



Muslim Women In Relation To Family, Society And Public Sphere: A Study On Kerala Society

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Abstract

Numerous sociological and anthropological researches aim to comprehend Muslim women in their household structure as well as their position in Kerala society and the public domain. These studies look at things like how they are treated by society, where they fit in, how society affects them, how they respond to society, how they show up in society and the public eye, how they make space in the public eye, and other related topics. These are complemented by inquiries on their identity and socioeconomic status. As a result, the works' content varies from simply outlining their familial relationships and socioeconomic status to tackling their identity concerns, interaction with modernity, and other topics. The marginalized position of Muslims in Kerala's social structure unites all of the aforementioned concerns. This article uses secondary data to study Muslim Women in Relation to Family, Society and Public Sphere: A Study on Kerala Society.

Key words: Muslim Women, Family, Society and Public Sphere.

INTRODUCTION:

Women make up almost half of the human resources, and they undoubtedly play a significant role in the advancement of Indian society¹. About half of India's population is female, and they play a crucial role in the social, cultural, and economic advancement of the nation². Regardless of their religion, women have the same goals and expectations as men. It is widely believed that Muslim women are marginalized and undervalued in both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities³. Kerala's Muslim population has experienced significant transformation, and they now enjoy greater educational and economic opportunities than their counterparts in other Indian states. This situation empowers them to bring about change and address many contemporary issues⁴.

According to the 2011 census, 26.56% of Kerala's population is Muslim. With 70.24% of the population being Muslim, Malappuram is the district in Kerala with the highest concentration of Muslims. According to the 2011 census, there are 4,112,920 people living in the Malappuram district, with 1,960,328 men and 2,152,592 women. The Malappuram district had 793,999 families living there in 2011. The district of Malappuram has an average sex ratio of 1,098. In 2011, the district of Malappuram's overall literacy rate was 93.57%, below Kerala's average of 94%. Of the 3,311,315 literate people in the population, 1,597,404 were men and 1,713,911 were women. Additionally, the Malappuram district had a 95.76% male literacy rate and a 91.62% female literacy rate (Census, 2011).

Numerous sociological and anthropological researches aim to comprehend Muslim women in their household structure as well as their position in Kerala society and the public domain. These studies look at things like how they are treated by society, where they fit in, how society affects them, how they respond to society, how they show up in society and the public eye, how they make space in the public eye, and other related topics. These are complemented by inquiries on their identity and socioeconomic status. As a result, the works' content varies from simply outlining their familial relationships and socioeconomic status to tackling their identity concerns, interaction with modernity, and other topics. The marginalized position of Muslims in Kerala's social structure unites all of the aforementioned concerns.

Sebastian's⁵ research (2023) 'Beyond A Monolithic Conception of Muslim Communities, Matriliney and Muslim women's involvement with the evolution of kinship on South India's Malabar Coast is only an anthropological investigation of Muslim women's kinship relationships and their changes. The study makes the assumption that Muslim women can have a part in changing familial relationships. According to the author, the mainstream reform research of colonial Kerala rarely gave Muslim women's methods, negotiations, and contestations for social change any attention. She goes on to note that although the reforms aimed to promote new gender relations based on conjugality and patrilineality, matrilineal women established a different space of their own.

Fathima⁶ (2014) in her *Matriliney Favours Women: Reality or Myth? A Comparative Study of The Socio-Cultural Status of Mappila Muslim Women in Matrilineal and Patrilineal Families of Malabar* attempts to investigate the sociocultural status of Muslim women from Mappila. Additionally, this study compares Muslim women from patrilineal and matrilineal households. According to the study, which was based on married Mappila Muslim women from two distinct kinship systems—patrilineal and matrilineal—kinship has a significant impact on women's micro-level autonomy even though there is no difference between matrilineal and patrilineal women in terms of macro-level status indicators. It is believed that matrilineal women enjoy a higher status than patrilineal women within their kin group because they are perceived to have greater decision-making authority in the home, greater mobility, and protection from domestic violence.

Merlin⁷ (2004) examines the effects of male migration on Muslim women in Kerala in her work *Male Migration to Gulf: Impact on Muslim Women in Kerala*. She looks into the sociocultural, economic, emotional, and psychological effects of migration as well as how it affects families and kids. Begum⁸ (2006) examines social and cultural development in the context of Muslim women in Malabar in her book *Muslim women in Malabar: Study in social and cultural change. The introduction of Islam to Malabar, the*

status and role of women in Islam, the social and cultural transformations Islam brought about for Muslim women, and the particular problems Muslim women experience are all covered in her research.

The Labyrinth of Dissonance: Islam and Women in Kerala, written by Sherin⁹ (2011), aims to depict Muslim women's experiences throughout colonial social reform efforts and their interactions with society after independence. She attempts to situate these issues within Kerala's overall Islamic past. Her research encompasses the feminist interpretation of Kerala's Islamic history, the role of Muslim women in Kerala's reform movements, and the current discourse surrounding Muslim women in Kerala. According to the author, Muslim women have historically been depicted as helpless victims who are illiterate and impoverished in the context of reform movements and subsequent progressive discourses. By highlighting the active involvement of Muslim women in the reform movements and offering a nuanced interpretation of the status of women generally and Muslim women specifically in pre-reform contexts, she challenges these stereotypes of Muslim women.

In their research, Kurup, Ismail, and Sherin attempt to investigate how Muslim women connect with and interact with modernity and tradition. In their article Muslim women in Kerala: Tradition vs. Modernity, Kurup & Ismail¹⁰ (2014) attempt to comprehend how Muslim women attempt to balance modernity and tradition. It is incorrect to assume that Muslim women consistently reject modern norms and give in to traditional ones. In reality, they interact with both and detach from them.

Reconciling religion, reform, and modernity: A study of early Muslim women's magazines from South India by Sherin¹¹ (2024) also attempts to understand how Muslim women engage and disengage with religion, reform, and modernity. She challenges the common misconception that Muslim women are slaves to their faith. She attempts to comprehend the subjectivity of Muslim women as well as their interaction with modernity by investigating the efforts made by Muslim women in South India to operate journals. The women's magazines that were distributed among Muslims in Kerala, South India, in the early 1900s are examined in this study. Unlike the public's nationalist and colonial monolithic fantasies, they were published by small-scale print houses, and Muslim women were involved in these publications as writers, editors, and publishers, creating a highly porous public sphere.

As the title implies, Musthafa's¹² (2021) work, Contributions of Muslim Women to the Malayalam Press: A work on the Journalistic Efforts of M. Haleema Beevi, examines the contributions of Muslim women to the Malayalam press, with a particular emphasis on Haleema Beevi's efforts in this regard. In order to dispel the stereotype that Muslim women are restricted to the home, this study, like the one on Sherin, attempts to describe Muslim women's public lives.

In their research, Mangat and Azad attempt to examine Muslim women's lives in the public domain with a particular emphasis on Kozhikode. In her work Public Sphere and Muslim Women: A work of Kozhikode District, Kerala, Khadeeja (2018) aims to comprehend what the public sphere is for Muslim women and how they interact with it. This study looks at Muslim women's general standing in daily life, with an emphasis on their political and educational advancements, in an effort to place them into the larger public conversation. The main goal of the study is to investigate how Muslim women in Kerala deal with the challenges of identifying as both marginalized Indian Muslims and privileged Malayalees, as well as how these two identities overlap at various points in time.

In her research, Azad¹³ (2020) examines how Muslim women in Calicut negotiate their surroundings. Understanding various issues related to Muslim women's participation in the public sphere is the goal of a study of the Kerala Development Model and how we may improve. In the framework of the Kerala Model of Development, she attempts to comprehend how they carve out a niche for themselves in the public realm. She also makes an effort to offer suggestions for ways to make their life better in public. This thesis aims to demonstrate that Muslim women's low involvement is caused by a combination of cultural factors and the state of Kerala's ignorance, which has failed to consider their requirements.

Some other works on Muslim women in a pan-Indian setting, while not exclusively about Muslim women in Kerala, provide insight into the social lives of Muslim women in Kerala or attempt to provide a comprehensive awareness of the situation of Muslim women. An idea of the situation of Muslim women in general can be gained from the study "Not without my Hijab: Experiences of Veiling Muslim Women in India" by Rumaney and Sriram¹⁴ (2023). Other works address the issue of women in general, transcending caste and religious distinctions. These studies also aim to provide us with a better understanding of the concerns and difficulties faced by Muslim women in Kerala.

Lindberg's¹⁵ (2014) research 'The historical roots of dowries in contemporary Kerala' is such a work that covers the case of Muslim women. Dowry and women's lives in Kerala: What has changed in a decade? , Bradley and Pallikadavath (2013) tries to address the situation of all women in general while addressing the problems Muslim women encounter with the dowry system. The study also looks into how gender relations have changed over the last three or four decades as a result of migration. The prevalence, trends, and sociocultural dynamics of dowry practices in Kerala, India, are examined by SPENCE et al. (2024) in their research Dowry Practices in Kerala: Trends, Implications, and Socio-Legal Perspectives.

In her research Abandoned Muslim Wives: Victims of Early Marriage, Sindhu¹⁶ (2014) attempts to illustrate the difficulties faced by Muslim women who have been abandoned by their husbands. The study, which looked at 500 Muslim wives who were abandoned and married before turning 18, came from the districts of Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Kannur. It found that women from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to marry young and be abandoned. Jafar¹⁷ (2015) attempts to address a similar issue in his work, Status of Muslim women in Kerala: A study of female age at marriage in Malappuram District. He attempts to address the issue of Muslim girls in Malappuram district getting married young. This study investigates the educational and occupational possibilities available to 1543 women both before and after marriage, using case studies from Kerala's Malappuram district. The findings imply that these women's options have been restricted by marriage. The outcome adds fresh perspectives to the on-going discussion of raising the minimum marriageable age for Muslim females in Kerala, a district with a majority of Muslims. In general, the evidence supports the worries about the wide-ranging effects of lowering the state's minimum marriage age for Muslim females.

The studies mentioned above show the theoretical perspectives on Muslim Women in relation to family, society and public sphere in Kerala Society. The roles that Muslim women play in the home, in society, and in public life demonstrate intricate relationships that are influenced by political, cultural, and religious elements. Muslim women frequently fall behind other communities, despite the fact that

modernization has increased chances for women's education and work. Interaction with sociocultural organizations like families, which mediate small-scale decisions like work, health, and education. Gender relations in Kerala have been significantly impacted by changes in family structure and customs during the past century.

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