



Muslim Women And The Question Of Empowerment: Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

About half of India's population is female, and their advancement in all spheres—social, cultural, and economic—is dependent on them. Kerala's Muslim population has experienced significant transformation, and in terms of education and economic status, they are in a better place than their counterparts in other Indian states. Their condition empowers them to drive change and address various contemporary issues. This article uses secondary data to study Muslim Women and the Question of Empowerment: Theoretical Analysis. This study intends to testify the question of empowerment in the context of Muslim women which is highly important. Since the colonial era, several attempts have been endeavoured to empower them in diverse capacities. Since the end of colonialism, many women have gained more authority.

Key words: Muslim Women, Muslim Community, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION:

The term empowerment is defined as “the notion of people having the ability to understand and control themselves and their environment—including social, economic, and political factors—expanding their capabilities and horizons and elevating themselves to greater levels of achievement and satisfaction”¹

(Wilson, 1996). "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life"² (Sushama Sahay, 1998).

Women constitute almost half of the human resource pool, and they undoubtedly play a significant role in the advancement of Indian society³. In India, women make up almost half of the population, and they are crucial to the nation's social, cultural, and economic advancement⁴. All women, regardless of faith, have the same goals and aspirations as men. It is widely believed that Muslim women are marginalized and oppressed in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities⁵. Kerala's Muslim population has experienced significant transformation, and in terms of education and economic status, they are in a better place than their counterparts in other Indian states. Their current state empowers them to drive transformation and address many contemporary issues⁶

The question of empowerment in the context of Muslim women is highly important. Since the colonial era, several attempts have been endeavoured to empower them in diverse capacities. Since the end of colonialism, many women have gained more authority. Usmani et al.'s *Rising beyond the ceiling* (2022) Kerala: 100 inspirational Muslim women⁷ tell the tales of 100 such women who have made significant contributions to Kerala's history since colonization. These women have contributed to numerous social concerns pertaining to Muslim women specifically and Muslims generally as a whole. They come from a variety of fields, including politics, art, literature, religion, culture, and education.

In the past three or four decades, Muslim women in Kerala have seen significant advancements in their activism, which is a reflection of their intellectual engagement with the issues and trends that impact their lives. In her work *Intellectual Activism of Muslim Women in Post-1990 Kerala*, Najada⁸ (2018) delves into the intellectual advancements that Muslim women encounter as a response to their circumstances and experiences. Even while Muslim women experienced this kind of development during colonialism, its consolidated form and highly clear manifestation are very recent. Given that the emergence, growth, and dissemination of Muslim women's organizations are examples of this type of intellectual action among Muslim women.

Shanuga Cherayi⁹ has written about the connection between the issues of social inclusion and Muslim women's inclusion and empowerment on the one hand. In their article, "Marginalized Muslim women in Kerala, India: The relationship between social exclusion and empowerment is examined through their interaction, with a particular emphasis on how they shape one another. The authors assert that through analysing data gathered from 101 Muslim women living in rural areas below the poverty line, they have investigated the relationship between social exclusion and Muslim women's empowerment. In the same Muslim women's social inclusion and empowerment: In an effort to develop a new conceptual framework, Cherayi & Jose (2016)¹⁰ investigate the connection between social inclusion and empowerment. The goal of this study is to create a conceptual framework that will allow researchers to address concerns about Muslim women's desires for empowerment through the process of social inclusion. The authors attempt to comprehend how women's empowerment in the social, economic, psychological, and political domains

enhances social inclusion and access to judicial institutions by creating a conceptual model of empowerment induced social inclusion. The study comes to the conclusion that women's access to justice institutions and social inclusion were greatly enhanced by their empowerment in the personal, familial, social, and political domains.

An intriguing, novel, and unique approach to comprehending the empowerment process in the context of Muslim women in Kerala may be found in Sabira & Shibinu's¹¹ *Impact of Male Migration on the Empowerment of Left-Behind Muslim Women in Malappuram, Kerala* (2024). They attempt to comprehend how male migration to Gulf countries empowers Muslim women left behind in Kerala, based on a research of Muslim women in the Malappuram district. Wives are forced to rely on themselves for a variety of tasks when their husbands are away, which eventually empowers them and helps them become self-sufficient for a range of demands. When a man migrates, the women left behind must take on more responsibility, which gives them more mobility, control over household resources, and decision-making authority. The women left behind use the foreign remittances to enhance their standard of living, access to information, and education.

Saira Bano Orakzai's¹² "The rights of women in Islam: The question of 'public' and 'private' spheres for women's rights and empowerment in Muslim societies" investigates the issue of women's rights in Islam from the perspectives of the "public" and "private" spheres of life, as well as how this affects the issue of women's empowerment. The paper illustrates the dialectical nature of the interpretation of women's rights in Islam by using a hermeneutic-relativist method. The study also looks at the debate between traditional and reformist conceptions of empowerment and rights, and it offers a framework for interpreting the "public" and "private" domains of existence in light of Muslim nations' cultural norms.

E. Samier, and Eman Elkaleh¹³ (Samier & ElKaleh) in their study on *Towards a Model of Muslim Women's Management Empowerment: Philosophical and Historical Evidence and Critical Approaches* addressing national and cultural differences from Western women's empowerment models and this paper builds a culturally appropriate model for Muslim women's empowerment in management and leadership positions. It also addresses sustainability goals of quality education, gender equality, economic growth, and reducing inequalities. This paper's core claim is that sustainability goals cannot be met in the absence of a model that is appropriate for the cultural and sociological framework in which women are educated and employed. By offering a theoretical framework and a multifaceted model that can guide and influence Muslim women's empowerment in management and leadership roles across many countries, this article adds to the body of existing scholarship.

Payal Shah and A. Khurshid's¹⁴ study on *Muslim woman hood, education, and empowerment: ethnographic reflections from Pakistan and India* looks at how educated Muslim women in Pakistan and India create and embody strong identities in relation to their social environments. The position of Muslim women in modern times has evolved into a prism through which to see and interact with Muslim societies. A picture of Muslim women as oppressed victims of their patriarchal families and society is embedded in these narratives. This article explores what empowerment means for educated Muslim women from Pakistan and India by focusing on their personal experiences. Since these participants are some of the first and only

educated women in their rural and low-income communities, we are especially interested in seeing how they use their unique educational position to define what it means to be an empowered Muslim woman in their respective situations. This shift away from frameworks that provide universalistic and homogenous understandings of Islam, education, and empowerment is the emphasis on the lived realities. Rather, it offers perspectives on the nuanced—and perhaps even contradictory—meanings and manifestations of gendered identities that are influenced by social and historical contexts.

Suman Kumar Kundu and Ananya Chakraborty¹⁵ attempt to provide an empirical analysis of Muslim women's empowerment in the purposefully chosen Murshidabad district of West Bengal, which has the greatest percentage of Muslims (63.67%) in the nation. A Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) has been developed to illustrate the multifaceted aspects of women's empowerment. It is based on 22 key indicators that serve as explained variables and cover four dimensions of women's empowerment: political awareness, mobility, control over economic resources, and control over household decision-making. S. Waseem, A. Ashraf and Ayaz Ahmad¹⁶ in their study Muslim Women Education and Empowerment in Rural Aligarh (A Case Study), the majority of the study's data came from primary sources. According to the findings, socio-economic circumstances have a greater influence on women's liberation than religion does. It demonstrates unequivocally the relationship between women's status and their ability to participate in decision-making within the family structure. Study also observes that education should be prioritized for the development of rural environments since it is the most crucial component.

Ranjita Biswas's¹⁷ article addresses the current status of Muslim women's access to higher education in India and makes recommendations for improvements. This study attempted to address the situation of Muslim women in higher education, the barriers to higher education they face, and the policies and programs that the government has put in place to help them access higher education. It concluded with some recommendations that might help Muslim women get higher education to a greater extent.

Women's Empowerment from an Islamic Perspective (Analytical Study) is a significant study by K. Umam, Muhammad Agus Waskito¹⁸ (K. Umam, 2022). According to the study's findings, Islam views women's empowerment as a comprehensive process that takes into account their four main religious, social, political, and economic facets. In the Islamic view, it indicates that the strong woman fulfils her responsibilities with complete knowledge, taking into account all facets of her character, creation, and roles within the family and community. In order for women to fulfil their full potential, they must be able to preserve, manage, use, and develop property for the good of society, their families, and themselves. This is known as women's economic empowerment from an Islamic perspective.

S. Ali¹⁹ (S.Ali, 2002) in his work “Women’s rights, CEDAW and international human rights debates: Toward empowerment?” taking into account the alternative 'Islamic' discourse on women's rights, the article explores the possibilities and difficulties of implementing CEDAW and human rights law to empower women. The possibility of human rights law as a useful tool for women's empowerment is examined in this study. The chapter examines the challenges associated with using ideas of formal equality to seek empowerment for women in a diverse world, beginning with a brief summary of the international norm of non-discrimination and equality that culminated in the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The study also looks at the human rights rhetoric and tools that are offered in alternative "Islamic" Muslim forums.

The studies mentioned above show the theoretical perspectives on empowerment of Muslim women. Empowering women is a modern concern for emerging nations such as India. In India, the largest Muslim minority community, the rates of women's empowerment remain precarious. In India, Muslim women have less status and are comparatively less powerful than men and women from other communities. Even though, as the thinkers opines, there has been a big transformation in Muslim women especially in the Muslim women of Kerala in the fields of education and economic status. There have been Muslim women all over the world who have proved their proficiency in many fields of politics, literature, culture, education and religion. The formation of many women's organizations aimed at empowering women has also been possible through the intellectual interventions of Muslim women. Women's socio-economic, political and psychological empowerment certainly enhances social inclusion and made access to judicial institutions. Migration of husbands to foreign countries empowers women as they are forced to do many personal and family tasks.

Studies on the empowerment of Muslim women uncover a variety of intricate opportunities and problems. Muslim women in India experience differences in political and socioeconomic status when compared to women and men from other communities. Many studies have analysed that women's education certainly plays a major role in the empowerment process. It is very pertinent that institutional, governmental, and cultural constraints that prevent women from reaching their full potential. In order to surmount these challenges, women ought to function within the established cultural and religious structures, contesting gender stereotypes and promoting equitable gender interactions.

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