measures (Amin 1991; Franke and Chasin 1992; Dreze and Sen 1998). Kerala Model of Development became a part of the broad global debate about the ideal pattern of development in the ‘third world’ (Parayil 1996; Achin 2005). The most important aspect of KMD is that it represented a pattern of paradox against the conventional notions of the economic model of development due to the active participation of government as well as non-governmental organizations through “public action” or “public politics” (Jeffrey 2003; Dreze and Sen 1998).

The combination of high level of social development with a low level of economic growth made Kerala a curious case among the academic and international

development policy circles. This is considered as a paradox and also as a proof that a greater involvement of state can result in higher social indicators. This pattern of development has baffled experts as it challenges a widely held traditional understanding of development as equal to economic growth, which postulates that economies of state or a country should be given the highest priority to the growth of per capita output; and if growth occurs then human development will follow. On the one hand, the success of this radical reform was relied upon the support rendered by various popular movement such as religious and caste-based reform movement. The class-based peasant and labour association meant to deliver social justice to all sections of the society (Nair 1994; Franke and Chasin 1994; Dreze and Sen 1998). On the other, radical transformation of traditional patterns of gender was also influenced by the process of Kerala model of development. According to Parayil (1996: 950)

The factors responsible for Kerala's achievements can be attributed to: meaningful land reforms; 'food for all' schemes through fair-price shops and feeding programmes for school children, infants and mothers; providing easy access to primary and preventative healthcare; promoting high literacy, particularly among women, through free and universal primary and secondary education; high mandated agricultural and farm wages; cost-effective transportation facilities; rural electrification; engaging the poor and working people in democratic processes, such as in labor and civic organizations; fostering public dialogue on environmental conservation issues; and developing social movements through the establishment of a civil society to promote environmental conservation and other grassroots projects.

The scholars have different opinion, both positive and negative, on Kerala Model of Development. Sen and Dreze (1998) cited the positive sides of KMD. They referred to the unique development of the state such as low level of gender inequality, equitable educational opportunities, social security, low range of caste oppression and less rural-urban divisions etc. They argue that these developments took place through the governmental as well as non-governmental initiatives, primarily by socio-political organizations (Dreze and Sen 1998). Scholars pointed out that the major achievements in the areas of education and health care acted as the foundational capabilities of Kerala's achievements of human development. The development of Kerala, being in a state of chaos from 1950s to 1960s, transformed into a developmental model in 1980-90s due to the new model initiated by the state and society (Govindan 2000; Oommen 2008; Franke and Chasin 1994; Tharamangalam 1998).

In a period of twelve years (1975-1987), the government allocated 50 percent of state's budget for social development in which 30 percent of the expenditure was invested for the development of education (Tharakan 1997:224). This kind of an uninterrupted large scale investment in the area of education for many years helped in the improvement of the educational standard of the state as against the other states of the country. When it comes to the rate of literacy and education, Kerala is much ahead of other Indian states, as it achieved the goal of universalizing the elementary education. It is reflected when the state managed to attain the literacy rate around 100 percent and maintained the rate of enrolment and brought down the dropout rates at the primary and secondary levels of education. The statistics based on the studies found out that the rate of education in each level, for instance, the enrolment rate of primary education increased from 2.49 million (1956- 57) to 4. 28 million (1980- 81). The increase in the rate of primary education resulted in the increased rate of enrolment in secondary education from 0.217 million to 1.31 million, and the university level educational rate also increased from 0.022 million (22 thousand) to 0.242 million (Zachariah Mathew 1999: 103).

Kerala has been successful in reducing the regional and gender gaps in literacy, education, and enrolment in education. According to Economic Review of 2004, there are 12,322 schools in Kerala with 4.894 million students. When the number was split between Public funded schools and private funded schools, it was found that, private sector manages 63.5 percent schools with 67 percent students and 66.6 percent teachers. This shows the importance of community organizations in the development of education in Kerala.

More than 94 percent of the rural population has access to primary schools within a distance of one kilometre, while 98 percent of the population has got one school within a distance of two kilometres. Furthermore 96 percent of the population is served by an upper primary school within a travel distance of 3 kilometres and one-fourth by a secondary school within two kilometers. Nearly 98 percent of the rural population has accessibility to secondary education within 6 to 8 kilometres. Facilities for higher education and technical education are available to rural students in a practically reasonable distance. Nearly half of the students in lower primary classes are girls. There is not much gender disparities in the nursery schools either. In schools, the proportion of girls is higher in secondary and higher secondary level. This proportion is much higher when it comes to graduate and postgraduate levels in arts and science colleges.

The representation of female candidates in professional courses is, however, comparatively low. Among the teachers in schools, the distribution of female teachers is around 70 percent in Kerala as against 50 percent in the rest of the country. In arts and science colleges, female teachers constitute around 50 percent of the faculty positions. The widespread transport network system and the subsidized transport rates for students further facilitate easy access for rural students to higher educational institutions (George 2006).

The social indices of Kerala indicate a benchmark gender ratio which is rare for developing regions of the world. Starting with the turn of the last century, the state had a favourable sex ratio 1004:1000, which gradually picked up and reached 1040:1000 in 1991, 1058:1000 in 2001 and 1084:1000 in 2011. This pattern in sex ratio is similar to Europe and North America. Kerala has often been referred to as the “land of women”. Historically the state has been quite different from the rest of the country in terms of the indicators of women’s development. The interstate comparisons show that Kerala women have performed better on several counts such as literacy, life expectancy and labour force participation to name a few. The life expectancy of women in Kerala, who were to live only a year longer than men in the 1950s, are expected to live 5.5 years longer in the 1990s, whereas in India as a whole, women are expected to live only 1.2 years longer than men. The infant mortality rate of Kerala was 16.5 per thousand in 1991 as against national infant mortality rate of 91 per thousand. The fertility rate is just 1.7 births per woman lower than the rate marked in Sweden. And there is hardly any gender gap in school education (Parayil 1996; Chakraborty 2005).

Robin Jeffrey (2004: 647-66) draws attention to the historical role of the matrilineal family system of Kerala in reducing the gender gap in facilitating the agency of women in Kerala. The *matrilinear* system of Kerala, although not a universal practice, surely have helped to reduce the gender gap and also in facilitating the agency of women. *Matrilineage* is the system that worked behind the establishment of women’s identity in Kerala, which gave security and autonomy to the women in the society. The matrilineal values are the key reasons behind women empowerment in the fields of female literacy, health, favourable sex ratio and such pro-women indices. In other words, these indices are definitely a contribution of the “transformed matriliney” (Saradamoni 1999).

Among all these favourable indices for women, education and healthcare are the major breakthrough for Kerala women. The contributions of women in these areas

are significant and notable. In state's mission to eradicate poverty, the government of Kerala realized the power of unorganized women from lower strata of the society in Kerala. They started an enterprise called *Kudumbasree* to empower the women from financially backward situations and transform them to an earning member of the family. The role of *Kudumbasree* was crucial in the poverty eradication project/mission. Indeed, due to the development policies of the UDF and LDF governments over the decades enabled women and girls to enter the "public sphere" and contribute to a greater extend. The gradual progression of women in the direction of gendered spaces and make them accessible for everyone empowered the women and gave them sense of identity.

The celebrated model of Kerala development continued well in the 1990s but became a subject of critical evaluation by late 1990s due to economic stagnation, fiscal deficit and widespread unemployment. Some scholars characterized the 'Model' as 'stagnant', while some perceived it having reached 'the end of its tether' and another went to the extent of calling it 'anti-growth'. Robin Jeffry (2004) has noted that Kerala is 'no model' but offers a lesson to understand the developmental process:

By the 1990s, one could view Kerala's condition from two extremes. One view contended that Kerala still provides a model to the world for achieving modest, development and sustainable ways of life. The '*model*' was based on (i) the acceptance of basic right for both men and women and (ii) large number of people who are aware of and ready to demand those rights. The other view, however, held that 'the system has failed', and 'any attempts to restructure or rationalize the system are stymied by entrenched interest and political system and culture that supports these interests'. Kerala represented a 'development debacle' (Jeffry 2003: xxii).

Tharakan (2008) pointed that the model represented mainly middle-level castes and communities and middle classes as it was not beneficial to the underprivileged sections of the society. Scholars admitted the fact that the KMD failed to address the problems of marginalized sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, fishermen community and women from these sections (Devika 2006; Kodoth and Eapen 2005). John Kurien (1995) argued that the Kerala model is an outlier one. He observed that public action guaranteeing widespread access to the basic facilities required to attain a high quality of life can never be complete without an adequate level of genuine people's participation in the form of collaborative and/or adversarial collective action. He emphasized that without the collective participation from all

sections of the society, even the radical and committed action by the state alone will remain a sterile challenge.

Thomas Isaac and Tharakan (1995) admitted the Kerala model was facing a 'grave crisis'. They pointed out that contemporary issues and possible solutions need to be highlighted rather than much acclaimed achievements in the past. The KMD has reached its consummation point. It was mainly due to the paradoxical phenomenon of rapid social development which did not translate into the economic growth of the state has been exhaustive of the state to cope with it. Tharamangalam (1998) established that the limitations of KMD is at the very roots of the 'crisis' due to the fiscal crisis to meet the various expenditures of the state.

However, scholars like Franke and Chasin (1996, 1998) passionately refuted this contention. They argued that Kerala continued to display its ability to improve its literacy, birth rates, infant mortality, and life expectancy and this demonstrated that the Kerala model is still valid and relevant as an alternative to growth-only development strategies. Despite having a very low industrial development, the uniqueness of this model lies in the higher standards in human development. Sen (2001) also shared the same viewpoints. He said, there is a deep historical component to literacy in Kerala that cannot be ignored. The fact is that the contribution of KMD cannot be ignored in the developmental processes of the state. Parayil (1996) argued that the 'Kerala model' of development should be counted as a possible idealization of a sustainable development paradigm.

However, the scholars are alarmed at the position of women in Kerala as "gender paradox" due to the invisible role of women in the public sphere despite having a higher degree of gender development indices in the state (Jeffrey 2003; Bhasker 2000; Kodoth and Eapan 2005). Jeffrey (2003) is also concerned about the invisibility of women in the realm of politics as it is considered as a male domain elsewhere in India. Their absence in the decision-making process is evident, and their education qualifications are not counted in the process of public engagement. According to Mukhopadhyay (2007: 26-8) "all political parties in the state have not merely denied women a legitimate foothold in the political arena, but have lost a potential for their own growth and regeneration as well". And she concludes that the women of Kerala are yet to earn their 'freedom'. It is observed that the low work participation of women in Kerala and unemployment rates of women in the state are as high as the other states of the country. The increase in the female work participation rates for major jobs was

negligibly low as it was in fractions (from 12.76 percent in 1981 to 12.85 percent in 1991). This, in comparison to the increase in male WPR (Work Participation Rate) in the state from 41.04 to 44.24 and the all-India female WPR from 14.07 to 16.48, can hardly be considered an 'increase' (Kumar 1994). According to the 2001 census report, the work participation of women was 15.3 percent as against the 50.4 percent of men, with the gender gap of 35.1 percent. In Kerala the women work participation rate was 25.7 percent which is less than the national average (51.9 percent), which clearly shows developmental paradoxes pertaining to Kerala.

By looking at the unique model of development and its sustainability, the current study argues that the KMD is gendered in nature. 'Gender paradox' in Kerala refers to the contradiction in lower level of public participation of women and the increasing incidences of violence upon them despite women's position in developmental indicators is marked in the KMD. The paradox refers to the notable absence and underrepresentation of women, particularly Muslim women, in the public sphere such as employment, politics, and in the economic aspects of Kerala. There are many reasons enlisted for imposing restrictions on women. One such would be the patriarchal aspect of religion, as it is reflected in the social practices, customs and tradition, where women are treated inferior to men. As Devika (2014) analysed, the educated unemployed women end up doing child rearing to compensate the loss of decision making capacities in their lives.

As compared to other religious communities, Muslim women belong to the poorest, educationally disenfranchised, economically vulnerable, politically marginalized group in the country. Scholars are of the opinion that in the context of India, the improvement in literacy rates would directly influence Muslim women's socio-economic and political status as citizens (Kazi 1999).

Contrary to the celebrated Kerala model of development, the present study argues that despite their high literacy and educational status the presence of Muslim women in public sphere, employment and politics, is either minimal or zero. As Gulati (1981) noted, employment opportunities play a key role in providing sexual equality and personal fulfilment. However, the Muslim women are invisible in every aspect of their social life such as employment and participation in the public sphere.

The Muslim women in Kerala are subjected to various social restrictions in their life from the family and community. They are forced to put their rights at stake such as their personal choice, like academics and marriage. They are well educated, smart to

handle problems in their lives, able to bargain and negotiate, but they compromise on the benefits of these, and are forced to prioritize their family life. The patriarchal population of the community does not expect or desire Muslim women to have any decision making power in life, while the same majority are of the idea that most of the women are dependent on the male members of the family and thus are worthy of the status of a secondary citizen.

My findings (discussed in detail in Chapter Four and Five) prove that majority of the Muslim women students got married during their higher secondary or higher studies due to family pressures and social practices. They also continue to face a lot of difficulties which include unemployment, underemployment, dowry, religious restrictions, and sexual and domestic violence. In the context of Kerala, it is contradictory to see that how the high level of literacy rate does not improve the low-level employment status of women. The primary reasons are patriarchal mentality and the religious orthodoxy practiced in the society. The conditions of the restrained position of women are empirically elucidated in the upcoming chapters.

Many scholars (Jeffry 2003; Rajan 2011; Osella and Osella 1999, 2007b; Oommen 2016) have observed the contributions and significant relation between the Kerala Model of Development and Gulf migration in the backdrop of socio-economic development. During 1970s and 1980s the Kerala economy has become dependent upon revenues and remittances from Gulf migration. The migration contributed significantly in poverty alleviation along with other factors including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation. In Kerala, without gulf remittance the model would not have been possible. As Osella and Osella (2007a) said migration has a great impact on the economy and culture of Kerala Muslims. The Gulf income has significantly influenced in developing the class structure, social hierarchy, worship patterns, family structure, and above all, religion and religiosity in Kerala especially among Kerala Muslims.

Section-III

3.3 Gulf Migration and its impact on Muslim Community

The migration of a large number of people to the Arab/Gulf countries, which began in the 1970s, had a tremendous effect on the Muslim community in Kerala. The rapid development of petro-dollar industries, oil producing countries, required labourers who migrated in huge numbers to the Middle Eastern countries from Kerala. It has changed

the community's outlook and their worldview, and extended the possibilities of social, economic, political, and physical mobility.

Gulf migration had a great impact on the labour market, consumption, savings and investment, poverty alleviation, income distribution and also in the economic growth of Kerala society. Economists noted that from 19th century till the middle of the 1980s, the colonial and post-colonial economy of Kerala gave a major boost to local trade. However, from 1980 onwards the Kerala economy was dependent upon the revenues and remittance from Arab/Gulf countries to a large extent.

It was also found that the relationship between the KMD and Gulf migration was complimentary to each other. The impact of KMD and the Gulf migration together played a vital role in the developmental processes of the state to a larger extent. The success rate of the Kerala Model of development was essentially due to the flow of remittance from the Arab/Gulf countries. Dreze and Sen (1998) argue that the increase in the per capita income, even when domestic production was very less, was fundamentally due to substantial remittances from abroad, mainly from Arab/Gulf countries. This argument was supported by the Kerala Migration Studies reports conducted by the Centre for Developmental Studies situated at Trivandrum, Kerala.

According to the study "Migration has provided the single most dynamic factor, in the otherwise dismal scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the twentieth century". And the study further claims that migration must have contributed much to poverty alleviation along with the state initiatives. It is clearly evident in the case of Malabar region. The region was economically lagging behind when compared to Travancore and Cochin in terms of literacy, life expectancy, etc. However, the situation changed during 1980s, basically due to the remittance from the Arab/Gulf countries. It helped them to access better education, healthcare facilities, and to eradicate poverty from the region and betterment of the community as a whole.

It is remarkable that, although the population of Kerala constitute only 4 percent of the country, but 50 percent of the total Indian migrants, particularly to the Middle East, belong to this state. Among migrants from Kerala, Muslims occupy primary positions. The main reason behind it is that the Muslims of Malabar had centuries-old maritime trade relation with the overseas countries, particularly with the Arabs. The number of Muslim immigrants increased enormously after the Gulf War of the 1990s than any other religious groups in Kerala. One of the exciting findings from the CDS (Centre for Developmental Study) migration study is that Muslim community

constitutes nearly 27 percent of Kerala's population, but through the migrant population, the state received a total remittance of 36.2 percent during 2014-15 (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan 2000). Unsurprisingly, the families in Malabar have at least one family member working in Gulf countries. It subsequently resulted in the rapid development of Muslim middle class families in the region. Gulf migration and the resultant economic progress, popularly known as "Dubai money", have led to the development of the Muslim community in Kerala. Through the revenue from petrodollar, the community gained measurably higher self-confidence in the spheres of family, religion and education (Miller 1992: 323-40). According to 2014 data of CDS, out of the total of remittances of rupees 15,129 crores, the Dubai money constitutes rupees 7029 crores, which indicates to the relationship between the developments of the state with the Gulf countries throughout the years (CDS 2014).

Migration has a major role in the transformation of the Muslim community. The Muslims of Kerala always look at Gulf as a preferred resort to get employment which provides social security. In the first couple of decades of migration, Muslims were working as unskilled labourers without any certified professional qualification, such as the construction of industry, house drivers, shopkeepers, etc. The Kerala society failed to upgrade the technical skill of Kerala workers in tune with changing demands. The studies say that 80 percent of the total migrants have no training, and interestingly 51 percent of these migrants belonged to the Muslim community (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 2000). Most of them spent a large amount of period as migrants to meet their family duties and obligations, but their aspirations are much wider than what they earn. However, this tendency is gradually changing due to the interest Muslims show in higher education. People who migrate after completing their higher studies get better jobs.

The study conducted by CDS stresses the importance of Muslims in contributing to the economic development of the state. The number of Kerala emigrants living abroad in 2014 is estimated to be about 24.0 lakhs, up from 22.8 lakhs in 2011, 21.9 lakhs in 2008, 18.4 lakhs in 2003 and 13.6 lakhs in 1998. Foreign remittances to Kerala from abroad significantly increased from Rs 13652 crores in 1998 to Rs 71142 crores in 2014. If we categorize the number of migrants district wise, Malappuram, the largest Muslim populated district of the state, produces the largest number of migrants 444100 (18.8 percent), and Kannur comes in second position with 290000 (12.4 percent). Malappuram district also achieved top position in terms of remittance, which is

estimated as 14.4 percent of the total remittance (Zachariah and Rajan 2004; Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan 2015). The following table clearly indicates the contribution of Muslims to the Kerala economy as immigrants.

Table-3.1

Number of emigrants and remittance on religious base from 2011 to 14

Religion	Migrants 2011 (%)	Remittances 2011 (%)	Migrants 2014 (%)	Remittance 2014 (%)
Hindus	31.2	36.4	36.3	39.55
Christians	25.1	17.1	19.6	24.2
Muslims	43.7	46.5	41.3	36.2
Total	100	100	100	100

Sources: CDS Working papers No: 450 (September 2012) and No: 463 (September 2015).

According to the table, the number of migrants is high among the Muslim community, 41.3 percent of the total migrant population of the state. As mentioned above Muslims contribute 36.2 percent of the total remittance. Hindus in Kerala constitute 54.73 percent of the population and contribute 39.55 percent of the remittance. The contribution of remittance by Christians is 24.2 percent whereas their population is 18.38 percent. The trend has been the same since the beginning of migration. The previous study of CDS reveals that Muslims received nearly half (49.6 percent) of the total remittances; while the share of Hindus and Christians were 29.9 percent and 25.5 percent respectively in 2008 (Zachariah and Rajan 2010). The per capita income of the state was 41,814 crores without including remittances but was as much as 54,664 crores when remittances were included (ibid). The per capita income was 52,084 crores, however it increased to 67,994 crores when the remittances were added. Remittances to Kerala are 1.6 times more than the revenue receipt of the state and 6.2 times the funding the state gets from the central government. It is 2.2 times the annual non-plan expenditure of the Kerala Government. In addition, the remittances were sufficient to wipe out 60 percent of the state's debt in 2011 (Zachariah and Rajan 2012). However, the rate of remittance is considerably low in 2011 when compared to 51 percent in 2007-08 and 46.5 percent in 2011. The decline in the rate of remittances is caused mainly by the law of *Nitaqat*⁴⁶ (localization). The number of Kerala migrants

⁴⁶ The Ministry of Labor of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has passed a resolution on September 2011 by announcing a new wave of Saudiisation, termed as *Nitaqat* (which means 'Ranges' in Arabic). The

who returned from abroad is 12.5 lakhs in 2014, up from 11.5 in 2011, 11.6 in 2008, 8.9 lakhs in 2003 and 7.4 lakhs in 1998 (Zachariah Mathew and Rajan 2015).

The major transformation noticed is that the flow of remittance has significantly reduced the gap between the rich and poor, and it is more visible in the case of Muslims in Malabar where the community was passing through miserable conditions before the migration took place. Migration has contributed to the improvement in the standard of living of the community mainly in the areas of employment, education and health. Migration reduces the rate of unemployment particularly in districts like Malappuram, Thrissur, Kannur and Calicut where the number of migrants have been much higher than any other district of the state. As Zachariah Mathew and Rajan (2015) note,

“migration has always made a dent in the unemployment level in the state. Emigration of a disproportionately large number of the unemployed persons helped to reduce the unemployment rate in the state. However, there is a flip side to this apparently positive effect. Though unemployment rates were reduced, but this depression came about not by providing employment to the unemployed within the state but by getting the unemployed out of the state”.

According to the data the unemployment rate of Kerala was 11.2 percent in 1998 and it was reduced to 7.2 percent in 2014. It is worth noting that the unemployment rate was reduced significantly in Malappuram district where the rate of unemployment was 10.6 percent in 2008, 6.3 percent in 2011 and 5.2 in 2014. However, it is also important to note that the rate of unemployment was higher among the Muslims. In 2014 the unemployment rate among Muslims was 9.1 percent, Christians 7.0 percent and Hindus 6.5 percent (ibid). The main reason for this increased rate of unemployment among Muslims is that their employment is mainly based on migration than any other job in government and allied sectors in Kerala.

The migration to the Gulf countries has gradually resulted in the emergence of a new middle class among the Muslim community in the Kerala society, which transformed a majority of Muslims from the agrarian class to the field of business and trade. Muslims have also begun to invest huge amount of money in the educational and allied fields, which was not the case before. The remittance from the Gulf helps the

primary aim of this policy is to create employment opportunities for Saudi nationals in the private sector. The government's direct intervention is aimed at obtaining quick results and giving Saudi nationals a better stand in the local jobs market, which is currently dominated by foreign employees holding 90% of the jobs. Of course the Nitaqat law has very negative impact on Kerala economy especially among Malabar Muslims of Kerala. Majority of the Indian migrant labour in Saudi Arabia are from Malabar, Kerala.

community to establish numerous modern educational institutions, including English medium schools, and various other institutions under various Muslim community organizations. As a result of this Kerala Muslims have attained relatively high status in the field of education especially in the area of women's education.

Before the 1990s their participation in the primary and upper primary level was low. According to the figures collected in the 1990s, the Muslim children enrolment in school has increased to an optimum level and the attitude towards the secular education has changed (Muhammed 2007). At present, the dropout rate of the community from school is very low compared to the dropout rate in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of the educational institutions run by the community get funds from Gulf countries—from the migrant labourers and the elite in the gulf countries. The study by Nair (1983) pointed out that emigration helped to bring a favourable change in the attitude of emigrants towards the education of their children, both boys and girls. The gulf migration has been an important factor in the spread of self-financing colleges in the Malabar region. The present study has observed that in educational institutions run by Muslim managements, girls outnumber boys in both Graduate and Post Graduate courses.

According to a study conducted by CDS, there is a significant increase in the number of youth who pass class 10 and class 12 exams every year. There was 25 percentage increase in the number of those who passed class 12 during 2009-2012. Between 1991 and 2014, there was an increase of 64 percent in the number of those who passed class 10. During the period of 2004-2014 alone, there was 36 percent increase (Zachariah and Rajan 2015). Muslims in Malabar run a number of such institutions which helps to improve the educational standard of the community. A sizeable proportion (37 percent) of the students' enrolment in professional colleges was accounted for by self-financing institutions (Zachariah, et.al 2000).

As Banu (2006: 318) points out, migration is an important factor that has deeply influenced the economic behaviour, religious culture and tradition of the Muslims of Kerala. Oommen (2016) points out how migratory movements and remittances affect religion and religious practices in Kerala, and leads to social transformation. He argues that the nature of the Gulf migrants has significantly influenced the class structure, social hierarchy, worship patterns, family structure and above all religion and religiosity in Kerala.

Jeffrey (2003: xxi) highlights the complementary relationship between migration and the Kerala Model of Development. He notes that migration to the Gulf helped to explain why the '*Kerala model*' had survived to become a legend. Without gulf remittance, '*the model*' would have been under severe pressure by the late 1970s, even before the Model began to be talked about by scholars across the world. Scholars also note that the well-accumulated human capital of Kerala responded to employment opportunities emerging in the wider world, generating substantial linkages that affect the 'Gulf boom', raising the per capita consumption expenditure.

The impact of employment migration and remittance from abroad has made a tremendous impact on households across Kerala which in turn leads to improved living standards and increased consumption level. An increased access to education also leads to improved health indicators such a decline in the overall birth rate and a decreased infant mortality rate (Banerjee et al 2002). Migration contributed significantly to poverty alleviation than any other factors including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation. The proportion of people below poverty line has decreased by 3 percentage points annually (Zachariah, et. al 2000). The decline in poverty was high among the Muslims (about six percent) and it was relatively high among the Ezhavas. The Gulf money also strengthened the socio-economic security of the state to achieve a better position as compared to other states (Zachariah and Rajan 2011).

Osella and Osella (2007b:8) note that migration to Gulf countries has become the primary source of income for the Muslims of Kerala and Gulf-based businessmen are at the forefront of India's post-liberalization economy. They are sharp innovators who have adopted the business and labour practices of global capitalism in both Kerala and in the Gulf. Gulf money played an inevitable part behind all success of Kerala society, particularly Muslims. In the particular context of Kozhikode, a district in the Malabar region, Osella and Osella (1999) observe that since the 1980s the economy has become dependent upon revenues and remittances from the Gulf. This diverse history contributes to the city's popular reputation for "cosmopolitanism."

More than economic development, the migrants' remittance also strengthen the solidarity and tight-knit character and feeling of the community, as major share of their income is spent for charity a lot of the Gulf money is spent on gifts to relatives, friends and community members at the time of marriage, home construction or for educational and health-related expenditures. In Kerala there are many orphanages run by Muslim

organizations which work to empower the socially and economically poor children. The financial support for these orphanages mainly comes from the Muslim Gulf migrants. The migrants help the poor in different ways to meet their basic needs and responsibilities. Osella and Osella (2009) observe that the ‘social mindednesses’ of the migrants as the combination of piety and economic calculation, the two seen as not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. Migrants are concerned with the “upliftment” of Kerala’s Muslim community; they are involved in community associations, orphanages, schools, trade organizations, and everyday politics. This is a fact highlighted by many scholars who have observed the relationship between Kerala and Gulf countries (Bayly 1983; Haynes 1987; Palsetia 2005).

Migration to overseas countries is mostly considered as a male-centric activity. The number of women migrants are very less. The various surveys conducted by the CDS since the 1970s indicate that the number of women migrants are significantly less compared to the total migrant population. In 1998, female emigrants numbered 126 thousand (9.3 percent) out of a total of 1362 thousand. The proportion of women is found to be higher in the Ernakulum district while it is very low in Malappuram even though it has the most number of migrants. Interestingly, female migrants are better qualified than male migrants, but few of them are gainfully employed. According to the data, 28 percent of the female emigrants have obtained their degree, whereas only nine percent of the males are graduated (Zachariah et al 2000).

Migration has produced both positive and negative impact on the women’s life in Kerala. Migration has also caused nearly a million married women in Kerala to live away from their husbands, who are called “Gulf wives” in the local parlance. In 2011, there were about 1.1 million Gulf wives in Kerala. The proportion of Gulf wives is highest among the Muslims (24 percent) and lowest among the Christians (5.9 percent), and among Hindus it was 6.7 percent. The gulf wives experience extreme loneliness and have to bear the burden of family responsibilities with which they had little acquaintance so long as their husbands were with them (Zachariah, Mathew, et al 2001).

The large scale migration of men has made a positive impact on women, particularly Muslim women, in Kerala. Gulati (1993) notes that one out of eight women in Kerala live away from their husbands due to the migration of the husbands. She further points that the absence of husband causes several hardships for wives; however, it also brings in several benefits to them in different ways. One of the most important benefit is that the status of women from a dependent subservient role in the family is

transformed to an independent one. Women take the responsibility of day-to-day household management in the absence of men, and become responsible for the health and education of their children. As a result, women's socialization patterns get wider and their world view broadened through engagement with banks, educational institutions, post offices, etc. They also become familiar with international communication pattern. In this process, women's isolation is broken down, their mobility is increased, and they are brought into contact with a wider network of institutions that were hitherto outside their experience. All these new experiences result in women gaining self-confidence with the increasing length of the migrants' stay away from home (Gulati 1995).

Migration has increased the number of women-headed households, and approximately the overall proportion of women-headed households is 25 percent. Among woman-headed households, emigration rate is 38 percent compared to the 15 percent among man-headed households. There is a clear indication that emigration is a major factor for the increase in the proportion of women-headed households. Migration has also caused a large number of married women living separately from their husbands as the men work in another state or another country. The number of married men enumerated in 10,000 households was less than the number of married women by 12 percent. The number of married men under 35 years was less than the number of married women under 30 years by as much as 35 percent. This means that a large number of young married women and men are living separated from their spouses (Zachariah et. al 1999: 38- 39).

In the post-Gulf migration era Muslim women of Malabar are seen as people with high socio-economic mobility and who are consumers of latest fashion. The remittance from the Gulf has totally changed the lifestyle of the Muslim women. Globalization indeed has a remarkable impact on the changing pattern of the lifestyle of the community. However, the major reason for this development is the remittance from abroad. It is in the dressing style that one can observe the most significant change migration has brought about. *Purdah*⁴⁷ and *Hijab* have become common among the Muslim women in Kerala. The economic remittance from the gulf countries also led to

⁴⁷ In the sense of attire, purdah can denote the practice of completely covering a woman's body by wearing a loose, body-covering robe called the purdah. It is a current trendy dress practice and fashion among Muslim women including youth in Kerala, especially in Malabar. From 1970 onwards the style of purdah introduced into Muslims of Kerala from Arabian countries through gulf migration.

changes in the cultural and life style of the Kerala Muslims. *Purdah* has become common among even the college-going students, and *Hijab* has become the new fashionable dress code among the school- and college-going girls. Migration has also influenced the improvement of their educational standard, and presently women are even enrolled in professional courses. The enrolment rate of women in colleges and other institutions of higher education is much higher than the boys. Muslim girls have been achieving high ranks in various state and national level entrance tests for admission for engineering and medical courses. I argue that the flow of remittances from the Gulf countries has played a major part in these changes. In the fourth chapter, I will offer a detailed discussion of the impact of gulf migration on the educational development of Muslim women.

The migration of men to the gulf countries results in widening the agency of women in decision-making and managing the household. The absence of a male as the head of the family empower women. However, in the absence of husbands for a long period Gulf wives have been facing many problems such as social pressure, loneliness, effects of adolescent childbirth, the pressure of child-rearing, sexual moroseness and the resultant psychological trauma despite whatever economic/social empowerment they have attained (Balan 2016).

Summary

It is important to highlight that there are many factors which contributed positively to the social, economic and educational development of Kerala society in general and the Muslim community in particular. Though Kerala is referred to as a model of development, the absence of women is visible in the public spaces of the Kerala society. While the socio-economic mobility of Muslim women has increased after the Gulf migration, their engagement in the public arena is significantly less than any other religious community. The absence of women in public spaces is mainly because of the role of religion and the social customs followed by the community and society. The sacred boundaries of religion consider the public presence of women as profane. The socialization or social practices of Muslim community have led to the silencing of the voices of Muslim women, as Muslims feminists argue. The coming chapters discuss about the increasing performance of Muslim women in higher education by critically looking at their participation in the other arenas of the society through the empirical data.

Chapter-4

Higher Education and Kerala Muslim Women: Mapping the Aspirations and Experiences

Introduction

Taking cue from the fieldwork, the present chapter will closely map the varying aspects of educational aspirations and experiences among Muslim women in Kerala. This chapter is divided into three sections; first section of the chapter presents profile of the respondents, who are from two colleges in Kerala. Second section aims to capture the aspirations of Muslim women over higher education and the third section deals with the experiences of young Muslim women's education in pre and post marital life.

The study critically explores the questions pertaining to the 'agency'⁴⁸ of Muslim women in Kerala by particularly analyzing their active engagement in higher education compared to their relative absence in the public spheres of Kerala. Despite being educated, 'subjugation' and 'under-representation' of women in general and Muslim women in particular in Kerala is reflected in all walks of life, such as domestic, social and political domains. This subjugation and under-representation of Muslim women and the role of religious institutions and family in constituting this condition, if any, is the primary focus of the study.

Earlier, scholars like Esposito (1998: ix) viewed higher education as a mechanism that would prepare women in an orderly and rational manner for participation in the public sphere as equal citizens. However, recent scholarships have come to recognize the fact that, although women's access to higher education has increased worldwide, the promise of equality has by and large not been realized.

⁴⁸ Despite there are different debates concerning the question of agency, the particular study looks at agency as the authority and power of an individual in decision making and practicing his/her choices and actions accordingly. According to feminist theorist Lois McNay (2000): "agency is the capacity for autonomous action". Islamic feminists have argued how women negotiate their lives within patriarchal systems and attempt to illuminate practicing women's agency by challenging stereotypes about religious women as victims or dupes and modern and secular understandings of gender equality (Griffith 1997; Mahmood 2005; Kandiyoti 1988).

Minault (1998: 1-2) has noticed that the social reform, especially with respect to women's education, among Indian Muslims has been a difficult task during the reform activities in the colonial period. She acknowledged the existence of double layered isolation and invisibility, compared with men as well as women from other communities. In her attempt to understand Indian Muslim women in their historical context and in the quest to characterize the invisible Muslim women, she adopts various strategies such as: as an issue, as symbols of the reformers', as an object of men's programmes, and through insider's perception (ibid: 2-10). Minault argues that a study of women's education is an excellent window to understand the social norms of Muslims, many of whom are equally concerned with preserving or reviving Muslim culture as with changing it.

Vivid presence of religious reform and revival, material as well as non-material gains from Gulf migration, and the residual impact from Kerala Model of Development has essentially framed a pretext for the socio-religious situation of Muslim women in contemporary Kerala (Dreze and Sen 1998; Govindan 2000; Oommen 2008). Available data confirms that the women enrolment ratio has increased since the formation of Kerala as a State, as is the case with Muslim women⁴⁹. Female enrolment in primary school has doubled and drastic growth is seen at the secondary and tertiary levels. Hasan and Menon (2004, 2005) and Mohammed (2007) are much impressive with the performance of Muslim women in Kerala despite the fact that first private Muslim girls' school was established only after Independence.

Within the aforementioned context, where Kerala has become a center of attraction for the scholars of developmental studies due to its unique 'model' of development, the present study explores the educational status of Muslims in Kerala in general and Muslim women in particular. To understand the multiple issues and challenges that shape the nature and aspirations of Muslim women for education, the study uses the data collected from the field work conducted in two premier higher educational institutions in Kerala run by Muslims namely, Farook College in Calicut and Pokker Sahib Memorial Orphanage College (PSMO) Tirurangadi.

⁴⁹ The present state of Kerala was formed in 1956. The region was divided into three political units: Travancore, Cochin and Malabar prior to the formation.

Section-I

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

The current study is mainly based on the primary data collected from Muslim women respondents who are pursuing higher education in both Farook and PSMO colleges. The data was collected from 120 respondents (60 from each college) through open ended questionnaire and personal interviews. The respondents consist of students from different disciplines including graduation, post-graduation and research. Apart from these, the study also collected data from professional degree students who reside in the premises of the particular colleges.

Table-4.1- Age distribution of respondents

Age Groups	Frequency	Percentage
19-21	81	68
22-24	23	19
25-27	11	9
28-30	5	4
Total	120	100

The majority of respondents belong to the age group of 19 to 30 in general. Out of them, 68% of the respondents are from the age category of 19-21 years and doing their bachelor degree in science, arts and management studies. Another 19% of the respondents belong to the age category of 22-24 years and 9% of them fall under the age category of 25-27 while the remaining 4% of the respondents were from 28-30 age categories. The collected sample is also divided on the basis of their educational degrees. Among them, 80% of the respondents are pursuing their Under Graduate Courses and 20% of them belong to post-graduation. Along with these researcher also have interviewed students who are pursuing professional education like MBBS, MD, B-tech, M-tech, LLB and LLM from the particular locality.

The samples from different age groups and varied disciplines would help to understand the diverse experience of the respondents whose responses contribute extensively for the study. In this study 73% of the participants are from social sciences background. Only 18% of the respondents are from science courses and remaining 8% of the respondents are from commerce background.

Table-4.2-Discipline background of the respondents

Disciplines	Frequency	Percentage
Arts	88	73
Science	22	18
Commerce	10	8
Total	120	100

The number of respondents from science discipline is less owing to their unavailability due to lab works and other project related work as along with less intakes. Post-Graduate courses are mainly offered in social science disciplines rather than in science in the selected institutions. The study found that the number of women doing graduation has remarkably increased compared to earlier times. However, it is significant to look at the number of women who complete the course, join for post-graduation and pursue education for employment opportunities. Or does education remains a mere status symbol for public acceptance? An attempt has been made in the following pages to examine the cultural economy of education and role of individual and family values on the question of educating a young Muslim women.

Section-II

In order to understand the Muslim women's aspirations and experiences of higher education in the context of Kerala the following part is divided into four themes, viz a viz engaging with the gender and modern education, women and religious education, education, family and marriage and women's education and social mobility. The current study is mainly based on empirical analysis with the help of qualitative data collected from the field through interviews as well as the narratives from Muslim women who pursue higher education which the researcher has codified. The table analyses refer the experiences of Muslim women students who are pursuing higher education and it also reflects how their parents perceive the education of girls and boys. The explanation of interviews and narratives also replicate the researcher's own experiences from the family and the community as well.

4.2 Gender and Modern Education

Analysing the debates on gender and higher education, Chanana (2001) argues that family and educational institutions create division of gender in Indian context. According to her, Indian society is gender biased as the social institutions like family and schools perpetuate gender inequality through the process of formal and informal

socialization. The choices of men and women in their life are constrained by social expectations of feminine and masculine roles and behavioural patterns. The study of gender is in effect the study of inequality and social differences which are critical to the understanding of women's disciplinary choices. One of the main concerns has been the imbalance as seen in arts vis-a-vis science at the school level onwards. Globalisation has changed the world into a global market and development in higher education has brought a transformation in the skills needed for jobs and change in the boundaries between arts and science subjects. There is a notable expansion and change in the subject choice of men and women in the academics and professional courses especially after 1991 (Chanana 2000, 2001 and 2007). The proportion of women entering into higher education and professional career also has increased rapidly. The growth of private education has contributed to the increased enrolment rate in undergraduate and higher education particularly in more technical courses like science and professional subjects. These courses are widely offered in colleges and were labelled as masculine subjects⁵⁰.

Similarly, the data on the Muslim women in Kerala shows the positive changes in the enrolment rate into higher education and points to the changes in subject choices and disciplines. The percentage of Muslim women in proportion to total enrolment of women in higher education is an interesting dimension. The expansion of higher educational facilities and opportunities led to better opportunities and representation of women in higher education. Chanana (2007:591) argues that Kerala has highest number of women enrolment in education which shows a positive trend of the education system.

The current study also agrees with Chanana at some points that the economic liberalization and the market demands have induced changes in women's higher education and their disciplinary choices. There are perceptible changes among women in their choices, especially in the metropolitan cities where they are enrolled into new professional courses such as management, fashion designing, computer oriented courses and human resource management. However, Chanana (ibid) questions the relative reflection of the same at the macro level as major chunk of Indian population resides in villages, where the role of women is restricted due to patriarchy in multiple

⁵⁰In Indian education system, certain disciplines particularly technical courses and science subjects were dominated by male students. Hence they were regarded as masculine subjects. But 1970 onwards women started opting for these disciplines breaking the male dominance. See Chanana 2007.

ways. If we closely examine the conditions of women in the larger context of India, we can easily find the deplorable conditions of women in the areas of socio educational field in which the case of Kerala is exceptionally different where community reform activities have tremendously contributed towards attaining educational mobility.

4.2.1 Muslim Women and Approaches to Modern Education

As Imtiaz Ahmad (1983:19) points out, generally it is believed that Muslims in India are either not modernized at all or are lagging behind other religious communities in getting modernized. Also, the dominant idea is that there is something inherently anti-modern about their religious faith which has been responsible for the failure to respond to the process of modernization and social change.

According to Engineer (1994: 297), Indian Muslim women are disadvantaged thrice; as a woman, as a member of minority community and as poor women. As Hasan and Menon (2004) pointed out, Muslim women are not equal to Hindu women in the domains of education, work, socio-economic status, marriage decision-making powers, mobility, domestic violence and political participation. The differences are mainly in the socio-economic status of Muslim families, occupational distribution, asset structure, standard of living and education. Education is seen as a necessary tool in raising the status of a community and women in society. It also helps to improve the quality of family life, and acts as a crucial socializing agency. Unfortunately, around 50 percent of the Muslim women are illiterate in India, which reinforces the general notion that Muslims are antithetical to modernity and modern education system.

In contrast to the aforementioned literature in the larger context of national narratives, Hasan and Menon (2005: 36) present the educational condition of Kerala on a positive note. They are impressed with the educational performance of Muslim women in Kerala. Their comparative study on the education of Muslim girls in five cities of India cites Calicut in Kerala as the example for positive community initiative and state investment in education. They authors said that the Muslim community in Kerala is one of the better role model of development model when compared to their counterparts in other states. These developments took place mainly due to three major reasons; firstly the active involvement of religious reform and revivalism initiated by the community leaders, secondly the material as well as non-material benefits from Gulf migration and thirdly the residual impact from Kerala Model of Development (Jeffrey 1998; Dreze and Sen 1998; U. Muhammed 2007; Miller 1992).

As discussed in chapter-3, the number of women being educated or the rates of education women receive have been expanded remarkably since the formation of Kerala as a state. The female enrolment in primary school has doubled and at the secondary and tertiary levels the increases has been drastic. This increase has its roots in the realization of traditional Muslim groups that the negation of modern education is one of the major reasons for the backwardness of the community, particularly in the case of women. Presently, all religious groups in Kerala including *Sunnis* are running engineering and arts and science colleges for both men and women, considering education as the primary requirement for the community development.

According to the statistics of 2012, 45 professional institutions are producing 18000 engineers, 600 MBBS doctors and 650 BDS graduates every year among Muslim women. In 2012, 26 Muslim girls have enrolled in government homeopathic college Calicut, out of the available 50 seats. In the same year, Out of 80,000 students who competed for entrance in All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), 27 candidates appeared from Kerala and among them 12 were Muslim girls (NP Hafiz 2013:47). In the year 2009, Muslim students have bagged more than 25% of the top 1000 ranks in the medical entrance test. In the first 100 ranks, 24 were Muslims and in the first 500 positions, 131 are from Muslim community. Also, two Muslim girls cracked top ranks in Kerala medical entrance Examination 2015⁵¹. All these hint at the increasing number of Muslim girls in higher education.

However, the present study found that, both in Farook and PSMO College, boys dominate in subjects like B.com, BBA and Computer applications. Here, the crucial relation between career choices and gender roles has to be scrutinized to understand the varying compromises and concerns. The study found that safety and security of the girls determine the priorities and concerns of parents, which in turn hinders their aspirations for choosing courses out of their interests.

The table (4.3) given below is intended to understand the Muslim women's perspectives and the attitudes on modern education regarding how they view the idea and the meaning of modern education. The respondents reacted very positively when the questions were placed before them.

⁵¹ P Hiba, a resident of Manchery in Malappuram district, bagged first rank in Medical Entrance Test and the second rank was bagged by Mariam Rafi of Aluva in Ernakulum district. Shabnam, a native of Thiruvananthapuram has bagged first rank in medical post graduate NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test). (The Hindu online May 21, 2015, accessed on 15th February 2016).

Table-4.3-Meaning of modern education

Meaning/Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Attaining knowledge	84	70
Attaining job	17	14
Status symbol	9	8
Personal development	5	4
Educated mother	5	4
Total	120	100

As a response to the importance of modern education for Muslim women, 70% of the respondents said that modern education is very necessary for everyone irrespective of gender in acquiring knowledge to empower themselves and in engaging with society. The table indicates the aspiration of the community towards modern education and its applicability in their everyday life. However, if we carefully observe the situations, there are some restraints from the family and community in which the girls failed to channelize their knowledge in the field of employment and public participations. People believe that level of education is directly proportionate to the chances of getting jobs; 14% respondents agreed that modern education is important to acquire a job and 4% opined that modern education helps to improve their personality. In the case of boys most of them said that the main intention behind studying is to obtain jobs in their preferred fields. Among the respondents, 8% of them replied that modern education helps them to get the social status. Other 4% responded that secular education is necessary for a Muslim woman to make good mothers. Although the Muslim women have achieved the height of higher education both in professional and non-professional areas, they are still lagging behind to get a space in public due to constraints from religion, family and community. They could not use the benefits of education beyond the boundary of self, family and community. So it is a fact that the increased rate of women education does not lead Muslim community towards development or modernity as vividly.

4.2.2 Parental Attitude towards Modern Education

The Kerala Model of Development is a mix of social, political, cultural, educational and economic experiences. It is a unique pattern of social and economic changes that have taken place in Kerala as result of various developmental initiatives; governmental and non-governmental based on public politics and public action. The significant achievements in the social indicators such as education and health acted as the

foundational capabilities of Kerala's human development achievements (Dreze and Sen 1998; Govindan 2000). Historically the state has been quite different from rest of the country concerning women's development and the inter-state comparisons show that women from Kerala have performed better as scholars pointed out above. Consequently, Kerala has often been referred as the "land of women"⁵². Keeping these views in mind the researcher intends to understand the parental reflections on education through the assessment of students' responses. Interestingly, the results shows an extremely different pattern of opinion against the celebrated development model of Kerala.

Table-4.4-Parental expectations over children's' education (in percentage)

Gendered expectations	Job	Attaining degree	Status symbol	Obtaining knowledge	Educated mother	Good proposal	Total
Male	92	0	2	6	0	0	100
Female	37	17	7	6	22	11	100

Analyzing the responses of participants, the study found that 92% of their parents are much concerned about their son's job, which is minimal when considering that of daughters. Naturally, it shows the preferences of parents towards boys' education, expecting returns only from them. As against the developmental model of Kerala, the study strengthens the general view of Indian society that men are patrons of the entire family. It is also interesting to note that the educated Muslim women in Kerala are neither encouraged to work nor earn, according to their wish, by their family. But at the same time other communities, especially Christian communities, encourage women to work and the number of Malayalee Christian women in nursing profession is symbolic of the power and empowerment of the Christian women in Kerala.

Zachariah and et. al (2000: 58-65) discusses the status of women and migration among various communities in the Kerala. He says that the percentage of female migrants from Christian community comprises half of the total migrant women population. Notably, half of the total migrants belong to Muslim community but the number of Muslim women migrants are below 5%. It is observed that Christians

⁵² Women in Kerala, unlike women of other states in India enjoy high literacy, health, social status and human development index. The unique development of the state is always referred as model of development at the national and international level. However, scholars have widely used the term 'land of women' to highlight the gender paradox of the Kerala model of development. See K Saradamoni (1980, 1994), J Devika (2006).

sacrifice their family and personal interests to attain good education and job unlike any other communities in Kerala. The number of Christian women in the private sector is higher than any other communities and the unemployment rate is significantly lower among Christians. The trend is evident, which is easy to analyze by looking at the matrimonial sites of the Christian community. They search for marriage proposals on the basis of their education and profession rather other factors. But among Muslims, as discussed above, young women in the professional courses do not pursue their careers due to various reasons. There is a constructed ‘ideal image of women’⁵³ which prescribes women to be meant only for family matters and are discouraged from doing any other duties. Endorsing this perception, one participant from PSMO College who belongs to *Jamaat* family background shared her experience.

Generally, my parents believe that my brother will take care of them in future and as a girl, I will go to husband’s home after marriage following the traditions of the community. These perceptions encourage my parents to educate my brother more than educating me and my sisters.

Another respondent shared that

My parents always discourage me from studying by saying that “whatever we spend on girl’s higher education, it is neither going to benefit our family nor bride groom’s family since most of the girls will be engaged only with family affairs after marriage”

(Interview with Aathifa, who is pursuing 3rd year BA Economics at PSMO College belongs to a *Mujahid* family).

As shown in the above table (4.4), 17% of the women respondents reflect their parents consider attaining a degree as the only aim and meaning of education. Another 7% said they find education only as a means to maintain the status symbol of their family. 11% of the respondents stated that education would help a girl to get good marriage proposals and hence their parents prefer them to be educated. Among the respondents, only six percent said that their family finds education as a way of attaining knowledge and enhancing developments both in private and public space as against the 70% of the students which is reflected in the first chart. Another 22% opined that the education could prepare a girl to become a better mother, which is the stereotypical view of education within a patriarchal society. One of the *Jamaat* leaders expressed his anxiety over the absence of women in professions in a personal conversation.

Today most of the girls preferably want to go either for medical or engineering courses and many of them attained this achievement. Among these,

⁵³ The word ‘ideal image of women’ is taken from Lina Fruzzetti (2013). *When Marriages go Astrays: Choices made, Choices Challenged*. Orient Blackswan.

approximately 40% of girls who completed MBBS and 60% who completed engineering are not working, especially in the age group of 25-35. Their absence in the areas of employment is mainly due to their family responsibilities as well as the discouragement from their husbands. It is a significant loss to the community and society.

(Sheikh Muhammed Karakkunnu, Assit. Ameer of *Jamaat-e- Islami* Kerala).

The present study found that the expectations of Muslim families are grounded in gender values in terms of education and employment. Even in the 21st century woman's education is not linked to her career and it is expected merely to enhance her role as a mother in the family. At the same time, men's role and education are largely centered on expectations over job and thereby family security.

4.2.3 Parental Preferences over Education

Along with various other factors, gender plays a crucial role in decision making regarding subject and career choices. The different forms of gender bias are clearly evident in the context of Muslim women in Kerala. In the current study the women respondents were asked to reflect upon the treatment of their family on gender relations and career preferences. The main intention is to understand the role of gender difference in mediating the choices of children within the family.

Table-4. 5-Parental preferences over Selection of Courses

Gender and preferences	Frequency	Percentage
More preference to brother	104	87
No preference	12	10
Equal preference	4	3
Total	100	100

Here 87% of the respondents shared their experiences that parents are highly gender biased in taking decisions regarding their daughter's selection of courses or subjects. Parents are more concerned and interested in their son's choices of education than daughters'. It is significant to understand that the differential gender role has a big effect on the selection of subject and jobs available. Class and social status of the family doesn't play into the field of decision making concerning women.

Yes, my parents had encouraged my brother to do engineering course in a self-financing institute which demands huge fees. At the same time, I was forced to choose humanities stream although my passion was to become an engineer. It was very difficult for me to convince my parents about my preferences of studies.

(Personal Interview with Fasna from Farook College who is pursuing Final year BA Sociology from a *Sunni* background family).

Another student responded felt that

My parents always respect the choices of my brother and discourage my priorities concerning options in educational sector. I wanted to study Bachelor of Computer Applications after plus two. I tried to convince my parents about my interest. They forced me to opt Malayalam literature for my further studies. (Interview with Afifa who is doing Masters in Malayalam literature from a *Mujahid* family background).

Only 13% told that they do not feel any partiality from their parents and said that they are getting equal importance as brothers. Through their constant struggle, many girls have succeeded in their attempt to convince their parents about the importance of education and career preferences on par with their brothers.

The study largely supports the similar argument forwarded by many scholars (Mukopadhyay and Seymour 1994; Gautam 2015) in the context of Muslim women in Kerala. They argue that while selecting the institute for the higher education for women, the family and parents are mainly concerned about ‘female chastity’⁵⁴ which constraints the educational choices of the daughter while still can fulfill the higher educational aspirations and ambitions of the son. It is evident from the above field experiences and examples that parents give more priorities for the fulfilment of boys’ choices than the girls’.

4.2.4 Cultural Economy of Education

It is imperative to understand the culpability of culture and economy which motivate and determine the educational choices of girls among Muslims in Kerala. Major chunk of the participants are first generation learners in the colleges. Many of their parent’s lacks basic education and some of them had to discontinue their schooling halfway due to social and economic reasons. A minute faction of them could finish their schooling and very few could complete their higher education to work in different professions such as teachers, lawyers and medical practitioners. However, surprisingly the respondents said that these uneducated parents and those who had to discontinue schooling are the real motivating force behind their daughters’ education. For them,

⁵⁴ The term Chastity means sexual purity which is often attached with female sexuality or sexual abstinence especially before marriage and outside the marriage institution.

education is the lost property and it is their dream to make their children capable of attaining it. Interestingly, they are ready to face any difficulties to fulfill the dream.

Table-4.6-Education and encouraging factors

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Parents	61	51
Father	9	8
Mother	6	5
Relatives	17	14
Teachers	17	14
Personal interest	5	4
Husband	5	4
Total	120	100

In the study, 64% of students responded felt that parents (parents, father and mother) are the real motivating forces behind their education. Out of these, 8% prioritize father while 5% prioritize mother as their motivating factor. For them, mother's support is important in order to fight with various socio- religious factors in completing their education, another 14% answered that teachers motivate them than anyone else and these teachers and books are their motivating factors. In many cases 14% of the respondents are supported by their educated relatives or the family members and though 20% of the total respondents are married only three percentage are supported by their husbands to continue their studies. Nearly 5% of the respondents shared their personal experiences, struggles and aspirations to acquire job for their self-reliance which can be ensured only through education.

I belong to a socially and economically backward family. Being a small-scale vendor, my father is facing financial difficulties to educate my sisters and me. But still they urge us to study further and attain a job.
(Interview with Shareefa, who is pursuing MA History at Farook College, belongs to *Sunni* family).

Zaina who pursues M.sc at Farook College belongs to *Jamaat* family responded that,

My parents are of the view that their children should not lack in opportunities for a better living out of education which they have had missed in their age.

In this case, although the parents are uneducated they could realize the value of education and job opportunities available to an educated individual from their lived experiences; and hence they encourage their children to acquire better education. Many respondents personally shared that education is a lost dream of their parents and educating their children reflects their desire for the lost dream.

Other than supporting economically, the uneducated parents are unable to guide their children in their capacity to suggest fruitful courses and best colleges to fulfill their aspirations. The general apprehension is that the science subjects can quickly open up job opportunities than social sciences which demand more investment of time to get employed. On the other, upper-middle-class parents prefer to send their children to professional courses such as law, medicine and engineering, not only for their employment and social mobility but also due to the status it symbolizes.

Similarly, class differences also play a significant role in choosing courses for their children. The study found that while people who belong to lower economic classes aspire to get employed out of education, people from economically well-off families mostly expect a degree. As Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986: 51) says, beyond economic factors, cultural habitus and dispositions inherited from the family fundamentally play an important role in the schooling success of their child. He argued that “it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital”. Bourdieu’s (1986) main argument is that the parental cultural capital⁵⁵ provides children with the symbolic power that enables them to master the cultural codes of high levels of education. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital deals with the importance of socialization into cultured activities like art, classical music, theatre and reading literature. For example, the parents who read frequently will impart that habit and environment to their children. The children from lower socio-economic backgrounds have to face their parental cultural capital as disadvantage as it is not given from the family.

One respondent expressed her aspiration to continue her study due to the following reasons.

I have often seen my mother and aunts who hardly get any chance to express their opinions at home because of their poor educational background. I do not want to end up my life also like them. So I challenged the situation with my strong determination to pursue my career aspirations. Education will help the

⁵⁵According to Bourdieu’s theory of ‘cultural capital’, the economic obstacles are not sufficient to explain the disparities in the educational attainment of the children from different social classes. He says, “beyond the economic factors, cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family fundamentally have important roles in the school success of a child. Cultural capital is the vehicle through which background inequalities are translated in to differential academic rewards and which in turn lead to unequal social and economic rewards and thereby maintaining and legitimizing the process”. For more, see John Katsillis and Richard Rubinson 1990.

women to improve their position in the family and society. It can bring equality in their relationships and give recognition to their identity. (Interview with Shereena Banu, who is pursuing M.sc Mathematics at PSMO College and belongs to *Mujahid* background family).

When it comes to the ‘student wives’ groups, very few are encouraged by the husband and his family, to continue their education after marriage; if at all, only as a status symbol. It is worth to note that if someone gets married during halfway of their education, their dream to continue higher education is significantly limited. However, when compared to the past, the present study found that few married women do continue studies after marriage or after few years of their marriage or even after motherhood. Among these respondents, many of their husbands are working in Gulf countries and prefer to continue their studies with different courses such as fashion designing and food technology. Unlike the regular students who are being examined here, the distance education programmes and part-time degree courses help the women to achieve their dreams even after a long gap in their studies. The above examples show the increasing aspirations of the Muslim community and women towards higher education. The study observed that the “educated ancestry” (Solomon 1987) plays a crucial role in educating a girl. Women of an educated family have easier access to pursue her higher education than others. In these cases, parents are confident to send their children to the institutions where their elder daughters have either studied or studying.

4.2.5 Women Education and Practice of Dowry

Modernization and women’s education could bring many changes in the practices associated with family and marriage system. In the era of globalization, even though the role of women is increasing in the market economy, the practice of dowry is still increasing in India. The payment of dowry to groom's family at the time of marriage has a long history in India and other Asian countries (Lee 1982). Traditionally dowry system was practiced only amongst upper caste Hindus, but today the exchange of gifts and ornaments has become an institutionalized custom and common practice of marriage among all socio-religious communities. Dowry system among Muslims in India is an under studied area in academics.

Families practice dowry as a strategy to maintain their class status in the society. Huge amount of dowry and elaborate wedding celebrations provide a means of both demonstrating and achieving high social status in the society (Osella and Osella 2000). Some parents consider dowry payments a legitimate stepping stone to high socio-

economic status especially in hypergamous marriage and it also provide social and economic security to girl at her husband's home. Sometimes girls are forced to marry with un-matching profile because their parents cannot afford huge dowry while many parents have taken bank loans and debts to meet the marriage and dowry expenses of their daughters. Marriages are generally hypergamous and the dowry is also a vehicle by which the girl's family try to make marriage relationship with the economically better families (Kumari 1989).

Generally dowry practice has negative relation with the educational choices and aspirations of women. From the experiences of women, the study claims that the choices become more constrained and more gendered during higher education because the idea of 'marriageability' and social security become key concerns of the family. There would be many factors which indirectly influence personal decision of an individual to opt particular subjects and disciplines for higher studies such as the expectation of the parents over children's education, their attitude, educational atmosphere of the family etc (Mukopadhyay and Seymour 1994).

Mukopadhyay and Seymour (1994) focus on the impact of the patriarchal family structure and ideology on Indian women. The study argues that the nature and extend of parental involvement vary in the families but decisions taken are always gender biased.

Education appears to have become a central currency in modern economic and marital relations and in the transactions of family status. Education is not simply a means for individual economic security but it often causes profound impact on the welfare of entire natal family- its economic welfare, its ability to secure "good" marriages for family members and its overall family status (Mukopadhyay and Seymour 1994: 105-6).

The idea of marriage in India is so deeply rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality. Generally, it is considered as the duty of family to invest the money for marriage of their girl child. The current study found that in most of the cases parents whether they are economically sound or not invest for their girl child's marriage than spending on her education.

In the case of Kerala Muslims, the major share of their remittance comes from the Arabian Gulf countries and in the case of most of the families in Malabar, at least one of their family members are working in Gulf countries. It has subsequently resulted in the development of Muslim middle class in the region. Migration has immensely contributed in changing Muslim community as a whole. Miller (1992: 323-40) points

outs the effect of 'Dubai money' and how the community gained remarkable self confidence in the fields of family, religious and educational life as a result.

Muslims in Kerala usually look at Gulf as a preferred site to have a job and earn a living. Most of them are working as unskilled laborers, such as construction workers, house drivers and shop keepers, without any certified professional qualification. They spend a considerable amount of time as migrants to meet their necessities and obligations towards family despite their aspirations which are much wider than what they earn. With renewed interest in higher education, this tendency is gradually changing in the contemporary times. Muslims who migrate after completing their higher studies acquire better job prospects in the Arab counties when compared to other communities like Christians. Kerala society has failed to enhance the technical skill of workers in tune with the changing demands. Studies show that 80 percent of the total migrants didn't acquire proper training and interestingly 51 percent of these migrants belong to the Muslim community (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan 2000: 65).

Most of the Muslim families are investing major shares of their income for marriage and allied activities such gold, dress, food etc; which they consider a necessary prospect to full fill before they return home and 'settle down'. Construction of new house, education of the family members and small investment for the post migrant life also comes along with the economic responsibility of arranging the marriage of their daughters and sisters. In many ways, education is directly linked with the bargaining power in the economy of marriage and dowry. Fixing of dowry amount in the presence of clergy or the *Mahallu* Committee members was the tradition among the Muslims, mostly among *Sunni* Muslims in Kerala, till recently. However such customary practices are not widely practiced today. (Interview with a Sunni leader on 07 April 2015).

The following narratives offer the parental attitudes towards women's marriage and education. Arifa, a 19 year old B.sc zoology second year student of Farook College, who belongs to a middle class *Jamaat* family, says:

My father has been working in Gulf for more than ten years. My elder sister got married last year and my family gave some amount of dowry as a customary practice though husband's family did not demand it. Even now, my family could not recover from the debt which we spent on her marriage. Due to the financial difficulties, I am getting some time to finish my course before my marriage. But my mother has invested some amount for me in a local investment scheme run by women in the neighborhood to buy some gold for my marriage.

Badariyya (daughter of an ex-gulf member) who pursues first year engineering course in printing technology at University of Calicut, and belongs to *Sunni* family, said her inability in choosing courses of her interest:

I preferred to do Bachelor of Architect or Fashion Technology after my Higher Secondary education but I could not get admission in government quota. Then I requested my parents to arrange a paid seat through management quota⁵⁶. My father replied without any second thought that either you join for printing technology or be prepared for marriage and let your husband take the responsibility of your further studies. Ultimately he is going to get benefit out of your education. He further said whatever money I have earned is invested for your marriage and not for education.

The researches and dominant discourses on dowry in India has generally been confined to non-Muslim communities like Hindus and Christians and very little research has been undertaken on dowry among Muslims in India. Dowry among Indian Muslims has existed and continues to exist in different forms in different regions. The reflections of the above respondent's shows that the parents are not ready to spend much amount of money for their girls' education compared to boys. Interestingly, in many cases, other family members and relatives also discourage parents to spend on girls' education in the pretext that the ultimate benefit of her study is going to husband's family.

The above personal narratives imply that though their parents are never reluctant to pay money for education, they are keen to save money for their wedding. This is the common practice among middle-class Muslims in Kerala, they deposit a huge amount of money in bank or jewellery or other local investments to meet the marriage expenses. The study found that one of the main reasons for the Muslim families' reluctance to invest in girl's education is due to lack of scope for the monetary reward unlike the case of sons. As Mukopadhyay and Seymour (1994: 11-2) rightly argue, sons are considered to be structurally and economically more central than daughters to family well-being. So parents find it more reliable investing family resources for the education of sons than daughters because the returns from the investments will directly get back to the family. It was expected that the higher education, influence of western culture, urban

⁵⁶ Management quota is an option to obtain admission in renowned colleges through donations, recommendations and fees which is higher than general quota. Certain numbers of seats are reserved as management quota in every management or non-governmental educational institutions. Usually the children from high economic status avail admission in management quota by paying high donations.

life style, social mobility and social legislation would reduce the practice of dowry in the society. Contrary to this, dowry system continued to exist and ironically it, raised the age of marriage among lower and middle class families as they have to wait for a proper proposal which suit their status.

In the current study in the selected two colleges the researcher could find only 5 married women students from Hindu community and not even a single student from Christian community though they are less in number in colleges. But the practice of investing money for girls' marriage is very common among Muslim communities when compared to other communities in Kerala. It is found that dowry increases with the level of the groom's education but is unrelated to that of the bride (Munshi 2012).

It is worthy to note the Islamic practice of gifts during marriage, in which the customary practice of dowry has never been entertained. On the contrary, Islam insists the groom to give reward to his bride, which is called *Mehr*, during the occasion of marriage. Quran commands that only the wife and neither her father nor other male relatives should receive the *Mehr* from her husband (Quran: 4:4). Moreover, she has every right to demand *Mehr*⁵⁷, whatever she wishes to get from her future husband. In the recent past, the educated students demand *Mehr* in many forms other than gold unlike the general perception that *Mehr* is equivalent only to gold. Interestingly, a young Muslim woman from Kerala dared to break the conventions on *Mehr* by fighting conventions and stereotypes. She demanded 50 books from her husband as *Mehr*, opening up a new discussion on the traditional idea of *Mehr*⁵⁸. Recently, another Muslim girl asked *Mehr* in the form of money and donated the money for charity works to construct a home for a poor family⁵⁹.

Indeed there are exceptional cases against the master narratives of investing in marriage where the families see education as imperative and are ready to invest money for the same. Jaseela, BA Economics first year student who comes from a middle-class gulf based family of traditional *Sunnis* also shared her experience.

⁵⁷ In Islamic system of marriage, mehr is a mandatory payment in the form of money or possessions paid or promised to pay by the groom at the time of marriage. The Muslim woman has the right to ask for her mehr from her proposed husband according to her wish and mehr is her property according to Islamic jurisprudence. For details, see Engineer 1994.

⁵⁸ Indian Express 29th October 2016, accessed on 12th March 2017; shiawaves.com 15th August 2016, accessed on 10th December 2017.

⁵⁹ Media One 22nd February 2017, accessed on 10th December 2017.

When I was in 10th class, my parents have invested nearly ten lakh rupees in jewellery in our town to purchase gold for my marriage. Those days the gold rate was increasing day by day. They were waiting for me to cross 18 years to arrange my wedding and even started searching proposals. However, they never refused to spend money to meet my educational expenses and provided me with all available material facilities for my studies such as public tuition, money for an educational trip etc.

Dr. Najeeba who belongs to an upper middle class traditional *Sunni* family shared her experience which challenges the conventional assumptions on *Sunnis*.

My aspiration was to become a doctor, though I was not a studious girl during my School days. After completing higher secondary, I told my father that I want to go for medical entrance coaching. He provided me with the best coaching centre available in Kerala. Since I couldn't crack seat in the merit quota, my father was ready to pay a high amount of fees in management quota despite the resistance from my entire family. The family insisted my dad to find some good marriage proposals keeping in mind the increasing amount of dowry day by day. Only because of my father I could survive the crisis. Today I have completed MBBS and planning to go for MD. But I am euphoric these days that the girls of my family are referring me as a role model to fight for their education.

Najeeba's experiences bring out new and different dimensions. Her middle-class status enabled her to continue her study despite all hindrance from the part of the family. It is a fact that middle-class families encourage their daughters to study and the number of women who attain the professional degree has increased rapidly. Najeeba's narration also immensely help to deconstruct the stereotypes that the *Sunnis* are very traditional and adamant towards modern educational system due to their religious orthodoxy, economic hardship and antagonism with colonial modernity. When lower class people tended to resist colonialism and its cultural aspects, including modern education, middle class (progressive groups) tended to maintain status quo and get benefits of colonial modernity (Punathil 2013). However such a binary of modern and traditional existed, in course of time *Sunnis* overcame these socio, economic and political hardships and engaged with the modern educations very positively.

4.3 Muslim Women and Religious Education

Madrassa system is considered as the vehicle of religious education among Muslims in the world which systematically shapes the Islamic identity of the community. As Clifford Geertz (1971) pointed out, Madrassa is the 'master institution' of Muslim society. There were many studies on Madrasas in North India during colonial and post-colonial period such as *Darul Uloom Deoband*, *Nadvatul Uloom*, etc. Other than focusing on Islamic learning, *Deoband* was an active player in the national movement.

Scholars point out that the religious and political strategies adopted by these institutions helped to shape a Muslim political identity in India. The emergence of these Madrasas also helped the Islamic reformism in British India and later. (Metcalf 2014; Alam 2011).

In Kerala, Muslim community has a great history of religious education from *Othupalli*⁶⁰ to Madrasa. Largely, they were antithetical to secular-modern education and followed traditional education system for obtaining knowledge. However, with advancement of time and jurisprudential development, secular education also got equal importance on par with religious education. As a part of the study, the researcher tried to understand the attitude and perception of the Muslim community towards madrasa education, with a focus on the gender perspective. The study states that people accept the importance of religious education, concerning the moral development of the community.

Here, the researcher's intention is to understand the role of religion in women's education within the larger framework of Islam and Muslim society. According to Prophet Muhammad, knowledge is important equally for both men and women and he advised the followers to go to any corner of the world to acquire knowledge even to China (China was considered the educational center mainly in medicine and literature in those days). Prophet said, on another occasion, education is a lost property of the believer and he asked the followers to regain that property (Vadinoor 1999:48). The reformism among the Muslims in Kerala was the subsequent result of Islamic reformism that took place in the global level in the late ninetieth and early twentieth century. Lindberg (2009:104) argues that madrasas in Kerala have become progressive by combining teaching of religious values with modern, technological education and it is the result of the reform movements among Muslims in Kerala.

Religion played a significant role in the making of individual identity in India/Kerala particularly after the advent of colonialism. Kerala is one of the religious and caste-influenced communities where reform began with the capacities of community reformers and later helped to spread all over the state. In Kerala, the Malayalee Muslim students attend both religious (madrasa) and secular schools without

⁶⁰ Muslim education was channeled through *Othupally* in the early times and it was meant for elementary religious education. *Othupalli* is a single teacher oriented primary school for Quran and Arabic learning and there were students from all age groups including boys and girls from the Muslim community. Girls attended the morning session of the *Othupalli* and the teaching method was mainly oral without teaching materials.

any exception and residential madras systems are not popular as in North India. Similarly, the Islamic schools and colleges frequently work in collaboration with government schools making Kerala's Islamic education unique (Sikand 2005). The curriculum of the madrasas appears to be less progressive on certain gender-related issues.

Some of the respondents say that religious education is completely a male-centric activity where they interpret the Quran and Hadith in men's favor to negate the role of women in community and society. They trained, especially in Sunni madrasas, the women to become homemakers, obey their fathers and husbands and maintain a chaste appearance. Sikand (2005) argues that other madrasas especially the *Mujahidin* madrasas have taken a different view about the status of girls and encourage them to pursue higher education to serve the society, through engaging in social work and helping the poor. *Mujahidin* are trained to think of themselves as good citizens who will promote the participation of women in all fields of society (Cited in Lindberg 2009:104-5). Most of the respondents in this study have completed their primary or secondary educations in Madrasas and are practicing religion in everyday life.

4.3.1 Meaning of Madrasa/Religious Education

It is a fact that the Muslims give equal importance for religious and secular educations in Kerala. Most of the parents prefer to enroll their children firstly to Madrasa before beginning the schooling, which have religious ethos of starting their education with religious learning. The religious educational system in Kerala can be categorized into three types such as *Othupalli*, *Dars* and Madrasas. *Othupalli* was located adjacent to Masjid which gives basic Islamic education to children, both boys and girls, of that area. *Dars* (higher religious learning) system was allowed only for boys, and the classes usually will be located in the top floor of Masjid and the education was free of cost (Mohammed 2007).

As discussed in the previous chapter (chapter-3), the introduction of Madrasa education was revolutionary in the history of Kerala Muslims. The first effort to introduce the modern Madrasa system in Kerala was done by the reformist leader, Chalilakath Kunjahammed Haji (1856-1919). Presently, there are many Islamic higher educational institutions such as Darul Huda Islamic University (DHIU)⁶¹, which have

⁶¹ DHIU was established as an Islamic Academy in 1986 under Samastha and formally upgraded to a university in May 2009 under the vision of Dr. U. Bapputty Haji (d. 2003). The philosophy upheld by

a mixed curriculum of religious and secular education even in higher levels and then the Coordination of Islamic Colleges (CIC)⁶² etc. Both of these institutions have their own separate girls' colleges where the teachers are exclusively women. The female institutions under coordination of Islamic colleges are called *Wafiyya* and college under DHIU is known as Fathima Zahra Islamic Women's College. The main aim of these institutions is to promote modern education and also encourage Islamic higher learning for girls.

Table-4.7-Meaning of religious education

Meaning of religious education	Frequency	Percentage
Religion and morality	63	52.5
Traditional values	44	36.5
Mutual respect	3	2.5
Not attended	3	2.5
No opinion	7	5.83
Total	120	100

When the questions were asked about the meaning of Madrasa education the responses were very different. Around 52% respondents answered that the Madrasa education mainly provides religious socialization such as ethics, moral duties and values to follow in life. It mainly consists of instructions to follow in the day to day life through moral behavior, ideal dressing and better manners while interacting with others. They also say that it will not help them to get any job in the modern world other than teaching in religious institution. Interestingly, 37% of the respondents criticized the religious educational system and method. They argue that it strictly restricts their role

DHIU was a dichotomous view towards education as both religious and secular. The aim of the institution is to provide academic excellence of highest standards to develop new trends and ideas to keep with the modernization of knowledge. Dr. Bahauddeen Muhammad Nadwi is the Vice- Chancellor of the University. Many of the students from DHIU are pursuing r higher studies in many state and central institutions such as Universities, IIMs, IITs and abroad as well. Presently DHIU has 24 affiliated colleges inside and outside the state and one Women's college as well. It also runs many other institutions such as Center for Public Education and Training which is formed in 2012 to plan, design and implement various educational and training programs aimed at different groups of public. The fatwa council is an exclusive platform of scholars formed to deal with all kinds of newly emerging issues from the Islamic perspective (Official website of DHIU). For more details refer to chapter 3.

⁶² Coordination of Islamic Colleges (CIC) is popularly known as Wafiy Colleges. CIC is an academic governing body functioning as an Islamic University in Kerala. Established in 2000 and registered with the Government of Kerala (Numb: 379/04), the CIC looks to achieve a closer integration of various streams of knowledge bridging the gap and realizing the synergy between religious and secular studies. Currently headquartered in Markazu Tharbiyyathil Islamiyya Educational Campus in the district of Malappuram, the CIC (Coordination of Islamic Colleges) has 60 Islamic, Arts and Science Colleges affiliated to it (Official website of CIC). Its syllabus includes both religious and secular, arts and science subjects. Similar to DHIU, many of CIC students are doing their higher studies in different parts of the world.

in the society and family and it does not entertain their presence in public. They also complain that there are many courageous women leaders in the history of Islam but their stories are never discussed in the books and classrooms to encourage the women. The curriculum and syllabus of the madrasas are prepared by men according to their interests and convenience. It is interesting to note the views of Mernissi (1975), a Moroccan Islamic feminist, who rightly says that the holy texts of Islam have been misinterpreted by men, especially by the clergy to serve their own interests.

Only 2% said that the religious education teaches everyone to respect each other and to respect women. Remaining 6% did not respond to this question. In the current study, 92% of respondents have completed madrasa education up to seventh class in which they learned the basic principles of Islam. Remaining respondents could not attend madrasa due to personal reasons such as overlapping timing with School. To cope up with it, their parents have arranged a religious teacher at home according to their individual economic capacity.

Analysis of respondents' answers clearly shows that the Madrasa system primarily focuses on cultivating an ethical self; unfortunately where women's presence is restricted in many ways. Islamic feminists are critical of the subordinated legal and social status afforded to women in Islamic nations and communities. But they deny the fact that Islam itself is responsible for this state of affairs. They argue that Islam has historically been interpreted in the patriarchal or misogynistic ways where men misinterpret *Quran* and *Sharia* in wrong directions for their interests. Such an understanding also lead to a view women as the cultural and practical bearers of religious or community identities through their 'symbolic presentations' such as dress code.

4.3.2 Intra- Community Perspective on Women Education

The varying degree of Muslim socio-political presence in Kerala's public sphere, much consistently, owe to their socio-religious organizations and the political party Muslim League. Considerable economic benefits achieved through Gulf migration also have a commentable role. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Kerala Muslim, during post-1950s is its revivalist trends and the organizational vitality. Many Muslim organizations are working under the banner of the *Sunnis*, *Mujahids* and the *Jamaath-e-Islami*, each combining 'religious' tasks of affirming the faith with 'secular' functions of lobbying for the Muslim cause (Samad 1998; Mujeeb 2008). The healthy community

competitions among them in the fields of educational and allied activities promoted the large scale community development.

When the questions are asked about the role of different intra- community groups such as *Sunnis*, *Mujahids*, *Jamaath-e-Islami* etc in promoting Muslim women's education and higher education for their own sects, there are common notions that *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups are in better positions in their public presence, through educational, political and other community activities. As discussed in Chapter-3, there are some historical and political reasons behind calling these groups as reformistic. But the field data shows a relatively equal position among the educational and public presence of the community. Osella and Osella (2007c) in her study on "Islamism and social reform in Kerala", found that usually *Mujahid* women get more freedom than that of *Sunnis*. Such an argument arises from the relative amount of quality education and accessibility to Masjid. On the other, *Sunni* women are not allowed to enter Masjid but allowed entry to certain religious sermons such as *Dikr-Dua*, *Moulids* and *Nerchas* (common religious and *Shrine* festivals). It is very common to see lots of women participating in these kinds of programmes and they have special arrangements for this. However, inter alia, they are not entertained in public stages, organizational bodies, masjids etc, by *Sunnis* (Osella and Osella 2007c). Interestingly, the present study shows a different picture looking at major shifts both in the attitudes and practices.

Table-4.8-Status of women in intra community group

Level of Women status	Frequency	percentage
Equal status	44	36
More status for educated women	5	4
Living context based	3	3
Better status for <i>Mujahid</i> and <i>Jamaat</i>	39	33
Muslim women are backward	2	2
No answer	27	22
Total	120	100

When the conventional notions about the status of Muslim women in different groups are put forward in front of the respondents, 36% of the respondents said that all women enjoy equal freedom within the Muslim community irrespective of their ideological differences. According to them, the success is based on the use of opportunities in their life. But surprisingly another 33% opined that women from

Mujahid and *Jamaat* group are doing better compared to the traditional *Sunni* group. Another 4% said that those who get educated, irrespective of their identities enjoy more opportunities and public presence. Another small group of 3% said that it is their social situation which defines their chances than any other factors. Another 22% of the respondents felt it as a complicated question to answer or judge Muslim women within different categories.

Indeed *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups have better access to public also because they were very active in the fields of reformism from the beginning of the twentieth century. But when the generation shifts happened among the *Sunnis* especially after the Gulf migration, they are also seen in the forefront of education similar to other groups although lag behind in terms of the public participation. Both *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* have their own women's wings, *Mujahid Girls Movement (MGM)* and *Girls Islamic Organization (GIO)* which help them to garner more opportunities in the public.

4.3.3 Women Education: Cultural and Identity Differences

This part of the study mainly focuses on the cultural practices and dress code of women in terms of their religious identity. One of the major issues around the question of identity of Indian Muslims is about being identified as 'a Muslim' in public spaces through their appearance and dressing such as *burqa*, *purdah*, beard, *topi* etc. These are considered as the markers of Muslim identity in the public (Sachar report 2006:12). Lazreg (2009: 1) discusses how Muslim women are portrayed in literature as well as in media. She argues that Muslim women have been represented as oppressed by the religion and Islam is typically understood as fundamentally inimical to women's social progress. The media and the West represent Muslims as 'other' and Muslim women as markers of inferior and oppressed symbols; Muslim women with *hijab* (the Islamic headscarf) or *burqa* are often represented as the most vulnerable victims of discrimination in terms of physical and verbal assault. The respondents of the current study challenge the negative and stereotypical image of Muslim women as passive victims represented in popular media. They claim their agencies by arguing that Muslim Women are active agents in initiating positive social changes.

Bullock (2002) in her study *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* argues that the orientalist perceive Islam only through the prism of religion where Islam and Muslims are purposefully projected as inferior and backwards and Islamic ideology as inherently against

liberation and progress. She vehemently criticizes western feminists for their insensible arguments that “veil equals oppression”. Bullock (2002) further argues that the wearing of the *hijab* is a rebellious act against the consumer-capitalist culture and materialism in the twenty-first century. For her, hijab is an “empowering tool of resistance,” against the increased sexualization and objectification of women and she finds hijab as advocating the sense of self-worth that should not be addressed on physical appearance. Most of the Western feminist discourses erase the historical and geographical specificity of women’s lives in the third world countries, branding them as second class citizen. As Lazreg (2009:1) argues, veil has traditionally been discussed as the most tangible sign of women’s oppression. Shamshad Hussain (2009: 22-4) also points out that ‘Muslim women’ are presented merely as a subject without agency in the process of defining themselves. In the larger manifestation, every media and public space portray Muslim women as being oppressed by Islamic patriarchy; veiled, secluded, subjugated and in need of rescue. Lughod (2002) in her study, *Do Muslim Women Really Need Savings*, strongly criticizes the secular liberals for their stereotyped confession against the reductive problematization and interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom. The following table indicates the intra-cultural differences of Muslim women and their responses on cultural practices and dress code in relation to other religious groups.

Table-4.9-Intra religious and cultural differences

Cultural differences	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	69	58
Disagree	36	30
No answer	14	12
Total	120	100

Among the respondents, 58% said that there are religious and cultural differences in the society which they experience in different ways on their life. However, interestingly, no one agreed that cultural differences or religious identity play any hindering role in achieving their success in educational and allied fields. Out of this, 30 % said that there are no cultural differences in relation to other religious groups and remaining 11% did not respond to the question.

Many experiences reveal the subordinate position of women imposed by family and community compared to their male siblings. Respondents strongly argued that

Muslim women should participate and fight for a gender neutral society by keeping their religious identity and culture.

My younger brother enjoys more freedom than me and my sister at home. He is free to go anywhere anytime with his friends or alone. But parents never allow me to go outside without friends, preferably girls and that too is not permitted after six in the evening. They do not encourage friendship with boys beyond a certain limit. If I question or argue on this, they say that this not our religious culture and you must obey.

(Fasna, pursuing research at Calicut University, belongs to *Sunni* family).

Interestingly many students responded differently on the questions of their dress code, particularly on *Hijab* and *Purdha*. At present *Purdah* seems to be a common dress among a significant number of Muslim women of Kerala especially after the Gulf migration and now it has become a part of their religious tradition as well. Most of the college going Muslim girls also wears *hijab* and some of them wear *purdha* claiming it as a symbol freedom and marker of their tradition rather than symbol of oppression.

Table-4.10-Dress preference of Muslim women in the college

Dress Code	Normal Dress without <i>Hijab</i>	<i>Purdah</i>	Normal Dress with <i>Hijab</i>
Parents	20%	10%	70%
Girls	35%	2%	63%

The fashion industry in Kerala also encouraged and accepted the gulf culture, especially the dress culture and *purdah* and *niqabs* got advertised through Muslim-owned publications. The number of women who wear *purdha* has increased from 3.5 percent to 32.5 percent during 1990 to 2002 (Abdelhalim 2013). Muslim men are also inspired by the dominant culture in the Gulf countries and bring Islamic garments particularly *purdha* for their wives, sisters and other female family members back home. Today, the Muslim women in Malabar cover themselves with a full *purdha* and a *hijab* that completely cover their bodies and heads without covering face (Lindberg 2009:103). These dressing styles and fashion came to Kerala especially after gulf migration.

When the questions are asked about the cultural differences of Muslim women compared to women in other religions, respondents apparently agreed on the differences in many ways within the educational institutions and outside. As table (4.10) indicates the cultural differences of Muslim women and their responses on cultural practices and dress code in relation to other religious groups.

In the survey, 70% of parents prefer their daughters to wear *hijab* and 10% insist for *Purdha*. Remaining 20% of the respondents observe normal dress code as other communities. Among the girls, 63% prefer *hijab* as regular dress code of Muslims against 35% who stand for normal dress code whereas only 2% find *Purdha* as their regular dress code. The above description thus challenges the stereotypes that govern the way Muslim identities are presented where *hijab* has been projected as the symbol of oppression imposed by religion and its practices. Largely, *hijab* is considered as the normal dress code of Muslim girls both by parents and students subverting the stereotypical assumption around the same. Many of them perceive it as a fashionable dress code like other dress styles. Their experience claims that they feel comfortable and secure in *hijab*, especially in public places howsoever others interpret it as a form of oppression. On the other hand those who use *purdha* have their own explanations to justify.

I wear Purda only to travel to my college. My college is 12 km away from home. I remove purdah once I reach the college. I feel comfortable and secure in Purdah especially while travelling in public transport. But I am really sad that my friends interpret my dressing in a very negative light.

(Shamna, English graduate student from a middle-class *Mujahid* family).

Another respondent expressed that

For me Purdha gives a secure feeling especially while travelling. In my family, we wear colorful dresses according to the occasions like marriage, family get together etc.

(Sajida, MA History student at Farook College, coming from Sunni family).

Rather than looking at her interests and capacity to choose her dressing, 'others' mark her as traditional or backward by stereotyping her cultural or religious identity. Lindberg (2009:102) explains that some middle- and upper-class Mappila women prefer a secluded way of life. They cover themselves entirely whenever they go out of their home but not primarily as a mark of religious identity but as a symbol of their elevated class status.

There are multiple perspectives on *hijab* and *veil* and the findings of the study challenge the dominant conceptions on *hijab*. The study found that the act of wearing *hijab* can be an extension of liberation and exerting her right to body and choices, which can also give a sense of liberation from western culture. Dr. Atheela Abdulla IAS, sub-collector of Malappuram district, probably the first IAS officer of the country to wear *hijab* reflects the increasing importance of *hijab* among the educated Muslim girls of Kerala.

4.4 Education, Family and Marriage

One of the major difficulties for women to attain higher education is the constraints from family and related struggles. Regardless of difference in religious background, many communities face various common problems such as financial constraints, low standard of living, parental objection in achieving education etc. According to Hasan and Menon (2004), parental opposition is the chief obstacle in continuing women's education than financial constraints among Hindus and Muslims. Today society recognizes the importance of women education, occupation, and financial independence to a great extent. However, girls are trained from very early age to be an ideal women and marriage is being taught as the ultimate aim than education (Fruzzetti 2013:46). In the case of North India, economic hardship is one of the main reasons for the educational backwardness of the community along with other reasons. Literature proves that the success of socio-educational development in Kerala is due to many factors and the intense, healthy competitions of the community is one of the leading factors in the educational success of Muslims (Miller 1992; Dreze and Sen 1998; Muhammed 2007).

4.4.1 Struggles for Education

The economic status of the family has an important role in determining the educational opportunities available to an individual. The study shows that the parents are struggling to generate money for their children's education and most of them are working in Gulf countries with small scale jobs. The study also discusses the issues of parents in educating their daughters and various family and marriage related constraints through the self-assessment of students. Indeed economic factor plays a crucial role against the education of girls along with other difficulties in terms of religion and family.

Table-4.11-Education and family struggle

Family struggle	Frequency	Percentage
Economic	52	43
Traditional Practices	11	9
Proximity of colleges	6	5
No struggle	51	43
Total	120	100

The study reports that 43% of the families are facing various difficulties and challenges in educating their girl child than boys mainly due to economic factors.

Shibla, pursuing MA Economics at Farook College, who belongs to a *Sunni* family, says:

“my family faces financial hardships to educate me. My father is an unskilled laborer in Gulf and unable to meet the educational and family expenses together”.

There are many workers in Gulf countries who face huge financial difficulties to meet the material needs of their families. Lack of economic resources constrains the higher educational aspiration of both boys and girls. Because of these reasons, people from the lower economic background are comparatively less in professional education. In a combined study, Hasan and Menon (2004:73) demonstrate that low socio-economic status of Muslims adversely affects women’s education and conversely a higher standard of living and husband’s education has the strongest positive effects on the higher education of the respondents. It is also important to note that the number of girl children in a family relatively reduce the chances of women’s higher educational opportunities.

Zamana, a final year B.Sc chemistry student who belongs to a middle class *Mujahid* family states that

My family faces economic hardships to send us for higher education. Also we are subjected to gossips and other challenges from our relatives and community. The community leaders always discourage my parents from educating us further.

Amina Zaif who is a BA Graduate student at Farook College, coming from *Mujahid* family responds as

“Nowadays, higher education is very costly and parents face difficulties in sending children to the reputed institutions. So they opt for a nearby average educational institution and perceive that the less we spend on education, the more they can save for our marriage.

Another 9% reported that the traditional notion like girl’s education is not as important as boy’s and stigmatization from the community, discourage the families in giving their children higher education. The proximity of colleges is one of the main reasons for 5% of the families. It is also true that the number of educational institutions are not proportionate to the student population of the region, which force them to seek distant places. But parents are not ready to send their daughters outside their locality for higher studies. One of the major issues in Malabar region is the lesser numbers of higher educational institutions compared to southern parts of Kerala. Even if students secure high marks, they have to either depend on management seats or find some other arrangements for their studies. Another 43% of the respondents shared that their

families do not face any problem to educate girls. These families are economically sound or middle class.

4.4.2 Muslim Women and the socio-cultural and Educational challenges

This study highlights many other factors that limit the choices of Muslim women in acquiring higher educations. In the context of Kerala, particularly Muslim women, they have achieved the success through constant struggles within the community and family, as discussed in Chapter-3. The material resources provided by the community in the forms of financial help, hostel facilities, the facility to follow religious practices and non-material support in the form security also strengthen their success. It is also significant to note that many Muslim women in Kerala succeeded due to the strong support of their family by breaking traditional norms and practices. However, the participants responded both positively and negatively on the question of the challenges they face in achieving her higher education. Contrary to their parental perspectives where they stresses more on economy, students' responses show marriage as the major challenge in continuing their higher educations.

Table-4.12-Problems in education

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Economic	6	5
Community	11	9
Marriage	50	42
Proximity of colleges	4	3
No issues	49	41
Total	120	100

The above table (table-4.12) indicates that 42% of respondents consider marriage and related issues as the obstacles they face in pursuing higher studies. Another 9% reported that various forms of discouragements both from the family and community affect their aspirations for higher education. Contrary to parent's reflections, just 4% said economic hardship obstruct their aspiration of higher education. Another 49% opined that they do not face any issues in continuing higher education. Here it is interesting to note that 51% of the students are facing problems in pursuing higher education due to different reasons such as marriage, economic constraints, difficulties in terms of community and proximity of colleges.

The study found that marriage plays a major hindrance than any other factors. It clearly shows the community's perspective on education which works against the progress of women even today. Many respondents shared that their families are

discouraged by the community leaders in sending them for higher studies. Sometimes, the community leaders are more concerned about the girl under their *Mahallu*⁶³ who has reached the age of marriage. Respondents say that the gossips from the community emotionally disturb their parents. It is a fact that many *Mahallu* committees help the families to arrange marriage of their daughters socially and economically but it is very hard to find any economic assistance being offered towards women's education.

Hidha, a third year PG student from a *Sunni* lower middle-class family emotionally says that,

Whenever we use to go out for a family function, the relatives will always ask when we are getting married, they never ask about our education or career choices. Such questions from family and community disappoint me and also put pressures on my parents. So I try to avoid attending family functions by saying some excuses.

Salmeera, a Chemistry PG student from *Jamaat* Family also expresses similar concern,

In Hindu and Christian community, people ask about courses or employment opportunities when they meet girls in their family. But in ours, people give utmost importance to marriage alone.

The respondents' experiences signify that they face various challenges from relatives and people outside the family than their parents. The current study found compared to other communities, early marriages are more common among Muslim community in Kerala. The current study also found that the meaning of education is different according to gender in the dominant and popular imagination. The degree of 'marriageability' varies and is widely dependent on the economic status of the family. Marriage and family commitments still remain to be the defining factors that condition Muslim women's life. The study argues that the meaning of education among Muslim women is limited to 'marriageability' and constructing well educated mothers unlike any other communities.

4.4.3 Education and Marital Status

Family and marriage are considered as universal institutions. Every community practices its own traditional rules and regulations on marriages with respect to their religion, caste and class status. The Indian society still follows the age old customs and traditions and reproduces the dominant social structure strictly through these

⁶³ Mahallu is an Islamic neighbourhood surrounding a main mosque which facilitates religious living. They often engage in conflict resolution and organize events aiming at the moral well-being of believers under its jurisdiction.

institutions of family and marriage. It performs the necessary functions of the social systems such as socialization, social recognition and security, economic and emotional support, etc. The customs and norms associated with marriage and family are clear manifestations of the particular cultural practices that are being followed; this in turn makes marriage the primary concern of every parent, especially in the case of girls.

As mentioned above, numbers of Muslim women in Kerala who are subjected to early marriages are more compared to other communities such as Christians and Hindus, though the trend is significantly changing. Socio-cultural and the dominant role of religion, patriarchal nature of Muslim society and economic factors are equally important actors in setting the trends. The early marriages lead to inequality and discrimination in the social lives of women in most of the cases. The focus of the study is also to understand how the marriages adversely affect Muslim women in attaining higher education in Kerala.

As observed in the study the students who belong to the ‘student wives’ status groups are more in Kerala especially among Muslim communities. In the current study, 80% of the student respondents are single and remaining 20% got married in the midst of their studies. But interestingly they continue higher studies, which highlight the trend among Muslim women in Kerala, of continuing education even after marriage. Notably, among this 80%, more than 75% of the students get marriage proposals during their study and all of them succeed in convincing their families to continue education, either with the help of teachers, family or friends. This significant increase in higher education shows the transformation stages of Muslims in Kerala on the attitude of women education which was considered as *Haram* due to various social and political reasons (Miller 1992; Samad 1998; Muhammed 2007).

Families often play distinct role in the decision making regarding their children, particularly in the case of daughters. Early marriage takes away many openings from women’s lives such as education, public participation and role in decision making. In the case of married women, the choice to continue education depends on the interest and the attitude of the husband’s family. The following narrative of Nazriya, 24 years old from a *Sunni* family illustrates the experience of a medical doctor.

I got married when I was studying in eleventh class because of the pressure from my parents. After completing my course, my husband inspired me to prepare for medical entrance and I got through, although he is just a graduate. Today I am working as a physician. Marriage never hindered my education. I want to

add that my husband is merely a graduate despite his extensive supports on my higher studies.

Another respondent narrates:

I got married when I was in the final year of graduation. During my first year in PG, I was forced to take a break due to pregnancy. Once my daughter was born, I decided to finish my PG. But juggling between career and childcare was a great challenge in front of me. Due to the extended support from my husband to convince his family, I was permitted to leave husband's home and live with my parents to continue my study.

(Minha, Master student, middle-class family and a followers of *Jamaat* ideology).

The experiences of these women have to be examined to understand the changing patterns of the community's perception on women. The lived experiences of above respondents prove the fact that marriage between the studies is not a major hindrance in pursuing their studies further. In many cases, girls demand husbands even before the wedding that they must be allowed to continue their education after marriage. However, there are also many different stories against the aforementioned narratives in which the promise of husband and his family during the time of marriage are broken.

The respondents shed light on the experiences of their friends who dropped out of education after marriages, due to the challenges from academics and family obligations. Very few respondents, below 5 percent, opinioned confidently that education and marriage can be managed together. Others were arguing that women naturally lose their interest in continuing study after marriage due to many personal and family pressures. The study also found that most of the girls compromise their career choices for family life and to meet their duties as a wife, mother and daughter in law.

4.4.4 Marriage Age

Marriage is considered as the legal union between a man and a woman with new established social roles within a family. The age and marriage are interrelated across the eastern and western societies. Especially in Asian countries age of marriage has a direct bearing on educational advancement of women and its direct and indirect advantages. However due to poverty and social and cultural background, parents opt child marriage in rural India irrespective of caste, tribe and religion. Marriage age of Muslim women has been a controversial topic in the society, whether it is in liberal or conservative and Western or Islamic countries. Constitutionally, child marriages are treated as cognizable and non-bailable offence and it comes under the violation of human rights as they often occur without the consent of young girl. In the case of

Muslims, there is no particular marriage age for girl or boy prescribed in *Sharia* law but suggested to be after the period of puberty. Islamic countries do not follow a consistent age of marriage and it varies according to the countries. Considering this, though Muslim feminist argued globally for the *Ijtihad* (interpretive reasoning) in Islamic jurisprudence, it has not been practiced much in application of Islamic law (Wadud 1992; Mernissi 1991; Lughod 2002)

Since independence, Muslim Personal Laws in India has been facing serious questions and challenges mainly in terms of marriage and inheritance. Because of these overwhelming master narratives of Muslim question in India, many important issues related to education, employment and mobility did not get much attention. According to Hasan and Menon (2004), there is a general tendency to fix Islam and personal law as either the oppressor or savior and most of them attribute women's low status to the problems of personal laws. The defining factors, which are popularly believed, are the male privilege of unilateral divorce, high fertility, the ubiquitous veil and conformity to the strict confines of womanhood within fundamentalist religious code. Moreover, they argue that the focus in these studies and debates is not on women per se.

Kerala is regarded as a progressive place of women development and gender sensitivity in many studies. This is attributed to Kerala Model of Development, which represented a pattern of paradox against the conventional notions of the economic model of development. It saw the active participation of Government as well as non-governmental organizations through "public action" or "public politics" (Jeffrey 2003; Dreze and Sen 1998). With a focus on the women's issues across the nation, the study takes into account the problems associated with Muslim women's marriage age and education and how these factors challenge her aspiration to achieve higher education in the context of Kerala. The following table represents the opinion of married and unmarried respondents on marriage age.

Table-4. 13-Marriage age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	6	5
19-21	46	38
22-24	40	33
25-27	10	8
28-30	1	.83
After studies	17	14
Total	120	100

The study proves that 38% of the student respondents prefer that the best age for girls' marriage is between 19-21 years. They expect that it may help them to complete their graduations at least and the minimum age of 20 years is necessary for the mental and physical development of a girl. Another 33% opine that marriage should be between the ages of 22-24 years. They argue that the decision on marriage should be left to girls than anyone else. They also point that they would be able to finish their post-graduation which may help them to get better jobs to achieve self-reliance between the prescribed ages. Interestingly, another 14% opined that marriage should be after completing the education. Their bold decisions challenge the stereotypes on lack of agential roles in their marriage and education. One of the students of this age group surprisingly responds that

I will never agree with my parents' decision of marriage in between my studies because many of my friends, who married early, are unhappy and facing so many hardships to continue their education. I will try to convince my parents with my capacity and with the help of my teachers. I shall make them convince about the problems my married friends face to continue the studies. If parents are adamant in their decisions, I will go for legal measures to safeguard my interests.

(Personal interview with Zameena, who is a graduation student, from middle-class family and a followers of Sunni ideology).

Hadiya belongs to *Mujahid* family background expressed her views as

I am doing my Graduation now and I have taken a word from my parents that I will not get married until I complete my Degree. And I need an alliance where they would allow me to continue my studies to get a good job.

The other 14% of people did not respond to these questions by stating that marriage should be decided according to the situations. Of these eight percent said that marriage should happen between the age of 25-27. One respondent added to it "We are not getting enough opportunities to achieve our aim or career and we do not have freedom to choose our life partner according to our interest". Remaining 5% supported the marriage age of below 18 years. The marriages between these ages are quite high among the girls who do not prefer higher education. Marriage at younger age largely leads to social and psychological consequences such as educational dropout, lower educational standard, unemployment and financial dependence. Also, early marriages may invite many problems in family life such as domestic violence, divorce, etc. Civil

society is actively working in Kerala to make awareness on the issue of early marriages. *Nissa*⁶⁴, a progressive women forum is a classic example of this.

4.4.5 Marriage and Decision Making of Muslim Women

The study significantly proves the fact that most of the decisions on marriage are mainly taken by the family with or without the consent of girls. The girls do not have any option to choose her future partner in most of the cases. Following graph illustrates the dominant role of parents on girls' marriage.

Table-4.14-Decision making role in marriage

Decision making power	Frequency	Percentage
Family	95	79
Myself	12	10
Relatives	13	11
Total	120	100

Here only 10% of the respondents are enjoying the freedom to take decisions on their marriages. On the other, in the case of 90%, parents and relatives are the decision makers without even the consent of their daughters. There are many factors such as religious, community and family related issues that adversely influence the decision-making process.

My family and relatives arranged my marriage without my consent. As a 19-year-old girl, I was interested to complete graduation, but my parents pressurized and convinced me by talking about the economic and family status of my husband.

(Personal interview with Adeeba who is pursuing final year degree from a Mujahid family).

Another respondent expressed that,

My elder brother registered my name in a matrimonial site without informing me. He is less educated than me. He told my parents about the chances of having good proposal than seeking the help of mediators.

(Personal interview with Ameena who is pursuing PG, from Sunni background family).

The above interviews highlight the conditions of educated Muslim women in

⁶⁴ Nissa is a Muslim women organization under the leadership of Zuhra. It gives voice to Muslim women who are silenced by age-old practices like polygamy and indiscriminate talaq. As a full-fledged activist, Zuhara has come a long way and her indomitable spirit and courage bear witness to a life of struggle, threat and challenges.

the decision-making on their affairs. In the case of the second interviewee, the brother takes decisions for educated sister without her consent. As Shamshad Hussain (2009: 24) clearly points out, the 'Muslim women' were merely a subject without agency in the process of defining themselves. The visible manifestation of this 'subjugation' of womanhood is vastly reflected in all walks of women life such as family, society etc.

Recently one issue was reported from Manjeri (a town in Malappuram district) that the parents arranged marriage for their 10th class daughter soon after her exams, though the girl tried to convince her parents in many ways. Finally, the girl reported to the police station that her parents are arranging marriage without her consent and warned that she would commit suicide if authorities do not take actions and cancel that marriage. While enquiring on the case, the authorities could also find evidences of ten illegal marriages which were going to happen in the same locality⁶⁵. There are Muslim girls who have written plus two public exams on the day of their marriage. Some Muslim girls were pregnant while writing their public exams of tenth and plus two classes (auto ethnographic account⁶⁶).

According to 2011 Census figures, there are 23,183 married girls below the age of 15 years in the State. The Census data also shows that around 10,175 children were born to the 'child brides' in the State. The Malappuram district, the largest Muslim populated district in the state is accounted for the highest percentage (3,615) of married girls below the age of 15 followed by Pathanamthitta. According to the Muslim Educational Society study report, nearly 99% of the students say 'no' towards lower marriage age very strictly. Out of the 5,139 Muslim girls who took part in the survey from 16 institutions, everyone except 67 maintained that the marriage age should be at least 18 years⁶⁷.

In 2013, Government of Kerala issued a controversial circular by reducing the age of woman's marriage from eighteen to sixteen allegedly on the appeal of Samastha and Muslim League. The main intention of the circular was to give legal protection to families those got married before the legal age of eighteen and twenty-one. This decision from the state authority invited a wide range of criticism within and outside of the community including Nissa, Haritha and Girls Islamic Organizations (GIO) along

⁶⁵ Mathrubhumi online news 8th March 2017, accessed on 25th October 2017.

⁶⁶ Auto ethnography is a tool in qualitative research in which author uses self-reflection and personal experiences and connects the autobiographical accounts to wider cultural, political, social meanings and understandings.

⁶⁷ New Indian Express 30th September 2013, accessed on 25th October 2017.

with Muslim Educational Society (MES). State Women Commission also vehemently criticized the state government's move. After the intense criticism from all over the state, the government withdrew the controversial circular in the month of June 2013 but issued a fresh circular after few days directing local bodies to register all marriages solemnized till that day as per the Kerala Registration of Marriages (Common) Rules 2008⁶⁸.

4.4.6 Post Marital Challenges and Education

Women's education is recognized as a stepping stone for women's social mobility, empowerment and development of the community and society. But still, Muslim women experience multiple challenges on their way towards the fulfillment of educational and career ambitions. In such situations, fulfilling the role of a wife is a challenging task for the Indian women, who are pursuing educational aspirations. The 'student-wife' category faces many internal and external problems in continuing their education along with other family obligations.

The women studying after her marriage is a common phenomenon among the Muslims, particularly in Malabar region of Kerala. It is significant to understand the manifest and latent outcomes of marriage, women's education and career. The study finds the recent trend among the youth to delay their marriage and parenthood in order to accomplish higher education and professional growth. It also highlights the rate of married women who are unsuccessful in continuing higher education along with family responsibilities. Hence, the current study argues that the family obligations play a fundamental role in women's career decisions in post-marital life. One of the respondents shares experiences of her struggle in pre and post marital life.

The situation was tough when I wanted to continue my studies after marriage. Before the wedding, my responsibility was only to study and my parents were also so supportive. After marriage, I have to meet dual responsibilities, both of my study and household work, even during the exams.

(Interview with Shareefa, post graduate student of PSMO College, coming from Jamaat family).

A graduate student Zaida coming from a Sunni family responds that;

We will not get same support for education from the in-laws that we enjoyed before the marriage. Since my husband works abroad, I have got the permission to continue my studies. But at the same time I was forced to take many leaves and had to miss exams for household duties as my studies was considered secondary.

⁶⁸ The Hindu 28th June 2013, accessed on 25th October 2017.

In one case, the researcher could find one graduate woman who went to the edge of divorce due to the negative attitude of the in-laws in continuing her education despite their promise before the marriage. On the one hand, the women of younger generation with emanated self-confidence are trying to challenge the system, but on the other, older generation forces them to adjust to the prevailing situations. Many women are still disappointed about their dropouts due to marriage and family life.

The researcher found that the dropout rate is higher among the graduate students than that of post-graduation. The official data of PSMO College says that only 70% of the total Muslim girls do successfully complete their graduation (based on the official record of PSMO College). The teachers say that 15% of Muslim girls are dropping out from first year and another 15% drop out in the second year. Marriage is the primary reason for a large number of dropouts.

Personal interview with PSMO college lecturer,

As a teacher, married girl students often want us to talk to their husbands and in-laws and ask them to let their studies be continued. Most of the partners are working in Gulf countries and many of them want either to take their wives abroad or to take care of his family. We tried our best to solve many issue and in some cases the husbands agreed to let their spouses finish their course.

Although the Muslim women complete education albeit fighting many struggles and challenges there is no guarantee for her employment or public participation. Women's role is conventionally set from her birth itself and her immediate identity is reduced to daughter, wife or mother. In these cases, women have to eventually encounter with many barriers within the family and society in order to fulfill her goals.

An interesting finding from the field is that women in Kerala are very much conscious about their rights and highly aspirant to achieve certain goals and are also interested in engaging with community activities. Compared to previous times, the number of Muslim girls in higher education has increased twice than Muslim boys. But the existing religious system or the patriarchal mindsets of men in Kerala limit women into narrowly defined roles considering them to be politically, socially and economically inferior.

4.5 Women Education and Social Mobility

Indeed there is a positive relationship between education and social mobility. Education gradually leads to socio, economic and cultural mobilization of any community. Alongside, there are many factors such as religion, caste, community, gender etc. that

determines social mobility both positively and negatively. It is worth to discuss Bourdieu's theory of habitus to understand the notion of social mobility.

Habitus as a system of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming (Bourdieu 1990).

It is essential for sociological analysis which is connected with the social structure of the society. Habitus is the mindset of structures which are embedded within transmitted practices of an individual or collective consciousness. It provides a lens to understand the practices and knowledge within the social setting in which they are generated. Habitus consists of our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, interests and our understanding of the world around us and is created through primary socialization into the world through family, culture and the milieu of education (Bourdieu 1986; Costa and Murphy 2015; Bathmaker et al. 2016).

According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus is the product of history which produces individual and collective practices in accordance with scheme generated by history. Habitus ensures the active presence of the past experiences reflected in each organism in the form of schemes of perceptions, thought and actions that tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time. Thus habitus encapsulates social action through dispositions and can be broadly explained as the evolving process through which justify individuals act, think, social positions, perceive and approach the world and their role in it (Costa and Murphy 2015). The study tries to analyze the role of the social structures and how do the external environmental factors influence the internal actors in the process of social mobilizations.

A number of studies on social mobility in India predominantly focus on the pattern of caste and religion. M. N. Srinivas (1977) argues that women mobility has been increased after the independence of the country due to women's participation in the freedom struggle to an extent. There was a considerable participation of women in the field of politics; in which the highest political office, even prime minister's post, has been held by a woman for nearly eleven years and there were two women chief ministers. There are ministers in almost every State and Central government and there are women in parliament and state legislative assemblies. Migration to urban areas, education and political participation etc. enabled them to assume new responsibilities.

According to Srinivas, mobility is mainly due to the process of Sanskritization⁶⁹ and westernization in which lower caste/class attains the upward mobility by imitating ways of upper caste/class.

Srinivas' (1977) contends that women's political mobility were too high in the first three decades of independence. Nevertheless, it was just a peripheral narration on women's political mobility. Even now women's mobilizations in politics and other areas are significantly less in all the states including Kerala. Caste, religion, gender etc. play dominant roles in Indian society where women's identity is considered as secondary. Literatures often argue that the exclusion and the subjugation of Indian women in general and Muslim women in particular is a common phenomenon in social, political and cultural spheres of everyday life even in the modern sophisticated world. The literatures mainly deal with the question of subordination of Muslim women in political and intellectual engagements and their lack of opportunities, resources and services etc. (Minault 1998; Hasan and Menon 2004; Kirmani 2013).

In this context, the study discusses the socio, economic and political mobility of Muslim women in relation to the educational standards. The proposed study argues that Muslim women's mobility is still a challenging task due to many reasons including religion, community and family.

Sen (2002: 197) noted that "to achieve as much as Kerala has done for a population of its size is no mean record in world history." Among the several states in India, Kerala represents an excellent position as per several indicators of social and human development index. The success of the development model is not only the state government initiative programmes but also the social actions by the members of the public -both collaborative and adversarial (Oommen 2008:5; Isaac and Tharakan 1995; Osella and Osella 2000; Franke and Chasin 1996, 1998).

The studies on social mobility assume the upward mobility of community and societies which is a paradigm shift from the old to new or 'modern' set up. Osella and Osella (2000) clearly points out how the primordial caste (lower) identity challenged the existing stereotypes in the context of Ezhavas⁷⁰ in Kerala through social, economic

⁶⁹ The concept Sanskritisation is developed by famous Indian sociologist MN Srinivas. Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher caste or more often twice-born caste. For more details refer to MN Srinivas 1952, 1962, 1966.

⁷⁰ Ezhavas are caste of relatively low ranking and an ex-untouchable community in the southern Indian state, Kerala. They were politically and economically weak, stigmatized as 'toddy tappers and 'devil dancers and considered as untouchable by upper caste Hindus. Presently they have improved their social

and political mobility in terms of education, employment and political representation. This study makes an attempt to problematize the existing studies on Kerala model of Development which considers Kerala as a 'women's space' through the 'public action' and 'public politics' (Jeffrey 2003; Sen 2002).

Thus the researcher attempts to understand the role of higher education and its ironical role in the production of inequalities among women in Kerala in general and Muslim women in particular. The researcher focuses on the socio-political and economic mobility of Muslim women analyzing their public presence and inter-generational mobility in terms of education and employment. The views of students studying in graduation and post-graduation along with parents were analyzed on diverse institutional practices that enable the entry of women into higher educational institutions.

4.5.1 Muslim Women Students Organizations and Public Engagements

As discussed in the previous chapters, Muslim women in Kerala have better socio-economic status compared to any other Muslim women in India. In the past one decade, there is a rapid increase in the performance of Muslim women in higher education. The current study argues that these educational outcomes of Muslim women could not translate into their social and economic mobility. Muslim women are marginalized and subjugated in the mainstream socio-political spheres.

In the case of general women, Devika (2006) points out that the women's space and agency was conceived within the dominant view of community and social reformists which have direct correlation with the notion of Kerala modernity. Reformism and its values of modernity consider 'formal education' as the major determinant for the empowerment of women in the contemporary Kerala society (Hussain 2010). Other than focusing on formal education, the entry of Muslim women into liberal spaces is always a contested topic in Kerala due to various predicaments associated with religion and community. In this context, for having a coherent understanding of Muslim women's education and public entry, it is imperative to

status by accumulating economic, symbolic and cultural capital through employment, religion, politics, migration, marriage, education and have obtained social mobility. See '*Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*' by Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella 2001.

understand the public activities of Muslim women students' organizations in Kerala in association with their male counterparts.

The following table clearly explains the paradoxes of Kerala Model in relation to women organizations and their public participation in Kerala. Here public participation refers the social, political and cultural activism.

Table- 4.15-Student organizations and political engagements

Level of political engagements	Frequency	Percentage
Active engagement	29	24
No engagement	36	30
Under male control	42	35
No answer	13	11
Total	120	100

The above table (table -4.15) clearly indicates the lesser participation of women in public activities along with the dominant nature of parental and community organizations. Here 35% reported that the student organizations are strictly controlled by the community leaders which in turn lead to the religious restrictions over women wing. Interestingly another 30% said that student organizations do not actively engage in public issues due to various factors such as family, community etc. If we take these two opinions together, the study proves that 65% of the respondents approve their absolute absence in public engagements like political participation, employment, decision making power. The current study found that the public participation of women organizations is only 24% and remaining 11% do not have any specific positive answer to these questions.

The following experiences from the field explicitly indicate the nature of family and religion.

I am not allowed to participate in any public programmes on my capacity than attending the programs in my college as they believe it is against our religion and culture. At the same time, my brother is allowed to participate in any activities of political parties and sports and cultural clubs located in my area, even though my father is an active worker of the political party and member of Mahallu committee. This is not only the experiences of mine but of many of my friends and classmates.

(Interview with Rashida who is from *Sunni* family, pursuing final year BA at PSMO College).

Najma, 19 year old student at Farook College belongs to *Mujahid* family shared that,

I was interested in being part of Oppana (Mappila women art form) team of my college which was going to participate in B Zone arts fest to be held in my College. In a casual talk I spoke to my family that I am going to perform in the coming fest. Suddenly my father replied that he has sent me to College to study and not to perform in public. I never expected such a reaction from him and I left my dream to perform.

Najiya, 20 year old student at Farook College belongs to *Jamaat* family expressed that,

When I finished my higher secondary, it was my dream to join National Cadet Corps (NCC) as my brother was part of it. But when I joined for graduation, I was not permitted to join NCC for the reason that I have to attend many programmes and camps outside the College.

These different narratives visibly present the attitude of family and community towards Muslim women irrespective of whether they are educated or not. Women are not permitted to take part in cultural, sports and even in educational related activities in public because of religion, family status and the notion of security. One of the main reasons for such restriction is because the family is answerable to the community and society about girls' public engagements. These precarious conditions restrict their public engagement to a large extent. It clearly shows the paradoxes of much celebrated Kerala model which assumes education is one of the main indicators of social mobility. The current study observed that the absence of social mobility and the denial of public space is also evident in the case of other communities though less in intensity. Only few student participants responded positively that they are permitted to participate in the academic and non-academic activities without any religious or family restrictions. In this case, most of these students are from the second generation educated family and in many cases their parents are working as teachers, government professional or as business persons.

4.5.2 Students Organizational Activities on Campus

Student activism has been a vital part of the colonial and post-colonial Indian society. It was considered to be one of the driving forces of the national independence movement. The youth movements, the group of graduated students from Aligarh Muslim University also contributed much to the nationalist struggle against British (Robinson 1975; Metcalf 2014). Student organizations also play crucial role in post-independence India in formulating governmental policies for student's favor through representations and many forms of political struggles (Jayaram 1979).

In Kerala, student organizations have been actively participating in the day to day academic and political engagement of the state for long. There are many student organizations such as SFI (Students Federation of India), KSU (Kerala Students Union), MSF (Muslim Students Federation), SIO (Students Islamic Organization), MSM (Mujahid Students Movement) and ABVP (Akhila Bharathiya Vidhyarthi Parishath), with different political ideologies associated with their parental political parties⁷¹.

Interestingly, among these various student groups, Muslims also keep separate students organizations for boys and girls under the same parental organization even in secular educational institutions including ‘mathrukam’, the women’s wing of SFI. There are three major Muslim students’ organizations working in Kerala, viz a viz MSF, SIO and CFI. Haritha, the women’s wing of MSF was formed in 2011, Girls Islamic Organization (GIO) in 1984, and Women’s Front of India and *Mujahid* Girls Movement (MGM) in 1987 respectively (Miller 1992; Samad 1998). Among them, MSM and MGM are not so active in the campuses compared to other two organizations. *Sunni* section do not have any separate women organization and their students’ organization, SKSSF’s (Samastha Kerala *Sunni* Students Federation) activities are mainly concentrated in *Mahallu* and Madrasas, and not in secular educational institutions. Haritha began its activities very recently in campuses and the members of the organization are mainly from the background of *Sunnis*, *Mujahid* and other religious groups. The present study shows the organizational presence and activities of these three girls’ student organizations in the campuses of Kerala.

Table-4.16-Women organizations and activities in campus

Women Organizations	Frequency	Percentage
Haritha	68	57
GIO	35	29
MGM	14	12
No opinion	3	2
Total	120	100

⁷¹ SFI, the Student Federation of India has been a leading student organization in the state being ideologically associated with the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) and the ruling party of Kerala. KSU, Kerala Student Union is associated with the Indian National Congress (INC). MSF, Muslim Student Federation is associated with Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and SIO, Student Islamic Organization is associated with Jamaat- e- Islami, a religious organization. MSM, Mujahid Student Movement is working under Mujahid group but not active in campuses. SKSSF, Samastha Kerala Sunni Students Federation, concentrate their activities mostly in *Mahallu* and *Madrasas*. Campus Front of India (CFI) is a student wing of Popular Front of India but does not have much support in campuses. And Akhil Barathiya Vidhyarthi Parishat (ABVP) is associated with the politics of RSS.

The study aimed to understand the political and academic activities of girls' student organizations within the campus. With 57%, Haritha actively engages in the campus politics compared to other two organizations. The other two organizations (GIO 29%) and (MGM 12%) are mainly working under the control of their parental religious organizations and their counter student wings which limit their activities in public. On the other hand, Haritha is working under the political organization Muslim League without any direct religious control.

As a student organization, Haritha is actively working for student's rights mainly focusing on girls' issues. Unlike GIO and MGM, Haritha has a broader political outlook which includes all the sections of the society. As an organization we have every right to take our political decisions which are never controlled by our parental organizations. Throughout these years we have organized many protests on different issues, camps, colloquiums and many district conferences. There is a common notion that both in India and Kerala politics is meant only for men. We break these stereotypes. It is the first time in the sixty years of history; women are elected as office bearers of MSF. Now it is our turn and we expect many positive changes.

(Interview with Fathima Thahliya, National Secretary and State President of Haritha).

Haritha, has organized many programs inside and outside the campus and has been very active both in Farook and PSMO Colleges. On World Women's Day, 8th March 2017, Haritha has organized a protest in Calicut University with the slogan "brave to say NO" against the governmental/police negligence upon the increased attacks on women in Kerala. They had organized many camps in which one camp is named as "SHE" for the socio-political empowerment of women, which was held on 21, 22 June 2014 and they have conducted many district conferences in Calicut and Malappuram districts. However Haritha has never been allowed to contest any of their candidates in the major posts of President, Secretary or University Union Council (UUC) in the College Union election for last six years due to the dominant nature of MSF. Haritha president accept the fact that "they have faced some restrictions from family and community while engaging with public politics actively" (Interview with Fathima Thahaliya).

GIO functions on the grounds of Islam which they interpret according to their parental organization's methodology. GIO is working with the goal of attaining social justice and prosperity without any discrimination on the grounds of religion and caste. They try to find solution to the problems of girls in the socio- political, moral and cultural domains to regain dignity. As its official version, being women organization,

GIO has to make its members realize their space in families as well as society (Official website of GIO).

GIO cadres are actively engaged in both academic and public activities than any other women groups working in Kerala. One of the main reasons for this active engagement is the help and support from the parental organization, Jamaat- e-Islami. We had conducted one International Muslim Women Colloquium on different academic topics in which thousands of people, academicians and non-academicians participated. I am very proud of being president of GIO and indeed this is the success of our collective. (Interview with Ruksana former president of GIO Kerala)⁷².

GIO is also working under the control of their parental organization as well as their male counterpart SIO. Similar to the case of Haritha, GIO also is marginally represented in campus political activities where SIO dominates. Sometimes GIO works as supporting system of SIO for their political presence/representation in colleges. But beyond the campus life, they are more active as SIO in conducting camps, conferences or taking the issues related to girls' subjugation and oppression. Recently GIO organized one campaign named "WE campaign" with the slogan of "demand justice, reclaim dignity, safe public space is our right" against the increasing gender bias.

MGM works not exactly as a students' wing but as a girls' organization for both students and non-students and for the protection of larger Muslim women interests unlike Haritha and GIO. It is less active in campus politics and more confined to their parental organization.

MGM has been working as subordinate to Mujahid Movement. The activities of MGM are more affiliated to religious activities than active student politics, to concentrate on ethical and moral obligations which lack in the present day context. Or it works as a subsystem to help the activities of parental organizations. We conduct seminar, relief and other charitable activities for the larger interests of the society. (Interview with active worker of MGM at Farook College).

It is interesting to note that reformism was first adopted by *Mujahids* in the context of Kerala inspired by global Islamic scholars who stood for modern education and women emancipation as discussed in the third chapter. But still they are unable to mobilize women unlike other two organizations, by focusing exclusively on the

⁷² International Women Colloquium (IWC) was held on 25 and 26th of February at Calicut in Kerala. It was fully controlled by GIO. The two days Colloquium discussed various academic topics such as epistemology, tradition, question of authority in Islam, Muslimah theology and gender hermeneutics of Islam, identity and representation of Muslim women, Muslim women lives and biographies, Muslim gender politics: de-colonial approaches, campus politics and Muslim women engagements etc. (IWC 2017: Event Brochure).

structural frames of religion. Other than focusing on formal education, *Mujahid* movement has failed to address the larger social mobility of the women.

The mobility of Muslim women's organizations in Kerala is still a controversial topic and appears as a distant dream. The modern secular educational spaces have marked a binary between boys' and girls' which treat the liberal space as exclusively male in terms of politics, decision-making process, etc.

4.5.3 Inter Religious Status and Socio-Economic Mobility

As discussed, other communities especially Christian women enjoy more social and economic mobility with in Kerala and outside compared to Muslim communities. The current study is trying to trace the responses of young Muslim girls on the degree of freedom and mobility they enjoy compared to non-Muslim women in Kerala.

There is a general tendency to perceive the Muslim women as oppressed by the patriarchal nature of religion which negates choices compared to women in other religious groups. It is visible that not only Islam but all the religions are patriarchal to a great extent, in their practice. Engineer (1994: 297) has argued that not only the religion but the inherent nature of society and men are the real culprits of women's inferior status which relegated them to a secondary position. Here the study indicates the freedom which Muslim women enjoy in relation to other religious groups.

Table-4.17-Inter religious status of women

Religion and women status	Frequency	Percentage
Other religious women enjoy more status	52	43
Equal status	52	43
Context based/living situation	14	12
No answer	2	2
Total	120	100

In the above table (4.17), 43% say that women from other religious communities such as Hindus and Christians enjoy more freedom than Muslims in terms of higher education, employment, political engagements and marriage. Mostly all respondents were referring to the opportunities in relation to Christian women. Surprisingly, 43% in the above graph shows that they do not feel that others are doing better than Muslim women. They argued that all women in India face oppression because of its patriarchal structure and religious ideologies which systematically curtail the rights of women. Another 12% said that the mobilization of women depends on the context in which they

are habituated. They argue that women from upper middle class families with more social and cultural capital enjoy better mobility in the society.

I am doing final year degree in Sociology. As part of our course, we have to participate in many social service programs such as camps, study tours etc. So whenever I talk to my parents that I have to attend either a program or study tour my parents get annoyed. They always discourage me from taking part in the programmes outside classroom. I have seen some of my friends also facing similar problems. At the same time, my friends from other religious groups enjoy better freedom than us. Their parents are ready to send them anywhere for education-related activities.

(Personal interview with Rifana, a middle class graduate student from a Mujahid family).

Zachariah and et al (2000:58-65) highlights the status of women migration in different communities in Kerala. The paper says that the highest proportion of female immigrants is from Syrian Christians (27%) and along with Latin Christians, the Christian community constitute nearly half of the migrant women. However, the Muslim women contribute less than 5% to the migrant women though half of the total migrants are Muslims. The respondents point out how the Christian girls sacrifice their family duties and responsibilities to attain good education and employment.

The number of engineers and doctors graduated from the Muslim community particularly women has increased significantly. But it is interesting to note that the employment generated in these areas is very less despite providing mere degrees. The Muslim community has better networks in Arabian and Gulf countries than any other communities but these facilities are not channelized towards women's employment and economic mobility. Hence, Muslim women are always dependent on her family, which restrict their roles within the walls of their house.

Few of the respondents agree with the general notion that Muslim women are oppressed and backward compared to other religious groups. As a religion, Islam places women better than any other religion but the interpreters of religion define Islam as highly gender biased which restrict women. As discussed in this chapter the meaning and expectations of parents in educating their son and daughter are extremely opposite. It is also interesting to note that the educated Muslim women in Kerala are not encouraged to work or earn on their capacity by their family. In the case of educated *Mujahids*, Osella and Osella (2007c) says that they stress that women's employment should not be actively encouraged. *Mujahids* generally expect women with high school matriculation plus basic religious (*madrassa*) qualifications as the prop for the family as a whole by fostering religious morality and promoting education of the children.

The findings undoubtedly strengthen the general notions around the commonality of Indian society where men are considered as the real investors and supporters of family. Despite their role as ideal women in the family, woman's socio, political and economic mobility is not a matter of concern to the male-centric society. The study found that although women are educated, their decision making power over selecting courses, marriages, etc. are highly constrained by family and community.

The existing literatures (Miller 1992; Samad 1998; Osella and Osella 2007c) on Kerala Muslims have categorized *Sunnis* as traditional where *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups as highly progressive according to their historical engagements with modern secular education and women education. Interestingly, the study found that in the ground level all three organizations share the same attitude by not giving any space to them based on their male-centric religious interpretations in terms of women's self-respect and their engagement in public. As an educated Muslim woman in Kerala, she has to confront with the traditional religious structures and family in terms of education, marriage and public appearance. Their struggles for liberation and self-respect within male-dominated religious structures demand gender equality and gender justice.

Summary

An interesting finding from the study is that women in Kerala are very conscious about their rights; they are highly aspirant about their goals and are also interested to engage in community activities. Even though the number of Muslim girls are double than Muslim boys in most of the educational institutions, the existing religious system or the patriarchal mindsets of the Muslims in Kerala has limited women into a narrowly defined roles conforming them to be politically, socially and economically inferior. Muslim girls are not even encouraged by their family for higher education on par with their male siblings and even in personal choices like selecting bride, age of marriage and selecting courses are biased. But tremendous changes have been occurred in the realm of Muslim women's education in the recent past though it has failed to channelize into employment. The next chapter is titled as 'the parental attitudes towards women education, employment and public engagements'. The chapter will analyze the experiences and challenges of Muslim parents in educating their daughters.

Chapter-5

The Parental Attitude towards Women Education, Employment and Public Engagements

Introduction

An attempt has been made to explore how far the parental attitude of the Muslim women students and the habitus of Muslim community restrict the educational capital⁷³ of young women's to enter employment and public participation. For the Muslim women, social mobility is restricted by the boundaries prescribed by the institution of family and the community. Despite the socio-economic achievements of the Kerala state through "public action and public politics" (Jeffrey 2003; Dreze and Sen 1998), the society could not fulfill its promises and has failed to transform the gender disparity in the state. In other words, the socio-economic developments have not resulted in a gender paradox⁷⁴ or balance in the society.

This chapter deals with the question of the aspirations of Muslim parents about the significance of higher education, employment, family life and public engagements of their daughter's in the context of Kerala. There has been a phenomenal increase in the enrollment of women in higher educational institutions in Kerala. The enrolment ratio of men and women in the colleges of Kerala show that the proportion of women is in fact higher than that of men particularly among the Muslim community. Also try to analyze various challenges and difficulties faced by the Muslim parents in educating their girl children. It also seeks to examine the gradual changes in the attitude of the family members towards women's education and women's public engagement in the present times where gender agency is considered as a crucial question. This chapter is

⁷³ Bourdieu explained three forms of cultural capital. They are: Embodied- cultural capital is a skill that cannot be separated from its bearer. Objectified- object themselves may function as a form of cultural capital, instruments and machines. Through the economic capital one can achieve this capital. Institutionalized- it means the certificates, credentials, educational qualifications, etc. Bourdieu described that cultural capital is different from one to another. Not only parental economic resources but parental cultural resources also have importance in the educational success of the children. Cultural capital acquired in the home and the school develop that embodied "talent" in that particular individuals. He said that school system transforms the inherited cultural capital in to the scholastic cultural capital, the latter it is pre disposed to appear as an individual achievement.

⁷⁴ As discussed in chapter-3, the term gender paradox is used to portray the contradictory image of women in contemporary Kerala. The Kerala model of development is associated with a gender paradox, but the paradox refers to notable absence and under-representation of women from public space of Kerala society such as employment, politics, religious restrictions and domestic violence, etc. For more refer to Bhasker 2000; Kodoth and Eapan 2005; Sharmila Sreekumar 2007, 2009.

divided into two sections. The first section of the chapter deals with profile of the parents who are the respondents of the study. The second part of the chapter presents the aspirations of the parents of Muslim women students over their daughters' higher education, employment and public engagement in relation to their siblings in the context of Kerala.

The subordinated position of women in public sphere and denial of their agency in the socio-political context of Muslim women in Kerala has been much discussed. One of the major criticisms levelled by Western liberal and Islamic feminists against Muslim societies is about the subordinate position of women in Islam. Hassan (1999, 2001) a leading Islamic feminist, argues against the misogynist attitude of Muslim men in interpreting the primary sources of Islamic principles, the *Quran* and the Hadith. Mernissi (1991) argues that many of the *Hadith* have been fabricated by men to suit their personal, economic and political interests.

Men have deliberately misinterpreted *Sharia*, the Islamic law, according to their convenience, completely relegating women to an inferior position. While a majority of the Islamic feminists are internal critics of Islam, and argue that Islam is not inherently anti-women but men have interpreted Islamic texts in such a way that these texts appear as misogynic. These interpreters often impose various restrictions on Muslim women, based on certain selected un-codified Hadith. The Islamic feminists attempt to reinterpret Islamic texts to ensure equal rights and citizenship for women within the Islamic structure demands critical intellectual analysis (Ahmed 1992; Wadud 2006; Hosseini 2009).

Islamic feminists have to deal with dual challenges in their fight against gender injustice. On the one hand they have to fight against traditional Islamic forces for revisiting textual interpretations for reforms and liberation of the community, on the other they have to fight against the "gendered Islamophobia" propagated by Western media and liberal feminists. The notion of gendered Islamophobia pertains to specific forms of discrimination levelled against Muslim women that proceed from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform and sustain the structural conditions of domination (Zine 2006). There have been a drastic increase in the degree of such discriminations in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror".

The ban on *hijab* (the Islamic headscarf) in French schools is another example of gendered Islamophobia operating systemically to deny young Muslim women the freedom to express their religious identification markers. The bodies of Muslim women

inscribed as ‘dangerous foreigners’ and Muslim identity signifier of the pervasive ‘Islamic threat’ (Lughod 2002; Zine 2004, 2006). The liberal feminists out rightly criticized Islam as oppressive, alleging that Islamic society is inherently male dominated, and the status and agency of women are strictly defined by the patriarchal structures of the community (Sommer and Zwemer 1907; Beauvoir 1949; Hirsi Ali 2006).

Fish (2002) in his study ‘*Islam and Authoritarianism*’ argues that Muslim countries are democratic underachievers. For him, “Muslim societies are not more prone to political violence; nor are they are secular than non-Muslim societies; and interpersonal trust is not necessarily lower in Muslim societies. However, one factor does help in explaining the democratic deficit: the subordination of women”. He further adds that the patriarchal social order in Muslim societies has an ironic character. In agreement with this argument, Norris and Inglehart (2011) point out that the modernization theory suggests that any deep-seated cultural division between Islam and the West will revolve far more strongly around social rather than political values, especially concerning the issues of sexual liberalization and gender equality.

It is quite interesting to analyze the socio-political situations the parents are habituated in order to understand the parental attitude to education and social mobility. The social and cultural capital of parents and family plays an important role in shaping the confidence levels and educational opportunities of the children. In ‘*the forms of capital*’⁷⁵ Bourdieu (1986) argues that there is a direct association between the parental cultural capital and the academic performance of children. According to him, cultural capital manifests in three forms-embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Culture manifests in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body in the *embodied* state; in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, and machines) in the *objectified* state; and in terms of educational qualifications in the *institutionalized* state. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is a major source of social inequality as in the case of economic capital-income and wealth. Cultural capital mainly consists in the form of non-economic resources, from context which the actors

⁷⁵ Pierre Bourdieu presented capital into three fundamental guises, as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu 1986: 16).

habituated, such as knowledge, skill education, which empower social mobility. Along with cultural capital, Bourdieu also identifies the importance of social capital. “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or in other words, to membership in a group” (ibid: 21). Bourdieu further points out,

the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected... social capital is never completely independent of it because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the re acknowledgment of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right (Bourdieu 1986: 21).

Social capital is a collective phenomenon. In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships such as those of neighborhood, the workplace or even kinship in the form of gifts, services, words, time, attention, care and concern. Social capital is one of the necessary conditions for the success rate of the local development, social integration, and political engagement (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu’s main argument is that parental cultural capital provides children with the symbolic power that enables them to master the cultural codes of high levels of education.

With the foregoing theoretical background, this chapter investigates the socio-cultural and educational development of Muslim mother respondents with special focus on the patterns of social mobility. Gupta (2015) in her study on the socialization of girls in the Indian context found that there are multiple factors that limit their social mobility, points out that social restrictions limits the girls’ movement in terms of space and time. The rhetoric of female body’s vulnerability is effectively used to negate their permeability of boundaries of home, neighborhood and locality. When a girl child grows up family and society limit the opportunities for her mental growth and development by invoking tradition. Once the girl reaches the age of puberty, the notion of ‘dirt’ associated with bodily processes prevent her from participating in household and religious chores.

The image of an ideal girl prevalent in any community is thus derived from various religio-cultural sources such as beliefs, texts, myths and ritualistic practices. Girls are socialized from a very early age in a way to internalize the traditional demeanour of being submissive, non-opposing and dependent on men. Acceptance of restrictions, sense of self-denial and perpetual fear or caution are some of the characteristic features that girls imbibe through their socialization. The socialization of girls has been extensively discussed in numerous studies. The common arguments of all these works are that the patrilocal family along with the community and religious identities structure the society into mutually exclusive spheres for men and women where men dominate every aspect of the social order such as education, employment, decision-making process and public participations. In short, the patriarchal society always questions the agency of women and projects her as inferior to men (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour 1994; Hasan and Menon 2004; Chanana 2007).

This chapter is divided into two sections: first section provides the profile of the respondents. The second section deals with three various themes which emerged from the field data such as gendered views on education; second examines the role of family and marriage on educational achievements and the third theme analyses the relationship between religion and public participation. The study has used mothers as the primary respondents. The researcher decided to give importance to views and experiences of mothers' as they play key role in shaping the social-cultural values and educational opportunities facilitated by the age-old traditional matrilineal system in Kerala in general and Malabar in particular. The pertinent sociological question demands a critical analysis on the Kerala Model of Development and competing ideological claims and cultural practices of globalization and urbanization on different religious and social groups of Kerala.

In this chapter the mothers' narrations, experiences and expectations are taken as the major sources of study. Study also analyses the perspective of mother respondents and expectations and experiences of the parents in educating their daughters and sons. In the context of Kerala, especially among Muslim the mothers are the driving force of the families especially in educational affairs in the absence of their men.

Section-I

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

As discussed in the fourth chapter the current study worked with college going young Muslim women students and the mother respondents whose children are studying higher education who resides at Ramanattukara and Tirurangadi Municipalities. This chapter makes an attempt to reflect upon the perceptions of mother respondents by collecting primary data from 120 respondents. One of the reasons for choosing these two areas is because these towns are known as educational hubs for Muslims in Kerala. These towns are located nearer to Farook College and PSMO College which are the major fields of the current study. First priority has been given to parents with girl children who are pursuing higher education in different professional and non-professional institutions along with their sons. The data is mainly collected using questionnaires and personal interviews.

The study includes parents from different age groups to capture wide range of opinions and perception on higher education and mobility of the Muslim women in Kerala. Most of respondents of the study are primarily belong to the age group of 30-65 years. This age group is the ideal because of corresponding relationship between the age of marriage and age of children education. The data collected from the respondents is categorized into six different age groups (30-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60). Around 36% of the respondents belong to the age group of 41-45 years and 21% of respondents are from the age group of 36-40 years. Another 18% parents belong to the age group of 46-50 years, and 11% are from the 30- 35 age group. Nearly 10% are from 51-55 years and remaining 5% between are 56 to 60 years old.

Table No-5.1-Age distribution of the respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
30-35	13	11
36-40	25	21
41-45	43	36
46-50	21	18
51-55	12	10
56-60	6	5
Total	120	100

Interestingly, 75% of the total women respondents in this study are ‘Gulf wives’⁷⁶. Among these, 82% of respondents belong to the category of homemakers. These women have to perform multiple roles at home, performing active role in the education, marriage and other related matters in the family in the absence of their male partner at home. Only 12% of the mother respondents are working in government sectors as teachers or office workers. Remaining 6% are working in private sectors or doing unskilled jobs. All the respondents live as separate families and most of the interviewees have three to five children.

The researcher has tried to include data from different ideological groups of the community such as the *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* sects to understand the intra-religious dimensions of women’s education in Kerala. In Kerala 54.73% of the residents are Hindus, 26.56% are Muslims and 18.38% are Christians. Unlike any other Indian Muslims Kerala Muslims has been divided into different sects based on certain ideologies, such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaath-e-Islami*. In Kerala among the Muslim population nearly 80% of them follow *Sunni* ideology and 15% follow *Mujahid* and remaining 5% follows *Jamaath-e-Islami* ideology. The dominant idea regarding modern education among Muslims in Kerala is that the *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups occupy relatively better position in terms of education, government and employment and presence in the public sphere. At the same time, the *Sunnis* remain follow traditional or orthodox practices which led to their relative backwardness in the field of education and other allied fields (Miller 1992; Samad 1998; Osella and Osella 2008).

Unlike in the case of the student respondents, there is a stark difference in the social composition of the parent respondents: parents from the *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* sects are in the forefront in engaging with questions of Muslim women’s education, employment and public engagement. Most of the parent respondents are from the employed category, are from these two sects. The major factor behind the relatively better educational status among these parents is that both the *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* sections grasped the opportunities that came with reformism whereas the *Sunnis* resisted the colonially-inspired reformism as part of their socio-cultural resistance. Compared to the previous generation, every section of Muslims are doing better in

⁷⁶ ‘Gulf Wives’ are married women in Kerala whose husbands work and live outside India. In the context of Kerala most of these women are wives of Kerala emigrants working in the Gulf countries. According to Zachariah and Rajan in 2011, there were about 1.1 million Gulf Wives. The proportion of Gulf wives is highest among the Muslims (24 percent). The most Muslim populated district Malappuram district have 25.8% gulf wives. For more see K. C. Zachariah S. Irudaya Rajan September 2012.

terms of women's education in the contemporary times. Interestingly, women with higher income enjoy a greater role in the decision-making within the family. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the level of mother's education positively affects the educational achievements of their children. The study also found that compared to parents who crossed the age of 50, believes in the clutches of customs and traditions with regard to the question of higher education and employment for women. However, young parents encourage their girl children to acquire higher education on par with their sons.

5.1.1 Educational Status of the Respondents

The educational level of respondents varies from primary school to post-graduation level. While there is a large number of parents who studied till high school, the number of parents with professional qualification is very less. Most of the respondents are from the category with high school education. Interestingly, there is a huge disparity between the educational qualifications of the male parents and female parents. In most of the cases, the mothers are educationally more qualified than the fathers.

Compared to the younger generation, the difference in educational qualification between the mothers and the fathers is very high among parents whose age is above 50 years. This can be explained by the fact that men could not continue their study after a point as they had to take care of the family by doing jobs, women were free from such responsibilities which enabled them to continue to pursue education.

The current study found that more than 90% of the mother respondents got married at the early age which is below 18 the legal age for women to get married in India. Those who passed the legal age without getting married have achieved better educational status, with their socio-educational status being better than those who got married before completing the age of 18. Compared to the younger generation, women from the older generation had to stop their studies before getting married. In fact many of the respondents revealed that they were forced to stop schooling due to marriage. For them, continuing education after marriage was an unimaginable possibility as the family and community discourage the idea itself.

Table No-5.2-Educational qualifications of the households (in Percentage)

Education qualification	Below high school	High school	PDC	UG	PG	Professional	Total
Father	20	41	14	14	3	7	100
Mother	14	45	18	13	4	5	100

Majority of the parents are not highly educated; most of them have not finished even their matriculation. 45% of the mother respondents had enrolled in High School, but a majority of them had to quit before completing matriculation. On the other hand, the success rate of the fathers is 41%. When we look at the possibility of completing the high school education, fathers' achievement levels are slightly lesser than that of the mothers. Most of the parent respondents belong to the age group of 36-50 years old. In the study the number of female parents with below high school education is less, 20% of the fathers have achieved better basic schooling whereas the figure is 14% in the case of mothers. In this category, majority of the parents belong to the age group of 50 years and above. Interestingly, 18% of mothers have completed pre-degree as against 15% of fathers.

Among the category of parents with graduation, the percentage is equal between men and women; fourteen percent. In terms of post-graduation, the figures are high for mothers. While 4% of the mothers hold post-graduate degrees, in the case of fathers it is 3%. In the case of professional education, the figures for men is high: which is 7% against the 5% of mothers. Most of the parents with graduate and post-graduate degrees fall under the age group of 36-40 years. It is worth pointing here that 98% of the parents studied in Malayalam medium schools and only 2% pursued their education through Arabic Colleges⁷⁷.

Education is considered as the principal agent of social mobility. Interestingly, the study found the positive trends in educational achievements of Muslims of Malabar community. It is noted that there is a positive direction both in terms of education and occupation between parents and children thus inter-generational mobility is very much visible and significant. The number of children who have achieved educational and professional qualifications are higher than their parents. Despite the fact that majority of the parents have studied only up to class 10, they encourage their children to pursue higher education. Today in most of the families, the minimum qualification of the children are graduate degree and many of them are even pursuing either post-graduation or professional education.

The study argues that there is a remarkable upward mobility in terms of educational achievement among Muslim communities, particularly in the case of

⁷⁷ Arabic colleges are Islamic religious higher education institutions in Kerala, which are usually known as Madrasa in North India. Mostly, Islamic theology and allied subjects are taught here, along with UGC approved degree courses.

women. The degree of confidence and awareness of their rights have enormously increased among the educated women when compared to their parents' generation who tend to compromise and adjust to the environment they were molded in. However, the study emphasizes the fact that social, economic and political mobility is significantly less in proportion to the educational development.

5.1.2 Economic Status of the Respondents

Compared to the Muslims in other states of India, Muslims of Kerala enjoy a better economic status, primarily because of the migration of Muslims from Kerala to the Arabian Gulf countries. A large scale migration from Kerala to the Arabian Gulf countries had started in the 1970s owing to the demand for labour with the "oil boom" in the West Asian countries. From 1990 onwards the number of Muslim migrants to the gulf countries increased. Migration to the Gulf and the resultant economic progress (locally referred to as the flow of "Dubai money") played a catalytic role in the educational development of the Muslim community in Kerala. Pointing out the importance of remittances from the Gulf for the Muslim community in Kerala, Miller (1992) said that the community gained higher level of self-confidence in the fields of family, religious and educational life.

With the inflow of money from the Gulf countries, the number of religious and educational institutions run by the Muslim community has increased in a phenomenal level. These institutions were set up under trusts and charitable societies act. At the same time, Gulf money also resulted in a large number of Muslims in the Malabar area turning into business and real estate ventures. Of late, the flourishing of software industry encouraged computer professionals from the community to migrate not just to the Gulf countries but to the U.S. and the European countries (Azeez and Begum 2009). Migration has had a deep impact on the overall socio-economic development of the Kerala society in general and the Muslim community in Particular⁷⁸.

The large scale migration to the gulf countries resulted in the emergence of a new middle class in Kerala, and this is clearly evident in the case of the Muslims of Malabar who were going through an economically adverse condition prior to migration

⁷⁸ A study conducted by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Thiruvananthapuram stresses the importance of Muslims in contributing to the overall economic development of the state. Foreign remittances to Kerala witnessed a significant increase from Rs. 13652 crores in 1998 to Rs. 71142 in 2014 (Zachariah and Rajan 2004; Zachariah Mathew and Rajan 2015).

to the gulf. As a result of the economic prosperity achieved through the gulf migration, a significant number of Muslims entered into the fields of business and trade. They also began investing a huge amount of money in the educational field. This helped in fueling the economic development of the community. The table given below indicates the economic status of the respondents of the present study.

Table-5.3-Economic status of the respondents

Economic status	Frequency	Percentage
Upper Class	1	.83
Upper middle Class	44	37
Middle Class	69	58
Lower Class	6	5
Total	120	100

In the study majority (58%) of the mother respondents belongs to the middle class with a respectable economic position. At least one of the primary kins either husband or son of these families are working abroad, although in most cases as manual labourers. However, these families are able to manage the household expenses, expenditure for education and marriage without much difficulty. They also have own house, land, vehicle etc. Around 37% of the parents fall into the category of upper middle class. They are either professionals or businessmen. Children from most of the upper middle class families are working in Gulf countries with many of them employed in reputed private firms. Unlike children from other economic categories, their children mostly pursue professional courses. 5% of the respondents face difficulties in managing their household expenses due to low income. Most of them work as unskilled labourers who are, however, very passionate about their girl children's education. Unlike in the case of the other categories, parents belonging to this category are very hopeful that acquiring education would help them to improve their economic status and ensure upward social mobility.

The study aims to examine the socio-political and educational conditions of the Muslim community in Kerala on the role religion, class, sub sect, family position in envisioning the importance of education and shaping future prospects of young Muslim girls in Kerala. The profile of the respondents help us to understand the role of socio-economic position of the families in shaping the attitude towards women's education and marriage and social mobility. It is in this context that the study seeks to explore whether the educational development of Muslim women in Kerala effectively translate into employment and participation in the public sphere. The following section discuss

the nature of relationship between gender and education from the perspective of mother respondents.

Section-II

5.2 Gender and Education

In this study, an attempt has been made by exploring the attitude of Muslim parents' particularly mothers towards women's education in the context of Kerala. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, the existing habitus of any community shapes the future of its members in every manner. In the case of the Muslim community in Kerala, religious identity is one of the major deciding factor in terms of their education, marriage and public participation. Bourdieu (1986) argues that habitus shapes the body, its gestures as well as stances; it makes the body a medium of expression for itself. Through the habitus, gender relationships constitute the body experiences, sensory perceptions and the form of the body (Gupta 2015).

Mukhopadhyay and Seymour (1994) argue that the socialization process of the community is structured within the frame of male domination. The family's approach towards education varies in the case of boy and girl children which evidently discriminatory in nature. The idea of 'marriageability' still plays a central role in women's educational choices and outcome. Chanana (2007) argues that family and educational institutions are the sites of social reproduction which reinforce the binary opposition of femininity and masculinity through socialization of boys and girls. According to Gupta (2015) gender constitutes a major site of tension between the socio-religious ethos of a community and the expectations arising out of the community's encounter with modernity. A modern democratic state expects individual citizens, both sexes, to become capable of making their own judgments by objective evidence, to be aware of rights and duties and to choose an occupation. However, in reality, society's expectations from young girls, which are based on cultural norms and religious values, impose a conflicting framework of goals and meaning. In the given context of family, community and the society as a whole, this study analyzes the parental perceptions of Muslim women's higher education in Kerala.

5.2.1 Parental Perception on Women's Higher Education

There is a growing realization among the parents in the recent past about the importance of higher education. They have become conscious of the fact that women's access to higher education and modern knowledge system would allow them to contribute to the

empowerment of community and the developmental process of the state while enabling them to understand social changes around them. However, it has to be pointed out that parents have varied aspirations and expectations with respect to their daughter higher education. The study probed the rationale behind sending their daughters to higher education; study considered acquisition of knowledge, higher chances of getting a job, advantage in the ‘marriage market’. The nature and degree of parental support to women’s education vary across the communities and families.

As suggested above, gender plays a significant role in the case of parental support to education. As discussed in the previous chapter four, parents believe that the meaning of education is different for girls and boys among the Muslims. As Francine (2007:122) points out, socialization agencies like family and school are not undoing gender, but re-doing gender through practices, and gender is created and re-created through social interactions. A significant percentage of the parents do not think of the need to provide equal opportunities for their male and female offspring’s alike. Many of them see education only as a stop-gap arrangement for women before they get married. In a country like India, educational outcomes are largely determined by parental support. Parents supporting education irrespective of gender positively influences the student’s academic achievement. In this study, many of the mothers admitted that acquiring higher education is important for women and argued that education is a powerful weapon in the society. It may however be observed that in the case of women the meaning of education is limited to acquiring a degree. The following table clearly demonstrates the parental perception of the meaning of their children’s education.

Table-5.4-Parental expectations from children education

Education	Job	Personal choice	Achieve knowledge	No answer	Marriage proposal	Total
Boy	90	6	3	1	0	100
Girl	16	7	60	4	13	100

It emerges from this study that there is a clear case of gender bias from the part of the mother over their children’s education. 90% the mothers stated that they expect better job prospects for their sons whereas only 16% mothers expect better employment opportunities for their daughters. The research found that parents with lower socio-economic status expect their children to acquire higher education and good jobs; they perceive education as a medium for socio-economic mobility. At the same time, for

parents from a better socio-economic background, girls acquiring higher education and receiving degrees is only a matter of social status. According to 60% of the respondents, the idea of higher education is to acquire knowledge. They see higher education only as a means to become a good daughter, wife and mother. Among the respondents, 13% states that, for them the most important attraction of higher education is to educate daughter for better marriage proposals. The remaining 4% respondents said that higher education is more of a question of personal choice than a question of parental attitude. Let us now look at the following responses from some of mothers to understand the structure of the Kerala Muslim society and how they express the meaning of education in the case of their children.

We have to give more importance to the higher education of boys than that of girls. If boys are not educated and do not have a good job, who will take care of their family in future? I do not have any worries about my daughter because after marriage she belongs to the husband's home and he will take care of her. He (son-in-law) is going to benefit out of her education.

(Personal interview with Shareena, who is working as a high school teacher belongs to *Mujahid* background).

If a boy gets a good job, the entire family benefits and works as security for many years. On the other hand, a girl can support her family only for a limited period of time: after that her actions will be dependent on the decisions taken by the husband and his family. She may not continue working also. So it is always better to give priority to boys' higher education.

(Personal interview with Sairabanu, follower of *Jamaat* ideology).

The parental reflection clearly shows the nature of the society in which they are formally habituated. The parents are more concerned about their son's higher education than that of the girls after a certain stage. The parental discrimination towards women's education is more visible after the higher secondary level; in most cases, the choices with respect to higher education is taken strictly under parental control. Parents do not expect any returns from the part of girls in the form of employment and salary. When the question about women taking up jobs after marriage is raised, most of the mothers responded that it is up to the husband to decide whether to let the wife take up a job or not. Let us look at a couple of responses from mothers in this regard.

My daughter has completed her bachelor's degree in Computer Science and she has cleared many job interviews after her study. But we never encouraged her to take up a job. We have fixed her marriage for next month. Now let her husband decide whether she must go for the job or not.

(Safiya, a mother respondent from a *Mujahid* family).

Noora, mother respondent from *Sunni* back ground expressed that,

It is the husband who chooses whether to send his wife for a job or not; because her security and family's well-being is a big concern. Parents cannot involve in such decisions as it is their life and they have the right to decide.

It is important to take note of two things here: one is the patrilocal system of the community which does not encourage women's employment and entertain women exercising her choice; the second point is the dominant idea that after marriage a woman belongs to her husband's home and going for a job will benefit only the husband's family. For the family's future financial security, parents depend on the earnings of their male off springs.

5.2.2 Parental Preferences over Choice of Educational Institution and Subjects

The higher educational status of children is greatly dependent upon the parental preferences and support. The gender bias and economic status of the parents are some of the major deciding factors in the selection of educational institutions and subject areas. The gendered role reflects in the socialization process of family among the Muslims of Kerala where parental treatment is extremely biased towards girls. The gender discrimination over choosing educational institutes and preferred disciplines is reflected in many studies in the context of India (Chanana 2007; Hasan and Menon 2004). The following opinion of a mother will help us to understand parental preferences in selection of educational institutions.

My children, both the boy and the girl are studying in institutions run by Muslim managements. Last year my daughter could not get a seat in the general category in a management institution as her score was low, but she got selected for the same course in the Government College a bit far from here. So we decided not to send her to college that year because it is very difficult to maintain our religious culture in a mixed atmosphere. This year, she got admission in a Muslim Management College by paying donations and we are happy to continue her study further along with her brother.

(Muneera, mother respondent who follows *Mujahid* Ideology).

The Muslim parents are very self-assured to send their children to educational institutions run by Muslim managements whereas they are a bit wary about the government colleges and colleges managed by non-Muslim managements. One of the main reasons for this is that, the parents see institutions run by Muslims as more friendly to their religious and cultural identity. For instance, wearing headscarf will not create a

problem in an institution run by Muslims. Muslim parents are worried that the non-Islamic atmosphere may disrupt the cultural practices of their children, particularly in the case of girls. The following table clearly shows the parental preferences in selecting colleges for their girl children.

Table-5.5-Parental choices in selection of educational institutions for women

Type of institution	Frequency	Percentage
Community	47	39
Government	1	.83
Other management	4	3
Course availability	32	27
Proximity of College	35	29
Any college	1	.83
Total	120	100

From the responses of 39% of mothers, it emerges that they prefer Muslim management institutions for their daughters' higher education as they enable them to follow their culture and traditions. The proximity of the college to the home is a major concern for 29% of the mothers. They opine that nearby colleges are preferred for their children in order to ensure safety and comfort, particularly for girls. Another set of parents who form 27% of the sample answered that the course availability is the major criterion for selecting an institution. These parents are belonged to the second generation educated category. These families are well aware of education and future employment opportunities. 3% of the respondents said that they prefer any management institute according to the status and the reputation of the colleges. There are many reputed government institutions in Kerala. Interestingly even the lower income families don't prefer government colleges; they rather opt for colleges that are near their home. They say that "the mixed culture of the educational atmosphere may negatively affect" their children.

In the previous chapter (chapter-4), girl students reflected that they face gender discrimination from parents in terms of the 'selection of subjects and courses'. As against this, this chapter reflects the changing attitude of the Muslim parents in terms of subject choices for their girl children. In the past decades, the subject choices of Muslim women were decided by the parents according to their socio-economic conditions. However, the changing attitude of families is greatly reflected in the performance of girl children. At present, Muslim girls are doing better in their higher

education and are on par with girls from other communities in Kerala⁷⁹. In recent days Muslim women have bagged top ranks in competitive examinations such as medical and engineering, NEET (National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test) and even in civil service examinations.

I could not continue my education beyond high school due to many reasons. But my elder daughter completed graduation in Physics and my younger son is pursuing first year graduation in English. Students must be allowed to choose courses according to their convenience and it should not be imposed by parents. As parents, we can just give suggestions but the final decisions should be theirs.

(Sareena, a mother respondent from Sunni background family).

Another mother respondent narrated that,

My daughter completed class 12 in the science stream with a high score. She wanted to pursue B.Sc. Chemistry but we forced her to join the coaching classes for engineering entrance examination and spent a lot of money. However she failed to secure a seat under the merit quota. The next year she joined for the course she preferred. Because of our compulsion she lost one year. (Rasiya from Jamaat background family).

The narratives above show some parental realization that children should be allowed to choose the subjects of their interest. However, when we look at the overall picture, it emerges that the parents' narratives are entirely different from students' personal experiences. One of the main reasons for this difference is that low-income parents are not able to send their girl children for professional courses such as medicine, engineering, law due to their economic burden and the parents do not expect any financial returns from girls after their marriage. Sometimes the girls are forced to compromise their choice of subject of study and educational institution according to marriage prospects. Parents are equally concerned about the social and physical security of their daughters and many Muslim parents are concerned about the 'female chastity' which acts as a constraint for Muslim women in terms of their educational choices and opportunities.

⁷⁹ See chapter-4 for subsequent discussion on the academic achievement of Muslim girls.

5.2.3 Mothers' Reflection on the Career Preferences and Employment of their Daughters

Men and women are treated differentially both within the house and the social domain. Compared to men, society leaves women with less socio-economic and political power. Societal structures in one way or the other treat women as 'inferior' to men. This has assisted men in their socio-biological drive for mastery, which has resulted in the legitimization of violence against women. As the social order is dominated by men, vestiges of patriarchy is still very much prevalent in the society. There are many factor that contribute to the stereotype that are in circulation in the society. Although globalization and the growth of Information Technology significantly contributed towards an increase in employment opportunities for both men and women, the gendering of education and employment has adversely affected women to a larger extent. Women are caught in a situation where they are confused between whether to be a good wife and mother or to prepare for a career in order to earn a living for themselves to become competent persons (Archer 1985: 294). The following table demonstrates the preferences of Muslim parents in Kerala with respect to the career choices of their daughters.

Table-5.6-Career choices for women

Career choices	Frequency	Percentage
Household work	46	38
teacher	36	30
Her choice	18	15
Doctor	7	6
Engineer	6	5
No opinion	7	6
Total	120	100

In this study, 30% of the parents consider teaching as the best employment prospect for their daughters. The patriarchal nature of the family, community and society hardly encourages women to work outside the home. Even when they are allowed to work, the patriarchal order insists that it should be without compromising her household duties and as a parent. Teaching is considered to be the best profession for women to achieve respect in the society. The mothers also pointed out that in the teaching profession there are more holidays and other privileges compared to other professions which will help women to align more with their family life. As suggested above, there has been an increase in employment opportunities as a result of

globalization. However, parents' responses shows the prevalence of the conventional expectations of the family and the society where a woman has to primarily conform to her 'gendered role' within the family.

Let us look at the response of Ramla, mother respondent belongs to *Jamaat* family

My brother's daughter is a lawyer. After she completed her education and got a placement, we started looking for marriage proposals for her. But we had to wait for more than three years to get a good proposal for her because of her job. When they come to know that she is an advocate the prospective bride-groom's family back out of the proposal.

Another respondent shared that,

In my surroundings, I know girls who are employed as Lab Technician, KSRTC employee and advocate facing difficulty in getting a proper marriage proposal. (Personal Interview with Shareefa from Sunni family).

The above narratives clearly indicate the gender bias among the Muslim community and the attitude towards certain professions in particular. The patriarchal society sees certain jobs such as advocate, police and military personnel are exclusively reserved for men. However, one should not ignore the fact that there are some positive developments happening within the Muslim society where some families break these stereotypes. Nowadays, some Muslim women are placed in coveted administrative positions such as IAS, IFS, IRS, etc.

In the table given above (Table No-5.6), few mothers opined positively whereas 15% of the parents shared that the job preference should be purely based on a woman's skills and aptitude. They further add that these days it is not easy to get a government job due to the large number of applicants for few jobs. It is also not easy to get employed in an aided schools and colleges without giving a huge amount of money as donation or caution deposit. The private sector, on the other hand, is providing more opportunities for qualified candidates. These opinions are largely shared by parents from low-income families. Financial hardships in everyday life could have influenced their perception. Interestingly, only 38% of the parents think that women should not work outside of home. They are of the opinion that women's primary duty is to take care of the family and household chores. According to them even the meaning of woman's education is to maintain a good family. Around 6% parents preferred the medical profession with degrees such as MBBS, BHMS, BAMS, and BDS for their children.

These parents mostly belong to either the middle class or upper middle class category. There is also another change that is taking place among the Muslims of Kerala. Nowadays there are many poor students doing medical courses with the financial support from philanthropists and charitable institutions, Among the Muslim community, a large number of engineers, belonging to both genders, pass out every year. In fact the proportion of Muslim women engineers have increased in a significant manner. However, only 5% of the respondents opted engineering as a preferred profession. Nearly 6% of the respondents did not respond to the question.

With respect to the question of women's income and economic independence, Seymour (1995: 82) argued that employment is clearly a critical factor giving women some degree of economic independence and making it possible for them to leave unhappy marriages. She further says that, it also promotes a greater equality within the home where the husband and parents-in-law have adjusted well to the employment of wives and daughter in law, between generation and between sharing of household task and responsibilities has been improved. A career and economic independence certainly create self-confidence in women. Compared to women from other communities, the number of Muslim women working in public or private sector, either as skilled or unskilled labourer are less.

Table-5.7-Parental expectations over daughter's education and income

Parental opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Women need not to earn	74	62
Women should earn	42	35
No opinion	4	3
Total	120	100

According to the table (Table No: 5.7) given above, 62% of parents do not have any expectations of financial return from their daughters. As discussed in the previous chapter, economically well-off families do not encourage women taking up jobs for two reasons. One is related to community and religious concerns. The second one is that most of the Muslim families see it as below their dignity to run a family with a woman's income.

My daughter has completed her bachelor's degree in physiotherapy (BPT). We do not encourage her to take up a job. We have saved enough money for us and for our next generation. If she goes for work, considering our financial status, people may feel bad. Presently, we are looking for good marriage proposals for

her. Let her husband and his family decide her career after the wedding. (Interview with a mother respondent who belongs to a middle-class *Mujahid* family).

Another 35% of the respondents are seriously concerned about their girl's career and prospects to look after the family. At the same time, the remaining 3% did not respond to the question. As mentioned earlier, the second generation educated families also encourage women's employment and economic and social mobility. According to them education is the only means to acquire a good job and achieve social and economic status. The economic status of the family is also a major determining factor in the case of a woman's career. A mother respondent from *Sunni* family shared that

My husband is doing a small business and he suffered a lot to educate our children. As a housewife, I could not help him to meet the family expenses. Presently my elder daughter is placed as a teacher in an aided School. Now let her take the responsibility to educate her younger brother who is in the second year of engineering degree.

Another respondent shared that

Earlier women could financially support their family only through limited means such as tailoring, running small household business, etc. but nowadays an educated woman can support the family with a proper career and income. This is good change. (Personal interview with Aaminumma from Jamaat background).

One of the major negative impacts of the gulf migration is that although it provides economic security to the community it prevents women from being part of the labor force and achieving mobility.

5. 3 Education, Family and Marriage

Family and marriage are considered as the most important and oldest institutions in Indian society. The significance of marriage and family was rooted in the socio-religious domain of Indian society. Every religious community the socio-cultural values considers marriage as the essential phase in the life of both men and women and in the case of women it was the only option open to women.

Marriage age play an important role especially in deciding the opportunities for women and it has influence over other factors like education, occupation, income and size of the family. Jensen and Thornton (2003) analyzes how early marriage is associated with the lives of women. In early marriages, the young women have little choice like whom to marry because the marriages are always arranged by the parents

or elders. There is a strong relation between a woman's age at marriage and the amount of education that she receives. The early marriage prevents women from attaining higher education, accessing employment, training opportunities, developing social relationships with peers and ability to participate in civic life (ibid: 13). The girl's education is rarely valued in traditional marriage markets. But the early marriage of a girl is depends on the social situation of the family, in the context of Kerala, it is poor social and physical outlook, number of siblings, social and financial pressure on the family and to meet migrant's responsibilities early. The number of siblings also influence the enrollment opportunities of children especially more number of daughters. But the study found at present among the Muslim communities of Kerala these constraints probably do not inhibit parental investments in daughters more than in sons.

My daughter is 21 year old now and we cannot wait till she completes the studies to marry her off. After a particular age, it is very difficult to get good proposals in our community. Every day, I have to face many questions from relatives and society regarding why she is not getting married. Moreover, most of her batch mates got married and many of them even have children. Though, she does not want to get married now we are passing through a severe crisis and it is high time to get her married. If she wants to continue her study let her husband and family decide after the marriage. Now our most important responsibility is to find a sound proposal for her and we do not want to take the blame on this again and again. (Personal interview with Fathima from Sunni family).

This is one of the responses from a mother respondent who clearly indicates the socio-cultural conditions of the Muslim families in Kerala. The above narrative would lead us to draw conclusions on how Muslim women's education is molded by two convictions. Primarily, parents are worried about the marriage prospects of their girl child particularly, after the age of 18.

Secondly it is very common among the Muslims to marry off their daughters even while they are pursuing education. Even though some women continue studies after marriage, many of them end up not finishing the courses. The rights and duties of women are mostly decided by the patriarchal norms of the society and it becomes the normative behavioural pattern among the Muslim community as well. Despite of many socio-religious sanctions and economic hurdles, some women have achieved higher education and career prospects even after marriage. The experiences of these women who continue their study after marriage need to be examined to understand the changing patterns of women's perception of self, motivation and struggles, lived experience,

multiple roles and responsibilities and the available support systems and dynamics associated with their life to achieve their dream.

Even though people recognize the value of education as a stepping stone for women's social mobility, economic development and social empowerment, she has to face multiple challenges to fulfill the dream. The root of this discrepancy can be traced back to the social construction of women and her identity in Indian society. Within the dominant patrilineal and patrilocal family structure, girls are viewed and controlled by family and relatives. From childhood they are made to believe that their goal in life should be to be an obedient wife, a dutiful daughter-in-law and a good mother. Therefore, her whole socialization process remains constructed as one long preparation to be a good wife and a good mother. Multiple factors including the geographical location of the family and their social experience have a direct influence on the events that family members and the girl experience over the course of time (Hasan and Menon 2004; Chanana 2007; Gupta 2015).

5.3.1 Education and Age for Marriage

As discussed in chapter 4, the Muslim women's marriageable age has been a contentious debate in Kerala for the past few years. Compared to the previous decades, there is a significant decrease in the number of child marriages among the Muslims of Kerala. Apart from the strict enforcement of the law regarding the age of marriage, economic stability and the desire for education among women changes the parental attitudes and contributed significantly towards the increase of the minimum age for marriage among Muslims in Kerala. At present, the religious organizations are also concerned about the legal age for marriage for both men and women⁸⁰.

The persistence of child marriage is due to parents' concerns around beauty, physical attractiveness and economic and social security. The parents are also worried that it would be difficult to get good marriage proposal for their children if they wait till the completion of their education. The table below demonstrates parents' reflections on the age of marriage.

⁸⁰ According to the 2011 census, Government of Kerala reported 23,183 child marriage cases (a marriage below the age of 15). According to the report of the Department of Social Justice of Kerala Government, there have been 2740 child marriages that took place in Kerala since 2010. Most of the reported cases happened among the Muslim community (Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala).

Table No-5.8-Parental reflections on age of marriage

Marriage age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	10	8.33
18-21	73	60.83
22-25	24	20
26-29	1	0.83
Girl's choice	9	7.5
Proposal based	3	2.5
Total	120	100

As discussed the age of marriage for the Muslim girls has become a central question in the Kerala society. As I have discussed about the young Muslim women's perception on the question of marriage in chapter four. In this section of the present chapter, I have made an effort to analyze the perception of Muslim parents' about the age of marriage for their daughters and critically examined women's aspiration for higher education and how they see marriage as central part of their life. In the study, 61% of the mother respondents stated that the most suitable age for a woman to get married is between the age of 18 and 21. This is in stark contrast to the response of the women students I discussed in the last chapter. Only 38% women students thought that 18- 21 is the ideal age for marriage. The parent's states that between 18 -21 is the ideal age for marriage for women and crossing 21 years may create difficulties in getting good marriage proposals. The parents also opined that Muslim men usually prefer brides who are below the age of 21. Surprisingly, 20% of the parents stated that the age of marriage should be between 22 to 25 years.

These parents support their daughters' aspiration for higher education and believe that women could complete their graduation and post-graduation before marriage. This, they believe, will give women confidence and maturity to handle the difficulties in future. Around 7% of the parents states that the age of marriage should be completely based on the women's choice. Another 7% of the parents stated that the while thinking about the age of marriage one has to take into account factors such as beauty and appearance of the girl and the norms of the society. The study found that there are many material and cultural factors such as economic issues, question of security of women, pressure from extended family, the number of girl children in the family, socio-religious values, which leads to early marriages. The remaining 2% of the parents stated that the question of marriage should be decided based on whether there are good marriage proposals but the girl should be above 18 years, the legal age of marriage. Let us look at the response of one mother.

My elder daughter got married after the completion of her Engineering degree. Many good marriage proposals came during her study, but she refused to get married. However, we struggled to get a good proposal and had to wait for more than two years after her studies. Right after her marriage, we started looking for proposal for our younger girl who is doing her first-year graduation. We decided to conduct her marriage as early as possible. (Personal interview with Amina, from Jamaat family background).

The study found that it is a difficult task to get a good proposal for a highly educated girl. As Seymour (1995:83) argues, education, marriage and family are inextricably linked. The main reason for such a situation is that the number of educated men is less in comparison to women particularly in Muslim communities. At the same time, it is very hard to find a man from the community who would allow his wife to continue higher education or to do job after marriage. For a married woman, the possibility of further study and employment depends on the educational or economic status of the husband's family. Curiously, many men with higher education or professional qualification are looking for women who are less educated. They look for women who have studied till class 12 or maximum under graduation. The reason they give is that their mothers and other family members would not be able to adjust with an educationally qualified daughter-in-law. As a result, they look for women who can be obedient wives who will be ready to live within the structured boundaries of the family.

5.3.2 Parental Attitudes Towards Education and Marriage

In chapter 4, I have pointed out that compared to the past, there has been a tremendous change in the attitude of the Muslim community towards the question of higher education and marriage. The growing presence of Muslim women in higher education reflects the changes in the perception of the parents. Various studies have observed how Muslim women were not allowed to study beyond a limit due to economic hardships and religious constraints (Menon 1981; Miller 1992; Samad 1998; Muhammed 2007). Various factors such as reforms within the community; governmental initiatives such as special incentives for girls; the flow of 'gulf income' to name few have made significant changes in the attitude toward Muslim women's education. In such a context, this study analyzes the difficulties faced by Muslim parents in meeting the expenses of their children's education and marriage.

Table-5.9-Problems faced by parents in balancing the education and marriage of their daughters

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Economic	48	40
Finding educated boy	25	21
Education after marriage	23	19
Religious ideology	11	9
No issues	13	11
Total	120	100

In chapter four I have elaborated on the students' perception of self-assessment on the problems they faced in the process of enrolling and completion of education. In this chapter, I will discuss on the problems and challenges faced by the Muslim parents in educating their daughters. Around 40% of the respondents said that they face severe economic problems to meet the expenses of their girl children's education and marriage. As mentioned before, a significant number of men from the families of the respondents are either working as unskilled labourers or doing manual labour in the Arabian Gulf countries. Along with taking care of their children's education, the parents have to meet the multiple requirements of the family such as taking care of children and other family members, educational and health issues of children. For parents, the expenses of marriage is also an equally worrying concern. In this study, 21% of the mother parents responded that finding a bridegroom who is equally educated is a difficult task. This underlines the fact that there is a relative absence of Muslim men in institutions of higher education. Around 19% of the parents stated that the major problem in relation to the education and marriage of their daughters is with respect to the question of continuing their education after marriage.

It becomes a major task for the parents of women to convince the husband's family to send their daughter for studies. In the case of husbands who are in Gulf or are from upper middle class family, the wives are often taken with them abroad and their education is stopped as a result. As the college teachers shared from their teaching experiences the dropout rate of Muslim women is higher than that of any other community in Kerala. The norms of the community and religious ideology play a crucial role in the decision-making of 9% of the parents. They prefer alliances for their daughters only from ideologically similar families. For instance, parents from *Mujahid* families prefer sons-in-law from *Mujahid* families. The remaining 10% of the

respondents stated that they do not face any hardships with respects to their children's education and marriage. Most of these respondents belong to educated and well-off families.

My husband is running a small general shop to meet our family expenses. My elder daughter has completed her intermediate with good marks and wants to join MBBS. My younger son is in class 10 and has the same ambition. We are struggling a lot to manage both household and educational expenses. We are planning to sell our small piece of land, an ancestral property. We have two options either to keep this money for her medical studies or her marriage. Finally, we have decided to spend the money for her education. Let her find the expenses for her marriage and brother's study. (Personal interview with Suhra, follower of Sunni ideology).

In this case, the parents are struggling to meet the expenses both for running the house and for supporting education. This is in fact the situation of most of the lower middle-class families in Kerala. Although they wish to send their children for higher studies they are worried about the expenses for their marriage. Many of the parents are aware of the importance of education for both boys and girls and they believe that better education will help a girl to have a better family life and to socialize her children in a better way. However, parents have to invest a huge amount of money for dowry and other expenses related to marriage though it is legally prohibited under the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1969.

There are different means through which dowry is given such as money, jewelry, property, car, donation to get a job in aided Colleges and job offer in Gulf countries. Similarly there are many cases of divorce prevalent following the practice of dowry which results even in bride's death, suicides and, murders. The absence of the proper execution of the law is the biggest cause for the growing number of dowry crimes.

My daughter got married when she was in the third year of her under-graduation. The bridegroom assured us that she can continue her education after marriage. We convinced our daughter about the same. But after marriage, she went to college hardly for one month and stopped her studies due to pressure from husband's family. She was doing Afzalul Ulema⁸¹, an Arabic course. We begged her husband's family to allow her to finish the degree. However, we

⁸¹ B.A. Afzal-ul-Ulama is an undergraduate Arabic language course, taught in many UGC approved colleges in Kerala. Subjects studied under this degree are reading literature in English, translation and communication, classical literature, applied grammar and linguistics in Arabic.

failed to convince her husband's family and now we regret that we opted for this proposal. (Personal interview with Nafeesa, who follow Mujahid ideology).

Thahira, a mother respondent from Sunni family opined that

For the sake of finalizing the alliance, the bridegroom's family would promise that the girl can continue her education after marriage, but the reality is that either they will change the word or the girl herself will decide to stop the studies because of family pressure and hostile environment towards her education.

The current study found that most of the marriages arranged by parents often fail to ensure the interests of the girl child. Parents are quite anxious about their unmarried daughters who are pursuing higher education. On the one hand, they wish to support their daughters' education and but on the other hand, they also want to do what they see as their responsibility to get them married off. Pursuing higher education after marriage is a challenging task, particularly among the Muslim community in Kerala. Few of the respondents argued that early marriage, childbearing, parenthood and household responsibilities cause an adverse impact on woman's education after marriage.

5. 3.3 Parental Preferences on Daughter's Marriage and its Implications for Muslim Women's Education

Among the Muslim community in Kerala, most of the marriages are arranged by the parents. The main concern of every parent is the safety and social and economic security of their daughters after marriage. Thus, parents choose the best available option for their daughters in terms of employment, educational status, economic independence and ideological perspective of the community. The study found that economic factor is more important than the social and educational factors in most of the cases. In other words, the economic stability of the partner is a major deciding factor in forming a marriage alliance. The following table explains the parental preferences regarding the selection of groom for their daughters.

Table-5.10-Parental preferences in girl's marriage

Preferences	Frequency	Percentage
Job	78	65
Economic status	18	15
Educational status	12	10
Religious ideology	6	5
Girl's choice	6	5
Total	120	100

The critical factors in deciding the prospects of marriage alliance is employment position of the groom. The study found that majority of (65%) the parents stated that the employment status of the bridegroom is given topmost priority while choosing spouses for their daughters. The concern for the parents is the economic status (15%) of the groom's family. Only 10% preferred the educational status of the groom. Intra-religious ideologies and differences are the major concerns only for 5% of the parents. It is interesting to note that only 5% of the parents gave importance to their daughter's interests and preferences in choosing her future partner. The study informs that parents mostly prefer the arranged marriages over love marriages in which their daughters have an active agency.

One of the ironies in the parental attitudes is that most of the parents do not encourage their daughters to work or earn an income. It is because of various factors related to the values of the family, community and society. But at the same time the employment status and the income of the husband is given utmost importance and value. What I have observed here is the cultural nuances of a male-dominated Muslim community is in operation with respect to questions of female education and employment. Women are always expected to be dependent on the husband or father whereas men's economic independence and status is the major concern of the parents. Most of the parents do not have any particular job preferences for their daughter's spouse. In most of the cases, the daughters' husbands or fiancée are working in Gulf countries while some others run business or do small scale jobs in their localities. However, there has been a considerable decrease in the preference for 'gulf husbands'.

My husband has been working abroad for the past fifteen years. He went to Dubai when my youngest daughter was just four years old. For more than one and a half decade we have stayed here without him. He is a yearly visitor to home for one month or so. I have to bear all the family responsibility alone. Now my daughter has turned twenty and we are looking for marriage proposals for her. From my own personal experiences and the struggles I have overcome, we are not interested in choosing a Gulf man as a husband for my daughter. (Sabira, a Gulf wife and follower of Sunni ideology).

There have been many scholarly writings on the problems faced by the wives of gulf migrants in the context of Kerala. The studies explored the social, physical and mental problems faced by the 'Gulf wives' (Osella 2008; Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan 2000; Gulati 1993, 1987). The personal struggles and experiences of mother parents who live away from their husbands for more than a decade or longer force them to

prefer people with jobs within Kerala over the gulf migrants as bridegrooms for their daughters. The economic stability of the family is given more importance than the particular job of the prospective son-in-law.

Professionally qualified people such as doctors, engineers and advocates always prefer men from their fields as their life partners. Although the parents of educated men prefer a bride from a similar educational background, women are not encouraged to take up employment and thus the educational qualification of the women merely function as a status symbol. It has to, however, be noted that the Muslim community in Kerala has attained some amount of economic capital in comparison to the Muslims in rest of India. It is worth noting here that the first three categories – employment, educational and economic status are in one way or the other mutually related and they meet at a common point of economic stability.

One of the interesting aspects that emerge from this study is that the amount of intra-community conflict⁸² has been largely decreased among the Muslims of Kerala. The social and educational development of the community and the emergence of *Sunnis* into the category of middle-class significantly reduced to the rate of intra-community conflict. This is particularly evident when it comes to the question of marriage between people who belong to different sects. However, the intra-community disputes continue to play the role of villain in many cases.

5.4 Religion and Public Participation

The main ethos of the religion is morality, norms and values based on the principles of Holy book, textual scripts, philosophies and ritualistic practices. Islam is considered as a way of life than simply defining within the frames of religion. According to the eminent sociologist, Durkheim (1954),

“religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”.

There are two common categories of all religion, sacred and profane in which sacred ultimately shape the universe into single moral community. In the process of

⁸² Unlike other communities in India the Muslims of Kerala are divided into different sects based on certain religious ideologies and practices such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat*. There are healthy competitions between these groups such as seminars, conferences etc. these competitions and debates have helped each groups to improve their social and economic status in Kerala.

development, religion played a significant role in shaping the people's life. The modernization theories claimed that the role of religion would be diminished in the secular democratic world order or the idea of reason would dominate over spiritual world. Contrary to this claim, the importance of religion or the religious revivalism, increased globally in the modern sophisticated world. Habermas (2006) argues that the religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance in the post- secular age. He further argued that religion is gaining influence not only worldwide, but also within national public spheres. Churches and religious organizations are increasingly assuming the role of "communities of interpretation" in the public arena of secular societies. They can influence public opinion through an organized institutional intervention in key issues, irrespective of whether their arguments are convincing or objectionable. However, the increased role of religion in politics marginalized the role of women and their public participation in a male dominated global order.

Religion is an integral part of social system in India. The idea of Indian secularism has been mainly based on the respect for all religions. Religion has two central narratives, symbols and histories which describe the meaning of life and maintain a set of ideas about the origin of life and the universe. Religion shapes attitudes and behavior of individual and society and their interaction with others rather poignantly. The society awakens a conscious urge in people to have faith in religious community and to consider it as sacred. This consciousness is inculcated in childhood itself through primary socialization. There are three main roles of religion first, providing an awareness of who an individual is; second, providing a sense of belonging to a group and third, providing a sense of purpose to one's life (Hasan and Menon 2004; Chanana 2007; Gupta 2015).

In the present context of public religion in the modern world, the study critically analyzes how the increased role of religion diminishes the opportunities of Muslim women and their public engagement in the state of Kerala.

5.4.1 Muslim women and religious engagements

Religion plays an active role in the processes of socialization among the Muslim community of Kerala. This section focuses on the relationship between religion and politics in the case of Muslim women in Kerala and their daily engagements in the public and religious life. The religious and community reform movement has been

actively working for the development of the Muslims in Kerala. Like other Indian states, the reform movement among the Kerala Muslims was also ‘male-centric’, where they treated the women as an ‘insider’ of family property (Hussain 2009).

Addressing the question of women, the ‘self-proclaimed’ progressive or modernist movements such as *Jamaat- e- Islami* and *Mujahid* movements were mainly engaged only in gaining formal education for women and never addressed the question of their engagement in the public activities. On the other hand *Sunnis* also miserably failed to address the issues related to Muslim women. Samastha Mushavara (top religious decision making body) had taken some problematic decisions in relation to women’s entry into public domain, particularly their entry to masjid and public politics. However, the strong religious stand later changed in 1997 when the women reservation bill was introduced in Panchayati Raj institutions in Kerala. In relation to that Samastha resolution claims that, women’s entry to public politics along with men is *Haram* (prohibited by Islam), except in an unavoidable circumstances means no options other than their participation. The sacred boundaries of religion considered the public presence of women or their voice over the men and community as profane.

The socialization or social practices of Muslim community are habituated in such a way where the ‘women’s voice’ is restricted inside the moralistic code of religion, as pointed out by Muslim feminists. Unlike other parts of India, a large number of Muslim women and students organizations are constituted in Kerala under various socio, religious and political groups to fight for their social and democratic rights. In reality, all these women organizations are strictly controlled by their male parental bodies. As in the case of reformism, male organizations act as a political agents of Muslim women in most of the cases and the subordination of women is visible in every aspect of their socio- political life. In this context, the study mainly focuses on the public participation of the Muslim women and the subsequent debates mother parent’s perspectives on the women in Kerala state and society has been discussed.

The following table designates how religion influences on the public participation of women. The responses of mother respondents about the relationship between religion and public participation of educated Muslim women clearly indicates the patriarchal mindsets of the community.

Table-5.11-Muslim women and public engagements

Parental Support in Public participation	Frequency	Percentage
Sunni	11	9
Mujahid	14	12
Jamaat	24	20
No participation	65	54
No answer	6	5
Total	120	100

The study found that more than 54% of the mother parents stated that they do not support the public participation of their daughters. One of the main reasons that all of them cited is based on the narrative that it is against the tradition of their religion and culture.

The study found that the culture and traditions are defined by men for their benefits and conveniences and place women outside the established cultural practices. The ‘progressive’ *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups who attained modern education much earlier than ‘traditional’ *Sunnis* also expressed their dissent on the public participation of educated women. *Jamaat* support to this cause was 20% against 11% of support from *Mujahids* and the mother parents’ support from *Sunni* background was just 9%. Remaining 5% did not respond to the questions.

Every Muslim groups including the *Sunnis*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* sects used to conduct various public religious speeches where the male clergies speaks on Islamic moral principles and the customary practices of religion. There used to be many private gatherings for young Muslim women to discuss about their religious rights and duties such as how to run a good family or how to become a good wife. In the case of the *Sunni mahallu* committees in most places in Kerala, conduct religious classes where the religious leader (*Qazi*) of that *Mahallu* or a renowned religious leader of the community would address women. As Muslim feminists argue, men become the interpreters of Islamic texts and tradition and women’s social life and cultural relations are structured according to the prevailing social conditions of male domination.

One mother respondent named Fathima from a *Sunni* family, spoke about the weekly religious class she used to attend.

Yes, I used to attend the religious classes every week which gave me more knowledge about my religion and practices. Every week Usthad (who teaches in Madrasas) discusses different subjects such as Islam and women, responsibility of women in the family, Muslim women and dress code, good family life, etc. through interesting stories and examples from the life of Prophet

or his wives to evoke our duties and responsibilities to be good Muslim women, disciplined daughter, responsible wife, etc. Nowadays, I take my elder daughter who is doing her graduation also to the class because we need to give more religious and moral education to them in the immoral conditions of the society today. Through this we have learned many additional things about the religion which were unknown to us.

Nazeera, a mother respondent from a *Mujahid* family responded that

In our area we used to conduct classes for women to understand the religious text and impart those in our lives. Though main sessions are taken by male scholars, we have classes led by women scholars also. But just like in other religions, most of the interpretations, translations and other texts are prepared by male scholars only.

Thousands of women attend these classes every week which has become an inevitable part of their life. It is important to note here that, most of the classes focuses on improving the moral character of the women whereas men are exempted from such moral classes most of the time. The speeches call upon them to think about the ‘eternal life’ which Muslims consider as more important than worldly life. The increasing nature of religiosity can be seen in all aspects of their life. The women have formed their own peer groups to discuss religion and other religious practices such as monthly *Swalath Majlis* (recitation of Prophet Muhammed and his nearest companion), charity groups, etc. Women also contribute some amount of money for smooth running of the meeting. Recently, a new trend has emerged among Muslim women: the emergence of pietistic group who conduct regular Islamic classes for women.

One should not confuse this with the piety movement of women that Saba Mahmood discusses in her book *Politics of Piety* (2005) in the context of mosques in Cairo, Egypt, where female preachers address congregations of women. In Kerala, *Sunni* Muslims considered woman’s entry into masjid as against the ethos of Islamic principles. On the other hand, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* sects allowed women to enter their mosques, though the male and female spaces within the mosques are segregated. Most of these piety groups are inspired by the private higher Islamic learning institutes (*Wafiyya*) which began for women as discussed in chapter 4. Other than focusing on Islamic teaching under the strict religious code of their parental instructions, all these women’s piety groups have failed to raise their voices for their socio-political rights. The speeches in the meetings of these piety groups stress women’s are supposed to be

at home, taking care of the family and that their public engagement is against the Islamic tradition.

The following response was from another parent, a school teacher who belongs to a middle-class *Jamaat* family. This narrative would help us to understand the differences in the socialization process between the religious classes conducted by Sunnis and other groups.

I have been regularly attending the classes for several years. Other than the Quran and Hadith classes, we discuss many issues and books related to Islam and Muslim women. Everyone has to participate in the discussion and it helps us to understand various issues women are facing and improve the reading culture among us. Moreover, I used to insist my children to read maximum they can without any discipline boundary.

The *Mujahid* and Jaamat groups have been systematically conducting their public religious activities through their respective women's wings. Like *Sunnis*, both these groups are also mainly concentrated on religious preaching but mostly by women pieties as against *Sunnis*, such as conducting *Quran* and *Hadith* classes' and discussion books published on the Islamic and women related issues. For the *Jamaat* sect, the duration of the *Quran* and *Hadith* classes is around ten months followed by exams, and they also issue course completion certificates. However, interestingly, men do not attend any of the religious classes headed by the women pieties. The women's wing of *Jamaat-e-Islami* has been very active in Kerala, with Girls Islamic Organization (GIO), their girl students' organization which engages in various public issues related to women such as the issue of age of marriage for women, issues related to women's public participation and the politicization of Islamic law. Muslim Girls Movement, the women's wing of *Mujahid* is not much visible in their public appearance as in the case of Girls Islamic Organization of *Jamaat*.

When the questions related to Muslim women and political participation in the context of the 50% reservations in the Panchayati Raj institutions emerged, all these three groups took a stand against the public and political activities of the Muslims women. The response of the participants mostly came from a religious frame work and they said that women's public presence along with men is considered as Haram according to Islamic beliefs.

5.4.2 Muslim Women and Political Participation

The central question I address in this section is Muslim women's engagement with the public sphere and politics in the state. I particularly focus on women's engagement with the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a religion/community-based political party in Kerala which has been functioning since 1948. The Kerala unit of the Indian Union Muslim League has been successful in instilling political consciousness among the Muslim community, who were not much politically organized in the post-independence Indian scenario (Aziz 1992; Miller 1992; Varshney 2002). However, looked from the perspective of women's participation, the Muslim League appear as a 'men's enclave', with the party marking a clear boundary for women, which is informed by orthodox beliefs within the Muslim community. The party has close ties with Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, the religious body that acts as an authority of the Sunni Muslims of Kerala, who claims that women's entry into politics is forbidden under the Islamic law.

It is interesting to note that Muslim League has formed its own woman wing in 1996 known as Vanitha League or Muslim Women League (MWL), mainly to handle the situation of women reservation in Panchayathiraj institutions in Kerala. According to Vanitha League, "in 1990s the concept of 'empowerment', a term that has shot into prominence, underlined the claim of work for women. Empowerment is used to refer to the process that helps the powerless groups to overcome their subordination, and it implies on the urgency of organization. Interestingly, Devika and Thampi (2012:xii) argue in their book that from 1990 onwards large number of women are appearing in political parties, but very few are visible in the top leadership of any political party.

In their discussion on gender and democratic decentralization of local self-government, J. Devika and Thambi (2012) provide a detailed account of women's engagement in the public politics of the state. They focus on women's reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions, introduced in 1992 and the subsequent amendment to the Act which raised women's reservation from 33% to 50% since 2010. Devika and Thampi (2012) argued that local women leaders are reluctant to join public politics and are rather content with being active in the social domain. The authors further argue that the local political space is 'apolitical' in nature, and leaders who resist local domination project themselves as the victims of assault by the local politicians and officials. On the contrary, at the upper-level politics, particularly at the district and state levels, leaders are concerned about the developmental politics and welfare entitlements in the context

of left politics in Kerala. While women have actively engaged in politics in the state from the time of the first communist government, the authors describe the various difficulties faced by women in various left organizations such as DYFI, SFI, KSSP, etc (ibid). At the same time, the male leaders of Muslim League argue that Muslim women leaders in the party claim that they are more interested in working in the social sphere rather than in the political realm. Most of these leaders reiterated women's submission to Islam and its ideals of feminine humility as indispensable for their entry into the public (ibid: 151).

In the political history of Kerala, male domination effectively subjugated even the voices of strong women such as Akkamma Cheriyan (1909-1982), a brave congress woman who led many social and political demonstrations, and K. R. Gouri, a communist revolutionary and the only female minister in the first communist government of 1957. K.R. Gouri was later expelled from the party in 1994 due to her alleged involvement in anti-party activities (Jeffrey 2003). The condition of women in Muslim League is worse than the situation in the dominant left and congress parties in Kerala. It is interesting to note that no woman has ever won the post of MLA or MP as an IUML representative in the sixty years political history of the state. In fact, in their entire electoral history, IUML has fielded only one woman candidate. Kamarunnissa Anwar contested to the Legislative Assembly under the banner of IUML from Calicut II in 1996 and was defeated by the CPI (M) leader Elamaram Kareem.

The political activities of women are strictly under the control of Muslim League. We are unable to take an independent decision or make a public statement on any controversial issues even in relation to Muslim women such as age of marriage for women, triple Talaq, etc. The idea of Vanitha League emerged only because of the introduction of 50% reservation for women in local self-government bodies. The party leaders insist that we should not work after 6 pm. The exception is given only during the time of election campaigning. Even then, it has to be with the prior permission of husband and father. The party has inscribed a clear code of conduct for women.

The above statement is by one of the topmost leaders of the women's wing of IUML who has been associated with the women's wing since its inception. The above statement shows the position of women within the party is confined to certain spheres. When the question of triple Talaq⁸³ issue emerged, Muslim Women League was silent,

⁸³ Islamic sharia law provides right to divorce for both men and women in Islam. This mode of divorce is not universal among Muslims across the world. As there is significant difference between the text and

though the women student wing (Haritha) of the party broke the silence on this account. The state president of that time, Kamarunnisa Anwar said that “the party leadership has already expressed its opinion; there is nothing more to say on the issue”⁸⁴. This strict rules and regulations of the party were widely criticized in the public domain of Kerala on many occasions.

In some cases, women leaders even resigned from their position due to the excessive amount of discrimination and male domination within the party. Vettasseri Mariyumma, vice-president of the Pookkoottur Village Panchayat in Malappuram District, resigned from her post alleging male supremacy in the panchayat governing board and party. Ms. Mariyumma stated that she had been representing the IUML in the panchayat council for over 11 years and had suffered from the interference of some leaders and the male dominant attitude⁸⁵.

Many such incidents are reported from several parts of the region, not only from Muslim League but from other parties as well. The following words are from a former Panchayat President, who fought with the party to get a seat in the panchayat election

I was elected as the Panchayat President though I was not active in politics. My husband and the party forced me to contest in the seat reserved for women. However, after the election, I was completely bound by the local leaders of the party and was not allowed to take any decisions as the President. Each of my action was closely watched by them and on many occasions I felt that I was just a political tool of the local leaders. However, at the same time, I was strongly supported by women colleagues of the party and office. (Interview with Sajina from Jamaat family background).

Jafar (2013) explained the implications of reservation policy for the political freedom of women in Kerala. The reservation policies could bring many educated women into local politics and decision making bodies. Though their participation in economic and political decision making remains very minimal in the state of Kerala. The study further observe that the reservation policy resulted in improving the constitutive political freedom of educated women in Kerala, but the instrumental

practice among the Muslim community, the practice of divorce varies according to the practice of different schools of thought. Triple talaq is the practice under which a Muslim man can divorce his wife by simply uttering talaq three times. Supreme Court challenged triple talaq on the ground that it violates the fundamental rights of a Muslim woman guaranteed under the Constitution. In 2017 Lok Sabha passed a bill which considers the triple talaq as a criminal offence with a jail tenure of up to three years.

⁸⁴ Indian Express, October 2016, accessed on 30th September 2017.

⁸⁵ The Hindu March 13, 2012, accessed on 30th September 2017

political freedom resulted from reservation has not been as evident. He says that the increasing representation of women in local politics is a sign of increasing their capabilities and effective instrument to increase their freedom further. Interestingly the study found that women candidates are limited to only those seats reserved for women especially in parties like Muslim League.

Georgekutty (2003:91-92) observed the political participation of women in Kerala at the grass roots level, by looking at their voting behavior, attitude towards the election campaign, participation in political organization and its activities, political awareness and the nature and extent of involvement in agitational activities. He argues that several social and cultural factors keep women away from active political participation, which include the belief that politics is a field that is not suitable for women.

The current study also found that many women who are not interested in contesting elections are forced to do so by the party as 50 % of the seats are reserved for women. Asked about the importance of 50% reservation for women in local body elections, many of them openly said that they are not conscious about 50% reservation. Politics is male-dominated space and there is a moral code against women's public political activities and it is against the tradition of Islam. The same model of answer obviously reflected from the side of ordinary women particularly, the housewives. During the local body elections, though the women were contesting, the flex boards were appeared with her husband's picture mostly in Malabar areas where Muslims are demographically powerful.

When I have personally discussed with some of the women candidates about it, they said that projecting women in public is against Islamic culture and traditions. Interestingly many of common women associated with the Muslim League party are unaware of Vanitha League and its political activities. Contrary to above narrations, many of them, mostly educated women opined that the 50% reservation may end the nature of patriarchy in the domain of politics.

There are many women's organizations among the Muslims such as Muslim Girls Movement (MGM), Girls Islamic Organization (GIO), *Nissa*. Among these '*Nissa*' which mean 'woman' is an independent women's organization working among Muslim women but with a socio-political outlook different from that of the other women's organizations within the community. The role of MGM, for instance, is

confined to a close circle. MGM works for the empowerment of both female students and women, specifically from the *Mujahid* sect.

As a Mujahid women's organization, MGM is more involved in religious and social activities such as conducting Quran and Hadith classes and socio-religious awareness programmes for girls and women. The educational empowerment of women is one of the major priorities of our organization. We have conducted many camps and conferences in this regard. Our focus is primarily on social and religious activities than public politics. (Interview with Suhara Mampad, president MGM state committee).

MGM is not active in the public politics of the state but intervenes in the discussion when issues related to Muslim women are raised in the public domain. Same as the case with its parent organization, MGM is politically inclined towards the Indian Union Muslim League. Many of the MGM leaders are part of Vanitha league as well. Their activities are under the strict control of their parent organization, Kerala Nadvatul Mujahideen (KNM).

The main agenda of the women organization is to ensure the effective participation of women in propagation and reform programmes of JIH (Jamaat-e-Islami Hind). Its professed aim is to prepare women to play a creative part in the family, community and society. The organization mainly concentrate on conducting knowledge enhancing programmes, refining programs, debates, seminars, campaigns, creative workshops and charity works. The women's wing of JIH also publishes a monthly called *Aramam* to discuss various religious, social and political issues related to women.

Our priority is to work for women within the frames of Islam. We have organized many programmes at the state and national level for women empowerment. The condition of Muslim women is very pathetic in terms of employment and public participation. Women must consider the 50% reservation in local bodies as our right and must utilize it. We have to face many difficulties, socially and emotionally, from the male-dominated public sphere, and we can gradually overcome this through our constant struggle. (Interview with Fousia, Editor, *Aramam* Monthly).

Compared to the Vanitha League and MGM, the women's wing of JIH is actively engaged in public activities that primarily cater to women, though they are working under a religious organization. The organization has organized many

programmes not only to promote the religious ideals of their parent organization but to contribute to women's empowerment as well⁸⁶.

My main argument is that the attitude within the community, especially among the traditional Muslim or Sunnis towards the question of women's education has undergone tremendous changes. The increase in the number of educational institutions run by Muslims and the high rate of Muslim women's enrolment in institutes of higher education shows the positive transformation within the Muslim community. It was observed that parents are concerned about the higher education and marriage of their daughters, and in many cases the parents explore the possibility of their daughters' education continuing after marriage.

However, it has been observed that the change in parents' attitude towards higher education has not made much change in the realms of religion and with respect to the question of socio-economic and political mobility. An educated Muslim girl will have to always face strict restrictions imposed by the family and the community. It may be argued that the community has failed to transform women's educational development to women empowerment. The gender biasness of the parents is quite often comes to the fore when the questions of higher education and career choices come for discussion.

The study argues that economic status is one of the major deciding factors of social and economic mobility, particularly in the case of women. For economically well-off families, whether women should find employment or not is only of secondary concern. At the same time, parents with lower socio-economic status encourage their daughters to take up employment as it facilitates social mobility. It is worth noting here that most of the parents prefer an employed youth as the husband for their daughters. Curiously, the same parents who believe that education will lead to social mobility consider it only as the last resort. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, parents' cultural capital provides children with the symbolic power that empower them to master the cultural codes of high levels of education and social and cultural attainment.

Through an exploration of Muslim women's public engagement, the study argues that Muslim women's organizations in Kerala primarily work as subsidiary

⁸⁶ For example on 24th January 2010, they organized a historic women conference at Kuttippuram, Malappuram district, with the slogan of "women empowerment for social revolution" and recently in 2017 February 25-26, GIO organized a women's colloquium-International Academic Conference at Calicut. They use this platform for creating discourses on Muslim women.

organs of their parent organizations. Most of the women's organizations primarily engage in the social and religious realm than the realm of active public politics. By examining the available literature and supplementing it with empirical evidence, the study argues that neither traditional nor modern leaders of the community do not encourage women's engagement in the public domain.

These leaders consider women as subordinate to men and religion is used to justify this subordination. At the same time, various parties/organizations strategically use women for electoral gains as half of the seats in local governing bodies are reserved for women. The primary findings of the study is that though there has been a commendable change in the educational development of Muslims in Kerala, and Muslim women in particular, with more institutions and a higher enrolment rate, this has not resulted in socio-economic and political mobility of Muslim women. This trend is visible in the case of all the sects among the Muslims, two reasons can be identified for this lack of mobility for women. Firstly, the celebrated Kerala Model failed to adequately address the question of the socio-economic mobility of women and the idea of development was reduced to providing formal education in Kerala context. Secondly, the reform movements, especially among the Muslims and the idea of reformism could not perceive beyond the question of access to formal education.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the perception of Muslim parents in Kerala on their daughters' education. The Muslim women have been performing well in education, especially higher education. But the educational qualification of women is always connected with the question of marriage. Many parents believe that whether a woman should continue her higher studies is wholly dependent on her husband's decisions as he is considered as the guardian of the woman after marriage. The study also observed that mother respondents also have gender-biased expectations with regard to the educational empowerment of their children. The study observed that while there is an improvement in the amount of education received by Muslim women in Kerala, the participation of women in the public sphere remains minimal in Kerala.

Chapter-6

Conclusion

The exploration of gender discrimination and its underlying causes in various spheres of life has been a key concern for sociologists in India. Over the past five decades, sociologists of education in India have paid attention to understand the nature of the relationship between gender inequality and higher education. The main concern of the present study has been to examine the concerns that guide the educational aspirations of Muslim women in Kerala. Though there have been several socio-religious reform movements in Kerala since the beginning of the 20th century, it is the “Kerala Model of Development” which made Kerala a reference point in discussions on human development. While there is no doubt about the fact that the universalization of primary and secondary education, irrespective of gender, religion, region and caste, brought Kerala a unique place in the national and global map, a critical analysis of the gender relations in Kerala reveals the gender based discrimination among all the social groups which shapes the educational visions and employment goals of the youth.

Unlike women in other parts of the country, women in Kerala have achieved high better educational and employment status. Muslims in Kerala in general and Muslim women in particular have made significant advancements in education, compared to Muslims in other states. However, the Muslims in Kerala lag behind the Hindus and Christians in Kerala in terms of their achievements in the field of higher education. Over the last five decades, there has been a significant changes in the attitude of the Muslim community towards women’s higher education thanks to various factors such as the inflow of money from the gulf, socio-religious reforms, and state policies. The rapid growth in the enrolment rate of Muslim women in educational institutions like colleges and universities reflects the Muslim community’s changing attitude towards higher education of women in the community.

A critical look at the Kerala Model of Development reveals its fault lines, especially with respect to the question of gender. Subjugation of women in general and marginalization of women in various spheres of life including the public sphere are sociological realities in contemporary Kerala. The Kerala Model of Development is characterized by a “gender paradox” despite educational and economic development of women in the state: there is an absence or underrepresentation of women in Kerala’s

public sphere, especially in the realms of employment and politics (Bhasker 2000; Kodoth and Eapan 2005; Srinivasan 2007; Sreekumar 2009).

In the backdrop of the above-mentioned context, the current study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To analyze the aspirations and expectations of Muslim students in selection of educational institutions and courses, and the means and methods of negotiations while dealing with family and the larger public sphere.
- To examine the motivational factors that inspire Muslim parents to encourage their daughters to pursue higher education and to analyze their views on the limited choices in selection of courses/colleges and access to multiple spaces within and beyond the educational institutions.

In order to pursue these objectives, I selected two historically important colleges from the Malabar (northern) region of Kerala—The Farook College and Pocker Sahib Memorial Orphanage (PSMO) College—as sites for the study. PSMO College, located at Tirurangadi in the Malappuram district of Kerala, was established in 1943 as an orphanage to take care of those who were orphaned and widowed by the Cholera epidemic in the region and the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. PSMO was upgraded to a college in 1972. Farook College, established in 1948, was the first ever college established by the Muslim community in Kerala and it has become one of the leading higher educational institutions of the Muslim community. The College was established as a result of the relentless efforts of numerous community and religious leaders of that time to fulfill the aspiration of community in the area of higher education. Both Farook College and PSMO College have made remarkable contributions to the educational development of Muslims in Kerala.

The current study has used two sets of respondents; student respondents (120) and mother respondents (120). The purposive random sampling method has been adopted while selecting the respondents. The parent (mother) respondents are selected from Ramanattukara and Tirurangadi municipalities where Farook College and PSMO College are located respectively. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been adopted while collecting data. The study has chosen mothers as the main respondents of the study, because, Muslim mothers are the driving force of the family in the absence of men at home as they work in the Gulf countries. The data has been collected through structured open ended questionnaire and personal interviews. The researcher also interviewed various social activists, educationists, political leaders, religious leaders

and teachers to situate and assess the position of Muslim women in Kerala in diverse spheres of life including educational institutions.

The study observed that the young Muslim women student respondents are highly career-oriented, and aspire to achieve advanced educational qualifications. Around 70% of the young respondents said that modern education is very crucial for everyone irrespective of gender. For women, it enables them to acquire knowledge and to empower them to engage with the society. Only 4% of the respondents said that modern education prepares women to be good mothers. Most of the young women in the selected colleges see career as a key for development rather than committing to the obligations of social institutions such as family and marriage. They opined that higher education will help them to access to diverse spheres of life including the family and society, something that their mothers could not achieve. The present study has, however, raised the question why the education system fails to produce the same outcome for both men and women in the family and society by analyzing the invisibility and subjugation of Muslim women in the public life of Kerala.

The study also found that parents are more concerned about the success and achievements of their sons rather than daughters. The gender discriminatory attitude of parents is evident even in the process of selecting colleges and courses for the children. While boys are allowed to select the courses and educational institutions on their own, girls are not given this freedom. Around 87% of the respondents have compromised their career and educational choices due to the secondary status of their gender at home and society. The respondents also agreed that the parents find it more important investing family resources for the education of sons than daughters because the returns from the investments in education will be directly added to the family.

Some of the parents also stated that they prefer nearby institutes and available courses and disciplines for their daughters rather than giving freedom in selection of educational choices. The safety and security of the girls determine the priorities and concerns of parents, which in turn hinders their aspirations for choosing courses of their interests.

The study found that there exists in society a gender bias when it comes to the question of educating boys and girls, especially in the case of higher education. 92% of the student respondents of the study opined that their parents expect their male siblings to get a job after they complete their education whereas only 37 % of the parents expects the girls to have a job after education. The parents think that it is important for the sons

to have a good career as they are expected to take care of the family. At the same time, they also believe that the benefit of a girl's education will go to her husband and his family. The parental attitude towards higher education of children is conditioned by patriarchal norms wherein investment in the education of male children is considered as profitable and investment in female children as a loss.

The study reveals that 62% of the parents do not expect any income from their daughters. The economically sound families do not encourage their daughters earning, mainly for two reasons: community and religious concerns, and the question of prestige. Families find it beneath their honour to run the household with the income of women. The gender biases of the parents become evident when it comes to matters of higher education and choosing a career. Many of the young Muslim women prioritize career, employment and the fulfillment of their aspirations over the traditionally approved institutions like family and marriage. They are of the opinion that higher education will help them to create and secure a different space and experience in the family and society. In the present context, Kerala Muslim women are not allowed/ encouraged to accept certain careers such as police, military, judiciary.

Among the mother respondents, hardly 10% of them preferred any professional jobs such as Medicine and Engineering for their daughters. However, it is interesting to note that economically weak families encourage their girls to secure better jobs as it will help them to run their family smoothly. The study also found that there is a gender bias at work when parents make decisions on the career choices of their female children. Women are encouraged to opt for careers such as teaching, nursing, etc. which complement their domestic roles. They are discouraged from taking up jobs that offer a good salary and status. The study has explored how family structures channelize women's education to specific areas and disciplines, which ensures "comfortable" professions for women. The better performance of women in education and the narrowing gender disparities have equipped women to acquire earning power in "comfortable" occupations which are non-technical in nature. However, family and the social system play an important role in mediating decisions regarding education and employment of women and channelling them towards the "marriageability" of young woman.

However, one has to further explore other aspects such as the class position, the sub-sect the parents belong to in the case of Muslim women who are allowed to work in the formal employment sector. The class position also plays a crucial role in the

educational development of women. The study found that people who belong to the lower economic strata aspire for a job after education whereas people from economically well-off families do not expect a job but only to get a degree. The class difference has a significant impact on the differential educational achievement of the youth.

The study found that affordability is a major concern for parents from the lower class in the determining the courses of study for their daughter. Due to financial constraints, parents sometimes advise or force them to choose affordable and uninteresting courses. Parents hardly prefer taking loans to educate their daughters as the income she may get in the future will flow to her husband's family and not her parents.

As is the case with Muslim in other Indian states, there exist internal divisions among Muslims of Kerala. As I have discussed in the third chapter, there are three major ideological groupings among the Kerala Muslims; the *Sunni*, the *Mujahid*, and the *Jamaat* groups. For historical and political reasons, the *Mujahid* and the *Jamaat* groups are called reformers as they have been in the forefront for the educational development of Muslims. The present study observed that both the *Mujahid* and the *Jamaat* groups attach importance to education and employment, of late the *Sunni* groups has also started giving importance to the higher education of women. Though only 36% of the respondents of the present study opined that Kerala Muslim women enjoy equal socio-political status across religious sects, one could observe the ideological convergence of the three groups on the questions of marriage, higher education, and the public appearance of Muslim women within and outside the educational institutions. It is observed that after the gulf migration, the Sunnis also have been active in promoting the educational empowerment of Muslims in Kerala.

This study highlights, the multiple socio-cultural and religious factors which limit the choices and aspirations of young Muslim women in acquiring higher education. The restrictions that family puts on women are one of the major constraints for them in attaining higher education. In the study 42% of the young women respondents said that marriage acts as a major hindrance for them in completing their education and acquiring their desired career. They face various forms of discouragements both from the family and the community which affect their aspirations for higher education. The study argues that for the Muslim women, educational qualification has meaning only in terms of marriageability and shaping well-educated

mothers. As observed in the study, the students who belong to the category of “student wives” are more among the Muslims when compared to the Hindu and the Christian communities. In the current study, out of the 80% unmarried respondents, more than 75% of the girls had received marriage proposals during their study and some of them, with the help of teachers, family members or friends, succeed in convincing their families, the importance of continuing their education.

Family often plays a significant role in making decisions regarding children’s education and marriage, and this is particularly true in the case of daughters. Early marriage limits the opportunities available to women such as education, public participation and role in decision-making. In the study 33% opined that the proper age for marriage is 22-24 for woman. Interestingly, another 14% opined that marriage should be after the completion of education. In the case of married women, the opportunity to continue education depends on the interest and the attitude of the husband’s family. The study found that among the “student wives”, very few are encouraged by the husband and his family to continue education after marriage. Even when they are allowed, it is only for the status that comes with it.

The present study found that few married women continue studies after marriage or after few years of their marriage or even after motherhood. Around 5 percent opinioned confidently that education and marriage should not be mutually exclusive. Some girls argued that women naturally lose their interest in continuing studies after marriage due to many personal and family pressures. The study also found that most of the girls compromise their career choices for family life and to meet their duties as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. In such situations, fulfilling the role of a wife is a challenging task for Indian women with educational aspirations. The women in the “student-wife” category face many internal and external problems in continuing their education along with performing their family obligations.

It is interesting to note that 61% of the mother respondents opined that 18-21 is the proper marriage age for a girl. They argued that education can be continued even after marriage. But they say that the chances of getting marriage proposals decrease after the girl turns 20. The study found that Muslim men get married early in life due to the migration to the Gulf. In many cases, a highly educated girl has to marry someone who is less educated, as economic considerations are given more importance than educational qualifications. One respondent who has a degree in medicine (MBBS) was married to a businessman who has studied only up to class 12. The educational

qualifications of the parents also play a significant role in deciding the various criteria while choosing proposals for their daughters. According to the mother respondents the critical factors in deciding the prospects of girls' marriage alliance are employment and the economic position of the groom. 80% of the parents in the study stated that the employment and economic status of the bridegroom is given topmost priority while choosing spouses for their daughters. Only 10% gave importance to the educational status of the groom. Parents usually argue that education can be continued after marriage and they look for a groom who is willing to let the girl continue her studies. However, many parents shared stories of how the education of their daughters was discontinued due to discouragements from the husband's family. The study found that even if girls manage to complete their studies despite all the odds, there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to take up employment. The degree of freedom, autonomy, individualism and stakes in decision making are really constrained for women in different matters like higher education, employment and marriage.

In the context of Kerala, education does not provide Muslim women empowerment. As discussed before, most of the parents give importance to education only because it helps them attract good marriage proposals. Student respondents, however, opined that career, and not marriage or homemaking, should be given more importance in a girl's life. Or at least there should be a balance between marriage and career. One of the young respondents stated that "degrees are of no use if they do not lead to any occupation and it is not needed to have an educational qualification and certificate to bring up children and run family." The social and cultural contexts in which they experience this reality appear to be serving as a challenge for their aspiration for future success. Among the respondents, 90% opined that parents play the supreme role in making decisions regarding marriage, sometimes even without the consent of the daughter. One respondent shared her opinion that "we are not getting enough opportunities to achieve our aim or career and we do not have freedom to choose our life partner according to our interest."

The parents are never reluctant to spend money for education, but they are keen to save money for their wedding. This is the common practice among middle-class Muslims in Kerala: they deposit a huge amount of money in banks or jewelry shops or other local investments to meet the marriage expenses. It is considered as the duty of family to invest money for the marriage of their girl child. It shows the gendered expectations of the parents in educating their children. The study also found that the

Muslim parents are worried about spending too much money on the higher education of women. 40% of the parents opined that face financial difficulties in educating their daughters. Most of the parents consider marrying off their daughter as their sole responsibility and thus fails to address their aspiration and expectation towards future as an individual.

The study observed that young Muslim women are not allowed to participate in most of the public events and activities such as cultural, sports and even educational related activities, even in the premises of their educational institutions. The parents discourage them from participating in the cultural and co-curricular programmes of the college by citing the reasons of religious faith, family status, safety and security. The families are afraid that they will have to address questions from the community regarding the moral conduct of their daughters. Due to these, women's public engagement is restricted. However, there has been a change in this trend of late.

At present, Muslim girls/woman have their own exclusive socio-political organizations in campuses which are not strictly independent of male-dominated parent organizations. The study also observed that community leaders exert a strong influence on the students from the community and their political organizations which impose strict religious restrictions on the women's wing of students' organizations. 65% of the respondents stated that there is an absolute absence of women in public engagements like political participation, employment, decision-making, etc. The student organizations do not actively engage in public issues due to various factors such as family, community etc. At the same time 43% of the participants said that women from other religious communities such as Hindus and Christians enjoy more freedom than Muslims in terms of higher education, employment, political engagements and marriage. Another 43% argued that all women in India face oppression because of the patriarchal structure and religious ideologies which systematically curtail the rights of women. The study also found that more than 54% of the mother parents do not support and encourage the public participation of their daughters. One of the main reasons that all of them cited is based on the narrative that it is against the tradition of their religion and culture. The study found that the culture and traditions are defined by men for their benefit and conveniences and place women outside the established cultural practices. The "progressive" *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups who gave importance to modern education much before the "traditional" Sunnis started paying attention to modern education, confine women to certain spaces and restrict their public engagements.

The community and family have always confined women into narrowly defined roles despite their outstanding performance in education. In India the family and education system create and reinforce gender divisions in the society by dividing feminine and masculine behaviour and assigning specific roles in the family and society. Instead of undoing these practices the family and the social structure are re-doing these gendered social practices through gendered socialization. The mother respondents clearly opined that education is important for men and women alike in the contemporary society. However, they were not ready to provide equal opportunities for their daughters. For many of them, higher education is merely a shelter to keep their children safe till the age of marriage. As mentioned above, most of the mother respondents considered education for girls as a means to become a good daughter, to attract good marriage proposals, and to be a good wife or mother.

The parental reflection clearly shows the patriarchal nature of the society which they have formally adapted. In most of the upper middle class families the educational qualifications of a woman is linked with the status of the family and not with her career or employment opportunities. The gender biases of parents become evident in matters of choosing the educational institutions and courses for boys and girls. They prefer community educational institutions for girls to ensure strict religious atmosphere. The proximity of the educational institution to the home is another major concern for parents. Parents enroll girls mostly in nearby institutions to ensure surveillance. The same sort of discrimination can be seen while selecting the courses—boys are encouraged to choose courses of their own interest whereas for women it is the parents who mostly do the choosing. The study argued that along with family, considering the opinions of the peer group while making decisions regarding higher educational choices is important. Lack of family guidance and motivation influence the educational achievements of the children.

Parental educational qualifications play an important role in deciding the career choices. The social and cultural capital imparted by the family play a significant role in the educational achievements of an individual. The present study also found that Muslim parents are unable to provide the cultural capital to their children as they fail to transform their economic capital into cultural or social capital. As Bourdieu points out, beyond economic factors, cultural habitus and dispositions inherited from the family fundamentally play an important role in the schooling success of their child.

Compared to women from other communities, Muslim women have to face multiple difficulties to preserve their self-respect and to act as a full-fledged citizen. They have to compromise both with themselves and society, particularly with the traditional religious structures as well as family in matters related to education, marriage and public appearance. Their attempts for liberation and self-respect are countered by a society that is dominated by men and religious institutions, thus making her identity a subordinated one. However, Muslim women's struggle is neither against religion as such as it is her primordial identity, nor the radical feminist notion of gender equality. It is a struggle for gender justice. In short, Muslim women in Kerala are very conscious about their rights, highly aspirational to achieve certain goals in their life and interested in engaging in different community activities. But the existing religious system and the patriarchal nature among the Muslims of Kerala have confined them into a narrowly defined role, considering them to be politically, socially and economically inferior despite "being educated".

The study found that most of the Muslims in Kerala are in favour of higher education for Muslim women. The Kerala Model of Development and the flow money from the Gulf are the major reasons behind these. The flow of remittances from the Gulf has elevated the economic status of Muslims in Kerala which enabled them to educate their children irrespective of their gender. The enrolment rate of Muslim women in higher education is higher than that of Muslim men in both professional and traditional courses. However, social, cultural and religious factors play an important role in determining the completion of their courses. The gendered expectations of the parents discourage Muslim parents from spending huge amount on the education of Muslim girls. They prefer to save money for girls wedding than spending for education.

The present study argued that though education has been a key component of the Kerala Model of Development, the manifest and latent outcomes of the project are largely shaped by the religious, caste and class position of women. The study found that though Muslim community in Kerala attaches importance to higher education, it is the marriage market and the ideal Islamic practices that shape the educational aspirations and employment opportunities of Muslim women. Thus for Muslim women in Kerala, education is only a means to achieve symbolic capital rather than empowerment through formal employment in different economic spheres.

The study found that the higher educational performance of Muslim women has considerably increased in the last two decades which is more or less equal to the level

of other communities. Further, the study also found that the number of Muslim men pursuing higher education is less compared to the number of Muslim women. The thesis highlighted the issue that even though the number of Muslim women in the field of higher education has increased considerably in the recent years the presence of women in the public sphere, role and power of decision making is nil. This has prompted the thesis to ask the question what women do after acquiring degrees. The study categorically argued that education does not necessarily result in the participation of women in the public sphere where religion and patriarchy still rule the roost. Through an analysis of the experiences of young Muslim women in Kerala, the study critiqued the general assumption that higher education results in gender equality and empowerment. Thus, the thesis argued that higher education has helped Muslim women in Kerala only to achieve symbolic capital rather than access to employment opportunities and socio-religious autonomy.

Limitations of the Study

One of the major limitations of the study is that it is limited to only Muslim women in two the colleges and did not take into account the voices of Muslim men and students from other religious communities studying in the same colleges. Taking their voices into account would have facilitated a comparative understanding of the student's ability to negotiate with family and community irrespective of their genders and religious background.

Scope of Future Research

As is the case with any other community in India, the Muslim community in India is a highly heterogeneous community with divisions on the lines of sect, language region and class. The status of Muslim women also varies according to their class, caste, educational and regional background. The "Kerala model of Muslim development" has become a point of reference for the Muslims in the other Indian states. However, the study observed that the participation of Muslim women in the contemporary Kerala society is minimal or poor. As we have observed more than 30% Muslim women have dropped out of colleges due to various socio-religious and economic factors.

- The study suggests that there is a need to further explore the patterns of dropout among the Muslim women in higher educational institutions across Kerala.
- The primary and secondary reasons for the higher dropout rate need to be examined in detail.

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GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION: MAPPING THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA

by Ramsheena Ca

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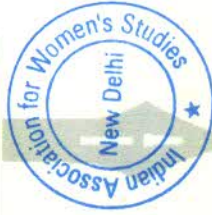
Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that ~~Mr.~~Ms. Ramsheena CA has participated in the XIV National Conference on Women's Studies, held in Gauhati University, from 4th to 7th February 2014. She has presented a paper titled *Constructed Womanhood: Religious Reformism and Contemporary Muslim Women in Kerala in the Sub-theme No.8.*

We wish all success in her future career.

Ilina Sen

Ilina Sen
President



Indu Agnihotri

Indu Agnihotri
General Secretary

Education, Employment and Empowerment: Reflections on Muslim Women in Kerala

Ramshina CA* & Nagaraju Gundemeda**

Abstract

What is the role of higher education in women's empowerment is a subject of critical scrutiny in social sciences. Though higher education is considered as a precondition for women to access material resources and human rights, empirical studies across the states in India negate this dominant propaganda. The current paper based on empirical work conducted in two prominent Muslim colleges in Kerala tries to analyse the nature of relationship between gender and religion, its impact in shaping the educational ideals and employment aspirations. The study argues that though education played a significant role in achieving the Kerala model of development, the manifest and latent outcomes of the project were largely shaped by the religious, caste and class position of women in general and Muslim women of Kerala in particular. The study found that though the Muslim community in Kerala attached significant role to higher education, it is the marriage market and the ideal Islamic practices that shape the educational aspirations and employment opportunities of Muslim women. Thus the higher education for Muslim women in Kerala aimed to achieve symbolic capital rather than empowerment through formal employment in different economic spheres.

Key Words: Muslim women, higher education, family choices, Kerala

Introduction

The status of women is always seen as an indicator of modernity (Mehta, 2004; Swarup and Bisar, 1991; Friedrich, 1993). Though half of the Indian population are women, they are visibly invisible in the socio-political spheres of the mainstream society. Development scholars attached greater significance to higher education for individual development and social transformation. Gender equality is viewed within the framework of women's empowerment. Though the concept of empowerment is a subject of controversy, it is the ideological outlook and methodological manifestos of the scholars including feminists which define the essence of

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**GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION:
MAPPING THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA**

Synopsis

Of

*Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

SOCIOLOGY

BY

RAMSHEENA. CA

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SUPERVISOR

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Introduction

Higher education has often been thought of the mechanism that would prepare human beings irrespective of genders in an orderly and rational manner for participating in the public arena. There has been a visible and procedural growth in the enrolment of women in higher educational institutions. Since the late nineteenth century onwards, with the project of modernity, scholars and reformers have discussed, debated, and negotiated the significance of women education and the role of women in society and public life. As a matter of common concern, access to higher education for women is intrinsically known to be an essential mechanism to prepare women to be independent and confident vis-à-vis men. However, some of the recent scholarships underline the fact that though women's access to higher education has increased worldwide, the promise of equality and women's mobility has not been realized (Esposito 1998: ix).

The role of higher education in the empowerment of women is a subject of critical scrutiny in social sciences. Though higher education is considered a precondition for women to access the material resources and human rights, empirical studies across the states in India prove that women lag behind men in every sphere of the society. In a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society like India, the parameters of gender, religion, caste, class and region are crucial factors in determining access to education. Gender disparity has been a major issue in India's pursuit for achieving the goal of universal access to education from primary to higher education level. In India, where women lag behind men in all spheres of the social life even in the twenty first century, gender discrimination and gender inequality are transmitted from generation to generation through socio-cultural practices.

Many studies have focused on women's advantage in higher education but it is important to point out that women's growing share in higher education does not indicate complete gender equality in other arenas of the society. It is assumed that the increasing number of women in education, especially in higher education, would change the social structure and social status of women in the society. However, gender differences remain fairly stable in educational practices, in the sphere of family and even in the equity-minded educational committees. Thereby, women lag behind men in terms of financial returns to education, family expectations, labour market participation and representation in politics (Mcdaniel 2009; Pettit and Hook 2005; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Zeher 2007). In other words, contestations on the approach to women

empowerment and education need a nuanced and renewed consideration, which will take into consideration various contributing actors, factors and characteristics.

Significance of the study

The exploration of gender discrimination and its underlying causes in various spheres of life has been a key concern for sociologists in India. Over the past five decades, sociologists of education in India have paid attention to the nature of the relationship between gender inequality and higher education. The main concern of the present study has been to examine the concerns that guide the educational aspirations of Muslim women in Kerala. Though there have been several socio-religious reform movements in Kerala since the beginning of the 20th century, it is the “Kerala Model of Development” which made Kerala a reference point in discussions on human development. While there is no doubt about the fact that the universalization of primary and secondary education, irrespective of gender, religion, region and caste, brought Kerala a unique place in the national and global map, a critical analysis of the gender relations in Kerala reveals the gender based discrimination among all the social groups which shapes the educational visions and employment goals of the youth.

Unlike women in other parts of the country, women in Kerala have achieved better educational and employment status. Muslims in Kerala in general and Muslim women in particular have made significant advancements in education, compared to Muslims in other states. However, the Muslims in Kerala lag behind the Hindus and Christians in Kerala in terms of their achievements in the field of higher education. The gulf migration, socio-religious reforms, and state policies played a significant role in the educational development of Muslim community in Kerala and have played a positive role in transforming the community’s attitude towards women’s higher education. The increasing enrolment rate of Muslim women in educational institutions like colleges and universities reflects the Muslim community’s changing attitude towards higher education of women in the community.

Contrary to popular perceptions and intellectual imaginations, the Muslim community in Kerala can be referred as a model to other Indian Muslims in the society. They enjoy a better socio-political and economic status compared to the Muslims in other Indian states. Their achievements in the fields of higher education, social progress and economic status are much higher than of Muslim communities in other parts of India. A critical look at the Kerala Model of Development, however, reveals its fault lines, especially with respect to the question of gender. Subjugation of

women in general and marginalization of women in various spheres of life including the public sphere are sociological realities in contemporary Kerala. The Kerala Model of Development is characterized by a “gender paradox” despite educational and economic development of women in the state: there is an absence or underrepresentation of women in Kerala’s public sphere, especially in the realms of employment and politics (Bhasker 2000; Kodoth and Eapan 2005; Srinivasan 2007; Sreekumar 2009).

Objectives of the Study

1. To map out the multiple debates on educating Muslim women in Kerala.
2. To analyze the aspirations of Muslim women students in selection of course and educational institutions.
3. To examine the means and methods of negotiations employed by Muslim women students in dealing with the family, religion, community and career.
4. To analyze the motivational factors of Muslim parents in educating their girl children and their expectations and experiences within the family and community.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The present study has primarily used Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital” to understand the convergence and divergence between Muslim women’s aspirations and experiences with respect to higher education. The cultural capital framework is employed to investigate the similarities and differences, if any, in the possession of capital and habitus while dealing with the educational aspirations and achievements of Muslim women in contemporary Kerala. The study also uses the theoretical discussions on Islamic feminism to engage with debates on Islamic texts and practices in relation to Muslim women.

The current study employs Bourdieu’s concepts of “capital” and “habitus” to examine the difference in investment of capital and influence of habitus on children’s education, considering the gender disparities among Muslims in Kerala. Social inequalities are more pronounced and discussed in some aspects of the educational systems, but gender inequalities need more discussion. Gender inequalities are manifested in different layers; in access to higher education, differences in the selection of colleges, experiences at home and inequality in the outcome of education. The study argues that more than economic disparities, it is the unequal distribution of certain cultural resources, which are greatly responsible for the differential educational

achievements of children. Bourdieu (1973) has argued that one's habitus develops in relation to the cultural capital one possesses. According to him, apart from economic capital, cultural capital plays a vital role in the educational success of children, which is influenced through habitus.

The study also argues that the 'gendered habitus' and 'gendered capital' play dominant role beyond cultural capital. An infant who learns to be a woman will find that her femininity is both a constraint and an enabler; her habitus is gendered, as is her future. By choosing the forms of education and employment that she does, by adopting the behavior considered suitable for her gender and teaching this to her daughter, a woman plays an important role in the continuation of the existing social hierarchy. It is possible to illuminate the ever-changing interplay between gender and education in the society by studying the gendered nature and the strategies employed in the social structure (Ashall 2004). Ashall (2004) argues that it is more important to think about gender as central to habitus and as a form of cultural capital. Social and cultural capital combine to form a 'gendered habitus' or predisposition which structures men and women's decisions, behaviors and opportunities (Ashall 2004; Egerton, 1997).

Islamic feminism

The current study makes an effort to map the sociological and theological practices within the larger ambit of Islamic feminism. A critical review of Islamic theology primarily represents multiple schools of thought based on the interpretations of religious texts. Historically, the interpretations are made by Muslim male clergies. However, over the last few decades, there is a nuanced approach by Islamic scholars to understand Islam from a feminist perspective. They try to understand Islam as a religion which primarily stands for gender equality in principle. The Islamic feminists try to interrogate the wide gap between text and context, where they find the problem with the nature of interpretations of the text. To study the contemporary educational status of Muslim women, it is important to trace out the ideological background which formulated and influenced the everyday practices of Muslim societies. Hence, this study draws parallel adoptions from the interpretative argumentation of Islamic feminists.

1.4 Selection of the Field Site and Sample

An empirical study has been conducted in two historically important colleges, Farook College and Pokker Sahab Memorial (PSMO) College, from the Malabar region of Kerala. Among the two colleges selected, the Farook College belongs to the Calicut district and the PSMO College belongs

to the Malappuram district. Demographically, Malappuram is the most Muslim populated district of the state and Calicut hosts the second largest Muslim population in Kerala. The researcher selected student respondents from Farook and PSMO colleges and parent respondents were selected from two towns, namely, Ramanattukara and Tirurangadi where these two colleges are located. The study analyzes the position of Muslim women in higher education and the challenges they face to achieve their aspirations and hurdles they experience in day today life as women in general and as Muslim women in particular. The researcher spent one year and four months in the field for collecting data.

Methodology and Tools of Data Collection

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research techniques for data collection, coding and analysis. The current study has used the questionnaire method and personal narratives of the respondents as a major source of data collection. The researcher used various formal and informal methods for data collection. The data has been collected through structured questionnaire with open ended questions, in depth interviews, personal narratives and group discussions. The researcher also interviewed various social activists, educationists, religious leaders and teachers to locate the position of Muslim women in various levels. The personal narratives and lived experience of Muslim women in the Kerala context has been used as one of the tools of data analysis for the study.

The study has used purposive random sampling method to select the two sets of population such as student respondents (120) and parent respondents (120). The study included respondents from the various sects of Muslim community in Kerala, such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat- e-Islami*. The data was collected from 120 respondents—60 Muslim women respondents were selected from each college. In each college, out of 60 respondents 20 students belong to *Sunni* group, 20 from *Mujahid* and remaining 20 respondents from *Jamaat* background. The study included respondents from all the disciplines such as sciences, social sciences and commerce and from all levels of study such as graduate, post graduate courses.

The second set of data was collected from parent respondents who reside at Ramanattukara Municipality near Farook College and Tirurangadi Municipality near PSMO College. In this sample 60 mother respondents are selected from Ramanattukara Municipality and remaining 60 are from Tirurangadi Municipality. The researcher also tried to include respondents from various fractions of Muslim community such as *Sunni*, *Mujahid* and *Jamaat*. Among the mother

respondents nearly 50% of the sample belongs to *Sunnis*, 25% from *Mujahid* and remaining 25% are followers of *Jamaat* ideology. There are various reasons for selecting mothers as respondents in the current study. The willingness of mothers to participate in the study and share their views was one of the main reasons. The absence of men due to the gulf migration also enabled Muslim women to access multiple spaces to fulfill the family and educational demands. Moreover, Muslim mothers are the driving force of the families. Therefore, the researcher felt that it is appropriate to capture their insight on the question of higher education for young Muslim women.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The present thesis is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter is intended to provide the background and context of the study, along with a brief sketch of statement of the problem and objectives of the study. It also presents the methodology and various tools employed in the course of this research and selection and significance of the field. The chapter also makes a theoretical engagement to look at Muslim women by analyzing the debates on Islamic texts and practices in relation to women's status in the conceptual frame work of Islamic feminism. The chapter also hints at Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital to understand the convergence and divergence between Muslim women's aspirations and experiences with respect to higher education.

The second chapter offers a sociological overview of the Indian Muslim community. The chapter analyzes the heterogeneous nature of the community by locating the caste and religious practices among the Muslim community in India. The chapter discusses the minority and backward status of Muslim community in general and the vulnerable status of Muslim women in particular by looking at their status in education, employment, political participation and other socio-developmental indicators.

The third chapter provides a brief history of the development and evolution of Muslims in Kerala, and analyzes the role of various factors in developing the Muslim community as a model of development for other Muslims in India. The chapter discusses the role of multiple factors such as reform leaders, reform movement and various community organizations in changing the social and economic outlook and attitude of the Muslim community in Kerala. It tries to map out the experiences and perceptions of Muslim women and response of the male reformers on the question of gender in educating the Muslim women.

The fourth chapter titled "Higher Education: Introduction to Kerala Muslim Women's Aspirations and Experiences" is based on the empirical analysis with the help of qualitative data

collected from the field through interviews as well as the narratives of Muslim women pursuing higher education. It sheds light on various themes which emerged from the field study such as Gender and Modern Education; Women and Religious Education; Education, Family and Marriage; Women Education and Social Mobility in order to understand Muslim women's aspirations and experiences with respect to higher education in the present context of Muslim society.

The fifth chapter of this study is also based on the empirical data collected from the parent respondents and is titled as "The Parental Attitude towards Female Education, Employment and Public Engagements". The chapter discusses the attitudes and expectations of the parents on the question of women's education, family, employment and public participation in relation to their sons in the context of Kerala. It highlights the everyday experiences of the inner lives of Muslim women in Kerala who are vulnerable being women on the one hand and a minority group on the other hand.

The fifth chapter is followed by the concluding chapter, which summarizes the findings and main arguments of the research. The explanations of interviews and narrations are concluded with sociological observations. The chapter also replicates the researcher's own experiences as a member of the Muslim community in Kerala.

Conclusion

The increasing number of Muslim women in higher education shows the positive attitude and keenness of the community towards the higher education of women. The study also problematizes the gender discrimination against educated women and the multiple challenges faced by them from both the parents and within the community. The current study argues that young Muslim women could not make use of the education they gained beyond the boundary of self, family, community and society. The immediate identity of Muslim women is reduced merely as a wife, mother, and primary caregiver without any decision-making power in the family and society. Thus, the thesis argues that higher education for Muslim women in Kerala aims to achieve symbolic capital rather than actual empowerment through formal employment in different economic spheres.

The study observes that the young Muslim women student respondents are highly career-oriented, and aspire to achieve advanced educational qualifications. According to them modern education is very crucial for everyone irrespective of gender. Most of the young women in the selected colleges see career as a key for development rather than committing to the obligations of

social institutions such as family and marriage. They believe that higher education will offer them access to diverse spheres of life including the family and society, something that their mothers could not achieve. The present study raises the question why the education system fails to produce the same outcome for both men and women in the family and society by analyzing the invisibility and subjugation of Muslim women in the public life of Kerala.

The gender discriminatory attitude of parents could be evident even in the process of selecting colleges and courses for the children. While boys are allowed to select the courses and educational institutions of their choice the same privilege is not given to girls. Most of the parents are ready to spend huge amount of money for the education of their male children whereas they are reluctant to spend money when it comes to the education of girl children. After a woman is married off, the income she generates flows to her husband's family and not to the parental family. So, some parents are reluctant to invest huge amount for educating girls. Instead, particularly in middle class and lower middle class families, they save that amount for the expenses of her marriage.

In the study 90% of the mothers said that they expect a good job for their sons but not for daughters, which shows how intensely the gendered discrimination is prevalent. The gender biases of the parents mostly become apparent when it comes to matters of higher education and choosing career. They, precluding high-status jobs that offer large salaries but demand commitments, promote careers such as teaching and nursing which complement with their domestic spheres and family roles. It is observed that family structures channelize women's education to specific areas and disciplines, which would enable 'comfort' professions for women. However, the family and social system play an important role in mediating decisions regarding education and employment of women and channelling them towards the 'marriageability' of girls. However, it is to be noted that economically weak families encourage their girls to achieve better jobs so as to run their family smoothly.

This study highlights the multiple socio-cultural and religious factors which limit the choices and aspirations of young Muslim women in acquiring higher education. The restrictions that family puts on women are one of the major constraints for them in attaining higher education. In the study 42% of the young women respondents said that marriage acts as a major hindrance for them in completing their education and acquiring their desired career. They face various forms of discouragements both from the family and the community which affect their aspirations for higher education. The study argues that for Muslim women, educational qualification has meaning

only in terms of marriageability and in shaping well-educated mothers. As observed in the study, students who belong to the category of “student wives” are more in number among the Muslims when compared to the Hindu and the Christian communities. In the current study, out of the 80% unmarried respondents, more than 75% of the girls had received marriage proposals during their study and some of them, with the help of teachers, family members or friends, succeeded in convincing their families the importance of continuing their education.

The degree of freedom, autonomy and individual ability in decision-making are constrained for women in different matters like higher education, employment and marriage. In the context of Kerala, education fails to lead Muslim women into empowerment. Most of the parents consider educational qualification only as a means to attract good marriage proposals in the marriage market. Respondents opined that not marriage and homemaking but career should have been given more importance in a girl’s life; or at least both should be given equal importance. One of the young respondents commented that “degrees are of no use if they do not lead to any occupation and it is not needed to have an educational qualification and certificate to bring up children and run family”. The social and cultural contexts in which they experience this reality appear to be serving as a challenge for their aspiration for future success.

Among the student respondents, 90% opined that parents are the decision makers regarding the marriage of the daughters, sometimes without even their consent. In many cases, a highly educated girl has to marry a husband with less education due to economic considerations of the family. Parents argue that education can be continued even after marriage and they look for a groom who is willing to let her continue studies. However, many parents also shared stories of discontinuation of studies due to discouragement from the part of husband and in-laws. The study found that even if girls manage to complete their studies facing all challenges there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to take up employment.

The study observed that young Muslim women are not allowed to participate in most of the public events and activities such as cultural, sports and even educational related activities, even in the premises of their educational institutions. The parents discourage them from participating in the cultural and co-curricular programmes of the college by citing the reasons of religious faith, family status, safety and security. The families are afraid that they will have to address questions from the community regarding the moral conduct of their daughters. Due to these, women’s public engagement is restricted. However, there has been a change in this trend of late.

At present, Muslim girls/woman have their own exclusive socio-political organizations in campuses which are not strictly independent of male-dominated parent organizations. The study observed that community leaders exert a strong influence on the students from the community and their political organizations which impose strict religious restrictions on the women's wing of students' organizations. 65% of the respondents stated that there is an absolute absence of women in public engagements like political participation, employment, decision-making, etc. The student organizations do not actively engage in public issues due to various factors such as family, community etc. At the same time 43% of the participants said that women from other religious communities such as Hindus and Christians enjoy more freedom than Muslims in terms of higher education, employment, political engagements and marriage.

Another 43% argued that all women in India face oppression because of the patriarchal structure and religious ideologies which systematically curtail the rights of women. The study found that more than 54% of the mother parents do not support and encourage the public participation of their daughters. One of the main reasons that all of them cited is based on the narrative that it is against the tradition of their religion and culture. The study found that the culture and traditions are defined by men for their benefit and conveniences and place women outside the established cultural practices. The "progressive" *Mujahid* and *Jamaat* groups who gave importance to modern education much before the "traditional" Sunnis started paying attention to modern education, confine women to certain spaces and restrict their public engagements.

The community and family have always confined women into narrowly defined roles despite their outstanding performance in education. In India the family and education system create and reinforce gender divisions in the society by dividing feminine and masculine behaviour and assigning specific roles in the family and society. Instead of undoing these practices the family and the social structure are re-doing these gendered social practices through gendered socialization. The mother respondents clearly opined that education is important for men and women alike in the contemporary society. However, they were not ready to provide equal opportunities for their daughters. For many of them, higher education is merely a shelter to keep their children safe till the age of marriage. As mentioned above, most of the mother respondents considered education for girls as a means to become a good daughter, to attract good marriage proposals, and to be a good wife or mother.

The thesis highlighted the issue that even though the number of Muslim women in the field of higher education has increased considerably in the recent years the presence of women in the public sphere, role and power of decision making is absent. This has prompted the thesis to ask the question what women do after acquiring degrees. The study categorically argued that education does not necessarily result in the participation of women in the public sphere where religion and patriarchy still rule the roost. Through an analysis of the experiences of young Muslim women in Kerala, the study critiqued the general assumption that higher education results in gender equality and empowerment. Thus, the thesis argues that higher education has helped Muslim women in Kerala only to achieve symbolic capital rather than access to employment opportunities and socio-religious autonomy.