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CHANGING IDENTITIES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN BEARY COMMUNITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN DAKSHINA KANNADA

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Abstract

The status of changing identities is certified only in peculiar destiny, such as religious practices are small changes that gather above time are much common. The identity of women in India has been dependent on many great changes over the past few millennia with decay in their identity from an ancient to medieval times; to the promotion of equal rights; by many reformers their history has been eventful. The present paper sought to attempt an objectives enquiry in respect of status of Muslim women in Beary Community, and its nature and extent, and related impact on the life styles of Muslim women, the purdah practice and the related problems of their educational level and employment prospects etc., the opportunities are available to women for their development. An assessment of women's status would be incomplete without reference to their participation in decision making within family, thus making it imperative to study the nature and extent of their participation in taking decision.

The present paper focuses attention on the Changing Identities of Muslim Women in Beary Community. It has been conducted in Dakshina Kannada District. It seeks to observe the degree and directions of changes that have taken place in the changing socioeconomic status of Muslim Women in Beary Community and the factors associated with the causation of such changes.

Keywords: Muslim Women, Beary Community, Social Change, Identity.

Introduction

Identity is socially constructed. It is something created by the socialization process, and the individual and social interpretations and actions of people. It is not something that is given by biology or nature. For example, being black or white, or male or female, only have significance in society because people attach some importance to these characteristics, and define people in terms of different categories; through learning their culture, and through their involvement with other individuals, social groups and subcultures, people come to develop ideas about what makes them similar to, or different from, others, and their identities are formed. The socialization process transmits both culture and identities from one generation to the next (Brown 2007).

Identity, Status and the Related Role

Marcia's theory is an expansion on German psychologist Erik Erikson's Ego Psychoanalytic Theory, which details the idea that the development of self-identity is one of eight levels of psychological growth in one's life. Marcia's Identity Status Theory combines elements of ego identity with the observed reactions of those starting out their juvenile age. Marcia's theory suggests that people start to make their personal identities during childhood and that their identities will develop during adolescence and early adulthood (Kroger & Marcia 2011).

The reflexivity of an identity, deliberate in the belief of significant symbols, allows the occurrence of a link between personal identity and performance. An identity provides an individual with a point of view or frame of reference in which to describe both the social situation and his or her own actions or potential actions (Heise 1979).

Women and Identity

The complexity of contemporary women's identity formation tasks depends in part on their vocational choices. Homemakers, although unencumbered with the roles of the work and family interface, must integrate within their identities their family roles, their own and societal evaluations of their family role performances, and the growing expectation that women will be employed; and women who prefer to be employed outside homes must integrate into their personal identities, their employment-related roles, societal expectations of women as family managers, and their own and society's evaluations of their employment and family role performances. Examining role-related identity among women differs based on employment status, which may contribute to our understanding of how contemporary women, committed to multiple roles, structure their personal identities and resolve for themselves the contradictory societal expectations associated with these roles (Graham et. al 2009).

The Identity of Muslim Women in Islam

Suppressed, deficient, and inadequate- these are the first words that come to mind when thinking about women in Islam. Of courses, before the advent of Islam, female children were buried alive in Arabia and women were considered transferable property.



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But Islam has empowered women with the most progressive rights since the 7th century. There has been no inferiority in rank offered to women. There are actual instructions of Islam regarding the rights, roles and responsibilities of women, with a special focus on gender equality in Islam (Wink 1990).

Demographical features of Muslims in Beary Community of Dakshina Kannada

Muslims in Tulunadu (the term Tulunadu used for Dakshina Kannada in Coastal Karnataka) are known as Bearys. They are believed to be the pioneers in this region, influenced by the Arabs who settled in Malabar, and married Hindu women in the 7th Century. Bearys originated in Kerala state. The religion which upheld the ideas of equality, and fraternity among the people attracted the marginalized people from other religions. The Beary community is distributed in the southwest coast of India. It has its own specific traditions and cultural identity. This community holds a vital place among the other Muslim communities in coastal areas. Beary community integrates the local Tulu culture of Dakshina Kannada and various traditions of the Malabar of Coastal area (Noori 1960).

Review of literature:

Identities of women in India Society

The status of women changed at different times in Ancient India. Vedic, and Epic periods show that women enjoyed more freedom at home, and public sphere like, performed customs with her husband, went to school, was free to select her life partner, practiced polyandry. She walked with her husband, and participated in political affairs. There was no gender discrimination. Women played an essential role in both inside and outside the household (Clarisse 1987).

The journey of Indian women from ancient to modern period has an essential impact on identity practices. In an agrarian society, women had a homemaker, role taking, action choice, and replacement processes. All these put together lead to the emergence of identity in a broken order. Under these circumstances, women changed her destiny, and way of life by taking part in various roles in multiple systems with courage, conviction, and managed the power of the past, and informal social control of the present in socio_cultural, familial, and organizational influences of her identity in an ever changing environment (Indira and Nayana 1992).

Islam has given equal rights to women in different fields like education, economy, and polity with honesty, dignity, and respect, and abolished discrimination on the basis of sex. In the beginning, a Muslim man couldn't marry more than one woman. Islam didn't allow men to marry more than one woman. During the Battle of Uhud, several men were killed, women turned widows, and children became orphans. In order to protect them, and safeguard their lives, Islam permitted men to marry more than one woman with a condition that they must do equal justice between their wives; if not, marry only one under the Sharia Law. There is no practice of dowry in Islam. Women have the right to divorce. After the death of the Prophet, The Quranic verses were wrongly interpreted, and injunctions about women were more secluded, and deprived in many aspects of social life (Khan 1990).

Changing Identities of Muslim Women through Social Institutions

A study conducted in Aligarh city of India, compared the status of women in the pre-independence and post-independence period. In the pre-independence period, there was no change taken place among Muslim women. In the post-independence period, a lot of change took place among Muslim women through the influence of education. Educated women changed the family structure, authority, political participation, age at marriage, and mass media consumption (Shadbano 1978).

The study conducted by Khan (2007), discussed in various ways, different perspectives, and examined how women in Muslim communities play a vital role in the public sphere. But the restriction imposed on her that she should not pass over their community boundaries. They laid a secure condition a good status in the socioeconomic life, and education. In four decades, many communal riots, movements, and several conflicts took place. Even these challenges continued in matters of Muslim women's exclusion from the public sphere. This is inextricably related to the rights of all women from public space.

Methodology

This study has been conducted in Dakshina Kannada district of coastal Karnataka. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was collected through the interview schedule, adopting stratified random sampling method, exploratory and descriptive research design. The data was collected from five taluks of Dakshina Kannada district; the names of taluks are Bantawala, Belthangadi, Mangalore, Puttur, and Sullia, responding from rural, semi urban and urban areas. The respondents (Muslim Women in Beary Community) were proportionately chosen, taking care of the nature of the region. The secondary data was collected from books, journals, e-journals and reports. A sample of 400 respondents was selected on Morgan and



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Krejcie Scale for a population which is equal to or greater than 1, 00,000; the required sample size is 384. The collected data is tabulated and processed for statistical analysis.

Objectives of the Study

- 1 To study the socio-economic conditions of Muslim women in Beary Community, in Dakshina Kannada district.
- 2 To assess the factors responsible for the changing identity of Muslim women in Beary Community.
- 3 To explore the constraints of Muslim women regarding social change in Beary Community.

Major Findings

1. Socio-economic Conditions of Muslim Women in Beary Community

This study is conducted on Muslim women in Beary Community of Dakshina Kannada District. Bearys comprise the predominant community in the study area. Muslim women below the age group of 40 are more educated and are employed in different fields. (1%) of women above the age group of 51 are illiterate, and 19% family annual income is below Rupees 1, 00,000 per annum. 64.4 percent women are engaged in different income generating activities. The remaining is engaged in household activities.

2. The factors responsible for the Changing Identity of Muslim Women in Beary Community

- **Providing Better Education to girls:** The attitude of respondents towards the education of their children, especially of daughter, is more favourable. They give importance to professional education, graduation, and post-graduation to their daughters. This type of education gives them better status, role and good identity for future, and it also helps in marriage.
- **Employment:** All employed women have individual freedom to spend their income as they wish, either for their individual needs, or for family purpose. The family is supporting young girls or daughters-in-law for employment. Employment helps Muslim women to improve their identity by raising their standard of living, by empowering them and providing them stability.
- **Political Participation:** Muslim women actively participate in Local Self Government. The elected representatives have acquired different positions like president, vice president, ex-Mayor and ex-deputy Mayor, Corporators, counsellor, and members. Motivation for better achievement comes from different sources, such as self-interest, encouragement of family members, neighbours, and friends. All elected representatives, observed in this study, are married. The family members, neighbours and friends who have political background have encouraged them to participate in Local Self Government.
- **Membership in Association:** Muslim women have joined various associations of social work and other services. The nature of the associations is - women oriented associations, associations of religious nature, and secular associations. Those associations are only for women (Mahila Mandala), meaning that they are exclusively for women. Religious associations are related to a particular religion. Secular associations are related all; under this category come Teachers' Association, Doctors' Association, Rotary Club and Lions Club. Significantly, 63 percent have occupied prestigious positions in different associations. Others are quite happy with the formal membership only.
- **Late Marriage and Monogamy Marriage:** 69 percent of the Muslim women are married in the age group between 18 and 22; (99.5%) of the Muslims follow the monogamous marriage. Education is the main reason for the late marriage and monogamous marriage of Muslim women in the studied area.
- **Small size of Family:** In general, Muslims in Dakshina Kannada live in small families. There are families having 1 to 2 children or no children. Muslim women respond to family planning favourably due to education, and the present condition of the family. 84 percent live in nuclear family. The reasons for preference to nuclear family are: possibility of less domestic conflict, and the greater opportunity for providing a good life to their children, and to self.
- **Property Rights:** Ownership of property among unmarried Muslim women in Beary Community is very rare. Married women get the property share from the parents or husband. 89 percent of widows have got share from their husband's property. The reason for not owning any property is, it is owned by the parents, or it is not divided or they don't have any property.
- **Decision Making and Household Responsibilities:** 57 percent decision making is done by both husband and wife together on all matters. In some cases, the in-laws and parents take decisions on marriage, career, schooling and investment. The responsibilities of household chores are under the headship of women. In most cases women alone do the household shopping; in some cases, they have the shopping done with family members and friends.

4. The constraints of Muslim women regarding social change in Beary Community.

- **Lack of Women Education:** The obstacles for girls' education at family are: financial crisis and early marriage of girls. Female school dropout is another problem in Muslim community. The school dropouts from rural area reported in this study. Reasons for female school dropouts are- financial issues, learning difficulties, absence of proper school near their area, lack of educational facilities and lack of education of parents.



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- **Unemployment:** Unemployed women are engaged in household activities like taking care of relatives, cooking, cleaning, and washing, and so on. The unemployment is due to family responsibility, and lack of required educational qualification. Absence of chance for work close to their area, jobs not matching the level of their qualification, and no interest among the family members to send them far away for work is the primary reasons behind unemployment. 18 percent of the respondents have opined that there is no need to work because they are economically strong, or that it is male members' responsibility to look after their female family members.
- **Lack of political participation:** Educated Muslim women were not interested in this field due to misconception about it. Only 13 percent employed Muslim women contested in the local self-governments. In principle, if any person wants to contest in local self-government, in the event of their success, they need to resign from job, to work in the elected post. Hence those who are already employed do not want to lose their job; so, they do not contest in Local Self Government. Muslim women above 35 years of age contested in local self- government in the studied area. Younger Muslim women do not have an interest in this field, as stated by respondents.
- **Early marriage:** The age of 12 percent of those who married below 18 years is above 50 years now. During their time, if a girl attained puberty between 11 and 13 years, their parents could arrange the marriage without daughter's permission.
- **A large family:** There are cases of family having more than four children above the age of 50 because the family did not favour of family planning. These are the constraints for social change.
- **Extended family:** 16 percent respondents are showing preference for extended family. The reasons for the preference for extended family are: support, security and intimacy, affection and family bonding. The widows, widowers, and divorced respondents depend on their children and on living together in extended family. The reasons for constraints of social change are - domestic conflicts, lack of women's individual freedom, and lack of opportunity for individual decision making for children's career, caused by a large number of family members.
- **Lack of Property Right:** Unmarried women very rare to get the property rights.
- **Abuse:** In general, very few cases of domestic violence were reported in this study. The prominent forms of domestic violence reported are personal abuse (58 percent) and isolation (42 percent). The reasons for abuse are: complaint on cooking, delay in pregnancy, abuse not only from husband but also from family members, from in-laws, and so on. The number of respondents who have faced domestic violence, and their level of economic status are analysed; in fact, only married respondents faced domestic violence. The study reports that even the educated married women have faced the domestic or marital violence, but in lesser volume.
- **Polygamy:** A few cases of polygamy are practiced due to getting sick of first wife and lack of children from the first wife, as stated by respondent in the studied area. But it is practiced, although Islam religion permits polygamy only on certain grounds.

Status of Muslim Women in general

Regarding the social position of Muslim women in Beary Community, in the region, 76 percent respondents opine that woman in Beary community are better placed than women in other sub-communities in Muslim religion. Education, employment, political participation, and membership in different associations have helped women for achievement of better places and social position.

Conclusion

Muslim women can no more be kept behind the curtains doing only domestic duties. Study area shows acceptance of the wider participation of women. They are educated and employed in different fields, are participate at assemblies, and are even holding the helm of areas like administration. Women with their intelligence and personality, protect the family from disruptions and disintegration. Muslim women are an integral part of today's society. They have an active social life, and participate in various socioeconomic, educational and political functions. 'Changing Identity' is occurring among Muslim women in Beary Community in all spheres, especially in Dakshina Kannada of Karnataka State. This trend addresses the guarantee of innovation-based social change, and a solution that could bring about more rights and open doors for women in general, and Muslim women in particular.

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