

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN KERALA: SOME ISSUES AMONG MALABAR MUSLIMS WOMEN

FATHIMA THSUHRA KADAKKADAN

Abstract: Women and their empowerment are the burning issues among the researchers in the field social science and inter disciplines. Girls and women from the Kerala are also facing some of the problems, especially Muslims women from the region of Malabar, although Kerala is leading many of the social indicators. Muslim women from the Malabar region still under the clutches of narrow religious boundaries. Lack of proper education among the Muslims women's, lack of financial security, religious restrictions for performing arts and cultural events, restriction of women to enter in the politics etc., are some of the problems, there are problems of marriage related also like child marriage, higher dowry practices, many form of interstate marriages like Mysore marriages, Bangalore marriages, Coimbatore marriages, Arabic marriages etc. there are different varieties of problem being faced by both higher educated and un educated Muslims from the Malabar region. Lack of proper recognition from the family and society, lack of proper marriage proposal because of the over aged, higher dowry, higher capitation for admission as faculties in schools and colleges are some of the problems being faced by the higher educated Muslims women, while child marriage, higher dowry, financial in-security, religious dress code, restriction of women for performing arts and cultural activities, restriction for entering in politics because of religious constraints are some of the problems being faced by the less educated and illiterate Muslims women from the Malabar region. This particular paper tries to address some of the problems/issues being faced by the Muslim women from the region of Malabar in Kerala.

Introduction: Women empowerment is one of the important aspect and in evitable part of a development of any type of society. For that a comprehensive as well as a universal planning in the field of education is unavoidable one. But some time when the implementation or execution of the education system, the religious interference make constraints for the implementation progressive educational system in the society. It affects badly among the educational attainments of the women particularly in Muslims girls and women. The state of Kerala has been achieved high rate of social empowerment and development indicators. It has achieved high human development index in all spear of activity and leading over any other state in India. Particular in the case of literacy, women literacy and favorable sex ratios is much higher than any other states in India. Low infant mortality, low morbidity and high life expectancy are some of the other development indicators which have been achieved by the state of Kerala since its formation. So all these factors had led to the development and empowerment of women in the society. Their role in the society has also significantly increased in Kerala as large chunk of Kerala men are working in other countries. Irrespective of religion, this wave changes spread to all sphere of women in the society. But women in Kerala has been suffering some kind of problems particularly women from the Muslims families. This paper tries to explain or to address some of the problems or challenges being faced by the women among muslim families of Kerala.

Kerala government has been started many initiative and programme and policies for the empowerment of women, programme like Ayalkkottam, kudumbasreeetc are some of them, which has been tremendous impact on the Kerala society. In the region of Malabar increasing representation of Muslims women's in Parents Teachers Association (PTA), which conducts

frequent meeting of parents of the school children for reviewing the progress of their kids and for discussing other relevant issues, shows that some kind of transformation has been happening among the Muslims women as in the form of, from four wall kitchen to mainstream society. But the lower strata of society large section of Muslims women still under the clutches of traditional religious boundary, they are not part or not able to come forwards as when society progress. One possible reason could be the lack of economic freedom. Only when a women attains economic empowerment she will be feeling the freedom of air, and the women empowerment will attain at its top, so without the attaining of economic security, it will be highly harder or challenge of women to come forward. Under these circumstances the women cannot able express their feelings in the society like their innate quality and instinct ideas, as a contribution towards the progressive society. During the renaissance period of 1926- 65 in Malabar, the society could witnessed arousing of many Muslims women's with highly instinct qualities, but today world this is not happening except some of the few figures like Kamarunneesa Anwar, SuhraMambad etc. In Malabar, Muslims women attained educational level through the new area like IT and Engineering. Many girls from the Muslims family have been getting higher marks even high ranks also, despite many constrained created by the society. This type of development in education has attained though the new organizationalprogrammers among progressive Muslims group, diverting the gulf remittances in the form investment in higher education sector and voluntary helping group. But still the Muslim women in Kerala under the clutches of the narrow religious boundaries. Thus there are many reasons are for this type of constrained. Let us explains each one in the below.

Political Reasons: Impracticability of Muslims

empowerment is the one of the greatest ever problems by the Muslims women in the state of Kerala. There are problems among Muslims women for entering in politics and if there entering in politics, the main stream society will not be tolerate that or may not get recognition and even the religious leaders will come forward to restrict or malign their identity in the politics, or they will treat this women as outside the religion realm. So because of these reasons involvements of Muslims women in the society are minimal. So when we take the local body elections in Kerala, many Muslims women are contesting among the seats which is reserved for the women, but when women became the member of the panchayat or any government body, they are not able to do/perform their job according to the mandate given by the people in respective areas, because of already explained religious constrained. So instead their husband or any relative from her family is perform the duty of the elected women representative. This is the case of majority of Muslims women elected representative in the local body elections in Kerala, specifically to Malabar, although it is against the illegal and ethics, but basically it comes from the narrow religious constrained created by the society.

Social Reasons: One of the main challenges in front of Muslims women is the lack of proper recognition of high educated and high qualified Muslims women in the region of Malabar. Even though they are attaining the higher education, the society still underestimating them and they are thinking it is not good to go outside their region for study or for any kind of job, and even they will be degrading this women. And they are forcing to work in the four walls of the kitchen if they have high educational qualification. In the matter of family too this girls are facing problems like, no proper relation with husband, and many of girls in the Malabar area they are growing, without getting father care and nursing, because of the most of the Malabar male households have been migrating to the gulf countries. There are reports like because of the absence of husband, many women are choosing their own way rather than stay alone without husband in the family. There are cases like women are eloping with someone by leaving their husband and children behind.

Marriage as a Social Issue: One of the main problems being faced by the girls in Malappuram is the marriage and its related issues. If one lady is highly educated and qualified she is not getting a husband who has qualified at least intermediate or degree. This is very pathetic social issues facing by our women in our social system. Another curious thing is that, boys in the Malabar area especially in Malappuram district, started to get married when just cross 21 years of old and so that when a girl gets higher education she is not getting proper age spouse in the area. This issue is very common in the Malappuram district. In such a case girl in the family are compelled to or forced by parents to tie knot the less qualified common gulf bridegroom, he may be/will be less educated and unskilled labor (which is the common

gulf person nature in the society). So in such a case post marriage situation actually will become the hell of the many Malabar women and chances of mutual adjustment will be less and that lead to the divorce. If one is highly educated and independent girl, even if she expressed some open opinion or criticism, she will be blaming as self-competence and guts lady and will be isolated and that will prevent her for making an any further interference which will create tensions and finally will be divorced, now a days the divorce rate in Malabar region has been increased tremendously. And in opposite side of this many educated women are forced to adjust this kind of hell situation because they are bounded with their children. Because of the poor family back ground and proper caring of the children many relations are forcing to continue without any mutual mental and physical relationship. Suppose even if a lady gets divorced she will be very afraid to go to court or to go for against the families, who tortured her mentally and physically, because of the family bound constrained. That also will leads to the miserable life even after the divorce.

Interstate Marriages: Like, problems among educated girls in the Malabar area, there are many problems being faced by the women in economically poor back ground girls in the society. They are victims of the social evils like practices of dowry and gold, which is prevailing in Malabar areas. Because of the high flow of gulf remittances, the amount given as dowry has increased in the middle income and rich families, but the financially poor family girls un-able to pay the high dowry (that is basically in the form of money or gold) and they will be remain as un married single women in the family. And even if they got married with someone who asks high dowry because of the arrangements like pre-marriage settlements of dowry will give at a future stipulated time, that post marriage life will be like hell condition and husband's family will be use high physical and oral attack against the wife and her family. And this type of marriage will be end in a divorce or murder of wife by the husband's family. Such a heinous type of experiences happens at the Malabar region of Kerala and when richer gets richer, this incidence has been increasing. When a poor girl not gets married she will end up in job like self-employed work like tailoring, pickle making, and working as labor in Pickle Company, plastic company, housewife and coolie worker. Other very pathetic incidents happened in the Malabar area is the interstate marriage like Coimbatore or Mysore kalyanam, which is prevailing poor back ward families. Un less until the society attitude towards the marriage system changes, this in human type of sadistic and brutal practices will be remain in the society and our society silently accepting all these savage attitudes.

Mysore Kalyanam as a Burning Issue: One of the greatest evil being faced by the poor financially background Muslim women in the Kerala especially from the Malabar region are the interstate marriages like Mysore marriages, Coimbatore marriages, Arabic

marriages and Bangalore marriages. This is basically happens by taking the advantages of poor, financially backwardness, un-educated and over aged of the Muslims families from Malabar area particularly the hill areas of the Malabar. Among all of these financial backwardness and high dowry prevalence are the major reasons for sending off their daughter to un known and un identified and un hygienic places of un-educated, unskilled, multiple or second marriage or divorced (mostly) person from the other state. The plethora's of studies find that most of the marriages there is no formal contract or arrangements between both the families and it happens through an intermediaries. The wide networks of such intermediate persons are there in the Malabar region and most of them are taking it as business one, which is very lucrative business now a days in the region. This is purely is a business one and when marriage happens small amount of dowry will be given as in the form of gold and money to the groom family. So just after the marriage, this bride will be shifted to unknown hygienic and strange language place of other state. Most of the bride will be shifted to slum after the 2 or 3 months of marriage. Most of the groom family is staying in a street and there is no surety about the security of this new bride, the places will be completely unsafe and there will be no basic facilities like toilet and proper food and drinking water, and they lead to a miserable life in the form of poverty. For Majority of the marriages, groom will be un-employed and he will be living by the dowry money, and once it gets over he will be started to beating to his wife by asking more dowry and money. After that this person will be fleeing to some other places and the wife alone stay in her husband hut with other family members. She will be also getting miserable treatment from other family members in form of beating, not giving proper food asking money. Places/Slums in Mysore like Gousiyannagar, Shantinagar, Nehrunagar, Naidunagar, Kalaynagiri are the main hub of this type of marriages. The reports say that more than 10000 marriages happen in this form. After getting un-bearable treatment from the husbands family, in many cases, the bride might be eloping to her own house and remain as single in her further life. And after their, for meeting their livelihood they are compelled to work in places textiles, grocery shops and a go as coolie workers. Even after, her own house, she has to lead a miserable and horrible life. Most of the cases she might having at least one kid. This is what is happening in most of the interstate marriages in the Malabar region of Kerala. This type of marriages will be end of great misery and sorrow and that leads to the end of this marriage relation in the form of divorce or some time in murder.

Cultural & Religious Challenges: In the religion of Islam, performing any form of cultural activities by the women is strictly restricted by its norms and roles. One of the main challenges being faced by the Muslim women is the dressing. Means in Islam there is

condition that Muslims women must to wear the complete body covering dresses like purdah, hijab etc. and many women under the religious role is forced to wear this kind of dresses when going for open places. So this is one of the main hindrances for performing any kind of cultural and sports activities. So even if they go any open air performances like dance and singling songs, this type of religious dressing code is becoming stumbling block. There is strict order in order to avoid wearing the modern dresses. There is a one art form of Kerala Muslim community, called Oppana and it is performed in open places and open stages, but most of the time it is performed by the non-Muslims women's. as per the religious rule one can marry from any family of the same religion, but in reality there is restriction to marry from other families on the grounds of their financial status, their occupation, their traditional family name etc, although there is no caste system prevailing among the Muslims, but these practices similar to the caste system.

Economic Reasons: Girls in the Muslims families are not access for the economic freedom because of the restrictions among the families and they are not allowed to go to market places. Lacks of education among the girls are the major reasons for the lack of economic freedom among the Muslim girls. They have to depend on their parents, brother or spouses for the financial needs.

Suggestions To Clear the system:

- Give proper education to the parents and bottom level of people in the families
- Increase the marriage age of girls in the Muslim families
- Make proper employments opportunity to girls, especially those who attained higher education from inside/outside Kerala.
- Faculty recruitments to the educational institutions should be based on the merit and educational qualification rather than financial position of the candidates
- Give proper protection and care to widows and implements proper programmes and policies for them like, self-employment assistance, cheap house loans, fees concession in educational institutions for their children's etc.
- Discourage the social evils like dowry and child marriages that prevailed among the Muslim families, religious organization also should give support for this avoid/removing this type of un civilized system
- Give facilities for Muslims girls for performing in arts and cultural festivals.
- Provide the state fellowship for the girls who are going for schools and colleges.
- Discourage interstate marriages as it is ruin the life of girls and if it necessary, make proper enquiry about the groom family and his locality
- Promote martial arts in schools and colleges for improving mental and physical fitness.