

# **Breaking Stereotypes: Two Generations of Muslim Women**

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## **Introduction**

**P**opular opinion continues to carry the impression of Muslim women in India as being somehow impervious to modernization and social changes. It is believed that the strong influence of religious ethos which breed a high degree of conservatism and adherence to traditional lifestyles force Muslim women to remain confined to the four-walls of the house and to persist in illiteracy and deprivation. The present paper seeks to examine this popular stereotype of the Muslim woman in India through empirical data drawn from a study of intergenerational mobility and social change among Muslim women of Darbhanga town of Bihar State. It seeks to analyse how much access to and control over material and social resources Muslim women have within the family and outside and whether this access and control has been changing over the generations. In other words, it tries to find out if any mobility has occurred in the socio-economic and cultural life of women? What are its dimensions and directions and how do women perceive these changes? What are the factors responsible for this at the family, community and national levels?

The main reason for taking up this particular theme is the paucity of empirical data on inter-generational mobility among women in general and Muslim women in particular. Most studies are focussed on the mobility of men in the family and concentrated either on the attitudinal aspect, case studies or life histories. Studies are needed to remove the many misconceptions and stereotypes of Muslim women who have been seen as merely victims of polygamy, triple talaq and purdah while their participation in changing their life situations in spite of the many constraints have not received the attention that is necessary. The present work is a modest attempt in this direction.

The study of Muslim women has very often been treated as a special area as though the very fact of being Muslim is enough to justify such special treatment. Most of the literature attributes their problems to religion without considering the heterogeneous nature of the Muslim community and their low socio-economic development that in itself has specific causes. Kazi makes the same observation when she states, "The perception that position of Muslim women in India can be ascribed to a certain intrinsic, immutable feature of Islam or that their legal status derives solely from reference to Muslim laws is widely prevalent. As a result of this misconception, Muslim women are often considered as 'separate' or 'different' from Indian society, reinforcing cultural stereotypes and obscuring their contemporary realities." (Kazi, 1998: 2) This stereotyped notion overlooks the fact that the problems of women from other communities too arises out of socio-cultural and economic factors. Thus the problem of dowry, widow remarriage, stigma attached to childless women or widows, preference for the male child, etc., are not specific to the Muslim community; rather these are general s of Indian society.

Therefore the questions which need to be examined are: Why, after fifty years of independence, do the stereotypes about Muslims in general and women in particular as 'being non-responsive to processes of change and development' continue to prevail among academics, media and other opinion-moulders both within the country and especially in the West? Are women not really responding to changes taking place at the national and global level?

Keeping in mind the heterogeneous nature of the Muslim community in India, it is our submission that the changes that are taking place need to be examined in the context of a number of national and regional processes and pressures. At the same time, the specific religious context, i.e., that of Islam cannot be ignored. The larger national context includes the historical events of Partition, the socio-economic and political position of the community, the role of the state and its policies, the rise of communal politics which has accentuated the sense of insecurity and sense of being under siege among Muslims. How does this macro picture impinge on the lives of Muslim women at the micro level, i.e., within the family?

## **I The Larger National Context**

One cannot but mention the partition of the country and its consequences. The partition shook the existence of Indian Muslims. Apart from the mass killings, destruction, loss of property and general dislocation which left its scars on the Muslim populace as a whole, the migration of major sections of the Muslim elite left a serious void. The Muslims who stayed back in India had to face general suspicion and hostility. This feeling of suspicion, distrust and hostility still prevails and is being faced by the generation, which was not even born at that time. The fear psyche that was generated then has been further intensified in recent years due to the growing influence of majoritarian communalist tendencies and forces. It is this psyche which continues to affect to a significant degree the actions and behaviour of Muslims.

The socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim community has been highlighted by a number of official reports and surveys. The Panel on Minorities and Weaker Sections headed by Gopal Singh (1983), the 43<sup>rd</sup>. Round of the National Sample Survey (1987-88), the Programme of Action, the New Education Policy, 1986 and the Planning Commission Survey of 1987-88 all draw attention to this.

The Muslims are the single largest minority in India numbering about 110 millions and constituting nearly 13 per cent of the population. More than 50 per cent of them live below the poverty line with a monthly income of Rs.150 or less as compared with the all-India poverty percentage of 39. A significantly larger percentage of Muslims live in urban areas (34 per cent) as compared to the all-India figure of 25 per cent. Fifty –three per cent of them are self-employed and there is a high percentage of landlessness (35 per cent). Literacy rates are low as compared to the all-India figures, 42 per cent as against 52, with the rates for Muslim women being 21 per cent. There is a rather thin educated middle class which is only just about emerging. Muslims are poorly represented in public employment, occupying only six per cent of state government jobs, four per cent in the central government, three per cent in the Indian Administrative Services and less than one per cent in senior bureaucratic posts. (Hasan, 1994) Their representation in Parliament has come down from 47 in 1996 to 29 in 1998. (Mehrtaj, 1998: 4)

While Article 46 of the Constitution of India provides for special provisions to protect the interests of the socially and educationally backward sections, the large majority of Muslims who are converts from the lower castes have not been able to avail of these provisions except in some states.

The overall experience of pervasive deprivation and discrimination coupled with the stridency of majoritarian chauvinism makes the community more conscious of the need to defend its identity. In such a situation the women of the community become extremely important symbols. After 1992, the Indian state's secular and democratic credentials have been seriously undermined.

While one delineates this larger context, one would like to draw attention and give voice to the urges and stirrings of ordinary Muslims, both men and women who continue to live, work and hope for better times. It is this spirit that we have tried to capture in this study.

## **II The Study - Universe and Sample**

The present paper deals with the educational, occupational mobility and cultural change in two generations of women in Darbhanga town and its impact on the third generation. For the purpose of the study, the family was taken as the unit and one hundred married women in the age group of thirty years and above were selected through purposive sampling for the purposes of interview. Sixty five per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 30-40 years and thirty four per cent were in the 40-50 years age group. Twenty three per cent of our sample were natives of Darbhanga, while 17 per cent had been living there for two generations and 60 per cent were new settlers in the town. The sample included educated and uneducated housewives and women working outside the home. The working women included wage earners, vendors and professionals. Fifty-seven of the respondents were from the ashraf category while forty-three were from the non-ashraf groups [Ansaris (weavers), Kassab (butchers), Rangrez (Dyers) and Churihara (bangle-sellers)]. Generally those women who belonged to the Ashraf groups were in government service whereas the non-ashraf women were in petty business and home-based work or were daily wage earners. A very thin stratum of professionals is emerging among the latter. The women from the ashraf groups who have entered the professions are generally the new settlers.

An interview schedule was administered to get the relevant data. During the course of the interview we made our own observations which also helped in analysing the qualitative dimensions of the data. The questions were formulated keeping in mind the regional, class, caste and occupational variations. The respondents were asked to furnish information about various relevant dimensions of their mothers' lives. Thus the information about the mothers is based on the perception of the respondents.

### **III Findings of Our Study**

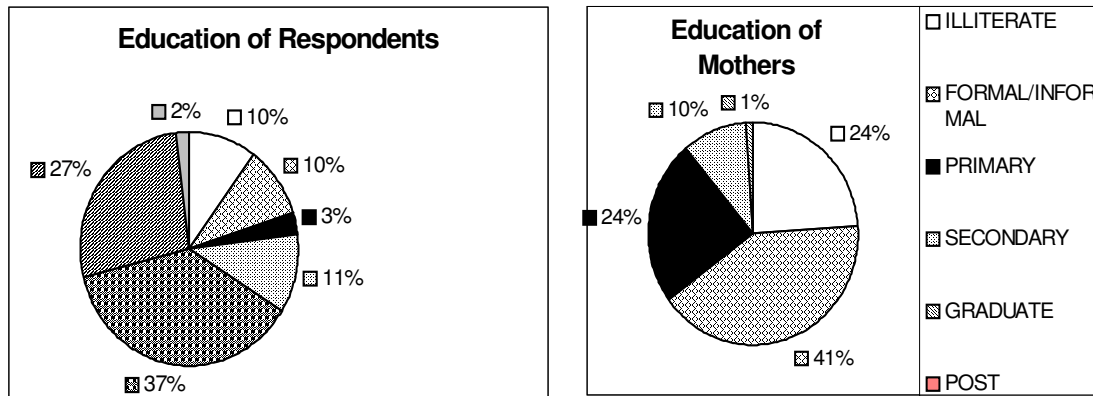
We now discuss the data regarding the educational, occupational and familial status of the women under study along with that of their mothers.

#### **i) Change in Educational Status**

Education is quite an important variable which affects the status of women. The number of Muslim women taking formal education specially higher education is increasing day by day due to various reasons.

Our data shows that the percentage of graduate and postgraduate women has sharply increased in the respondents' generation. The majority of the respondents' mothers were either illiterate or had informal or formal religious education and were literate or had been educated only upto the primary level.

**Chart - 1**



If we compare the educational level of the respondents with that of their mothers, we find a remarkable increase in the level of education especially at graduate and postgraduate levels. We find an overall upward educational mobility within two generations. While in the mothers' generation the percentage of illiterates was 21, which came down to 10 in the respondents' generation. The percentage of those educated informally or in formal religious institutions also decreases from 44 to 10. Similarly, the percentage of those educated only upto the primary level has also fallen from 24 to 3. There is a sharp increase in the percentage of graduates in the respondents' generation, from 1 to 37. The change is even more remarkable in the field of post-graduate, technical and professional education where no women had qualified upto this level in the previous generation.

Thus the data presents a generation gap in educational levels. This shows quite an encouraging picture regarding consciousness among Muslim women about the importance of education. When asked about the reasons of illiteracy or low educational levels of their mothers, they expressed family tradition, indifferent attitude of older people towards female education, non-availability of educational institutions for girls, distance of school/college, monetary constraints etc.

One also finds a change in the type of school attended by the mothers and that of the respondents and age of admission to school. As the data reveals, in the previous generation the trend of formal education was weak. All those who attended schools went either to government schools or the madrsas. But there is a slight change in the type of school which the women under study have attended i.e. public and government school. A further change that can be noticed is regarding the type of schools the respondents' daughters are attending or have attended. Now most of the women send their daughters to English medium schools if they can afford it.

With regard to the importance of education, they opine that education is the only means to affirm self-identity or individuality; to compete with the changing socio-economic and political environment and for economic independence of the girls. None of the respondents see religion as an obstacle in the education of girls but stress the importance of other socio-economic variables. It is interesting to note that there is also a shift in the aim of education in two generations. The majority of the women got education not with the aim of economic independence but more for the sake of education in order to face any unforeseen eventuality. The women under study have a different motive for educating their daughters. They want them

to become economically independent, to improve their status in the society and to increase their awareness about the real causes of their victimisation which has often been couched in the name of religion.

## **ii) Change in occupational status**

The wave of social change has also touched the Muslims in general and women in particular in India. Muslim women are also taking up jobs. Though their number is comparatively few, they have concentrated in professions like teaching and medicine whereas women of the Hindu community have entered in almost all professions. This may be due to the belated recognition of the importance of education of women among the Muslim community which in itself can be traced to various socio-economic and historical reasons. Also to some extent, social taboos and psychological conditioning hinders their participation along with a sense of the discrimination prevalent in all spheres which prevents them from using their potential in the field of national development.

One of the most important factors which determines the social status of any individual or group of individuals relates to economic conditions. Women have been working in every known economic system for their maintenance and for their fulfilment. Traditionally, women were confined to household work and looking after children and husband. But the industrial revolution has brought a shift in the structure of work and hence the concept of work has changed. Women from the lower socio-economic strata have been working in agriculture, factories and as construction workers. But the entry of women of the urban middle and upper middle classes into the work force is a comparatively recent phenomenon and this development has significant impact on social change and mobility. (Suguna, 1994)

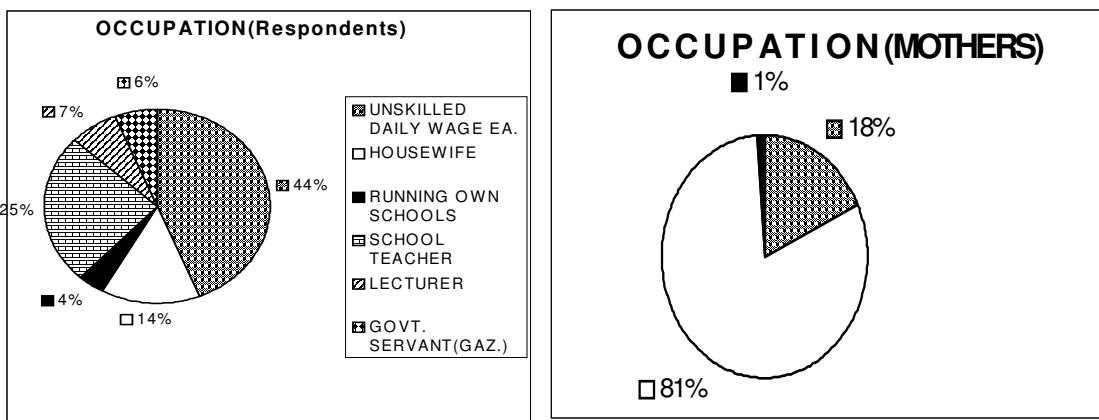
For the purpose of our analysis we have taken occupational mobility as shift in the occupation or participation of respondents' generation in different professions or career. Occupational mobility is not only considered as an indicator of social change but also as a transmitting agent of new attitudes and behaviour (Laxmi, 1991:36). This is so because if one goes out to work one's area of interaction increases which results in imbibing new values and attitudes.

As already mentioned intergenerational occupational mobility has been studied by various social scientists but these studies have mainly focused on the mobility of men in the family. There is a paucity of literature on occupational mobility of women in general and Muslim women in particular. Keeping this in mind we explore the shift in occupation (if any), reasons for this mobility, its direction and degree. Also, we examine the hurdles being faced by our respondents in their occupational achievement. For this purpose occupation has been divided mainly into two categories: housewives and women working outside the home; the latter includes professionals, wage earners and vendors. Wage earners include *bidi* and *bindi* makers, while the vendors are *churi*, vegetable and fruit sellers. We assess any shift in occupation in the case of wage earners and vendors from that of their mothers and also whether they would prefer the same occupation for their daughters.

When we analyse the data on intergenerational occupational mobility, we find a remarkable change. The respondents are the first generation (in the case of professional women) to enter into professions like teaching, medicine and government jobs. Chart 2 shows that in the mothers' generation there was only one school teacher and this has increased to 25 per cent in respondents'

generation. In professions like medicine, college teaching and government employment the data indicates that the respondents are the trend-setters, whereas there has not been much mobility in the case of wage earners and vendors. This is so because the women of this group had been an earning member from the previous generation yet the fact can not be denied that their number in the present generation has also gone up due to various reasons. One of the reasons was the poor economy of the family (17.8) which compelled the women to sit at the shop or to do door-to-door vending to run the family. Secondly, a few women (11.7) used to help their mother-in-law in their occupation and so when they died automatically they had to continue with that occupation to support the family (in case of some bindi worker).

**Chart - 2**



Thus the data presents a generation gap in occupational achievement of mothers and respondents. These figures show an encouraging picture of awareness among Muslim women about the importance of employment in the changing socio-economic environment. Though their number is comparatively small, the reasons or causes of their lower participation vary from region to region, economic condition of the family and so on.

It has been found that the economic strata, educational and occupational background of the family, the place of residence, the social group to which they belong, family structure, the indifferent attitude and discouragement of male members are the some of the factors which affect the occupational achievement of a woman. As far as the job preferences of the women for their daughters were concerned, it was found that the unskilled workers aspired more skilled work like knitting, tailoring embroidery for their daughters. The reason of course is financial as well as social i.e. status and prestige and more income. Most of the educated women preferred teaching and medical profession for their daughters (60 per cent), few of them for a career in computers (8 per cent), about 10 per cent preferred administrative jobs. The rest of them have given no choice stating that it depends on the availability, opportunity and qualification of their daughters. It is interesting to note that a little more than fifty per cent of educated housewives were in favour of a professional career like teaching and medicine for their daughters. When they were asked to give reasons for their being housewives in spite of their basic qualifications for a teaching job, they blame the traditional social norms, the local culture and structure of the family etc. They were also asked if given a chance

whether they would like to take up a job. It is amazing to note that a little more than forty per cent of them were in favour of it for the sake of economic independence and personal psychological satisfaction.

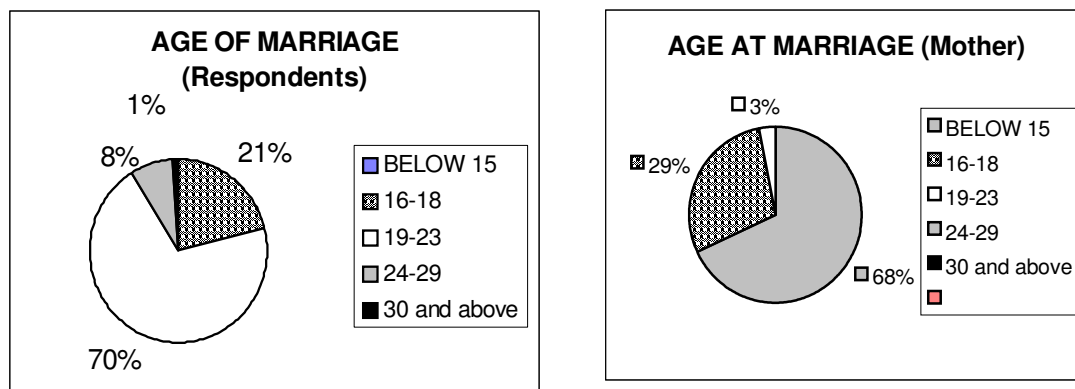
### iii) Cultural Mobility and Change

In the following section, we present the views and opinions of our respondents regarding the socio-cultural changes in marriage and family patterns in two generations such as age at marriage, knowledge of dower or Mehr pattern of marriage, number of children desired, preference for male child, family planning, perception of gender discrimination, observance of purdah, freedom of movement, their participation or involvement in deciding matters within and outside of the family and so on.

#### a) Age of marriage

It has been found that due to higher education, better employment opportunities, disintegration of joint family structure, there is an increase in age at marriage, especially in urban areas. Various studies have shown that there is an increase in the age of marriage with urbanisation. Our study also corroborates the above-mentioned observation. The majority of the respondents (70 per cent) got married between the age of 19-23 while 21 per cent got married below the age of 18 years and 8 per cent between the age of 24 -29. Only one case of late marriage i.e. between 30-34 has been found. Most of those who got married below 18 years of age are illiterate and from the lower economic stratum but belong to both ashraf and non-ashraf category.

Chart - 3



Whereas, the data regarding the age at marriage of the respondents' mothers shows that 68 per cent got married below or at the age of 15 years followed by 29 per cent who got married between the age of 16-18 and 3 per cent between the ages of 19-22. Interestingly none of respondents' mothers got married in their mid or late twenties. If we compare the age at marriage of two generations there is a distinct and discernible increase in age at marriage. The reasons are education, migration, change in family structure, employment opportunities etc.

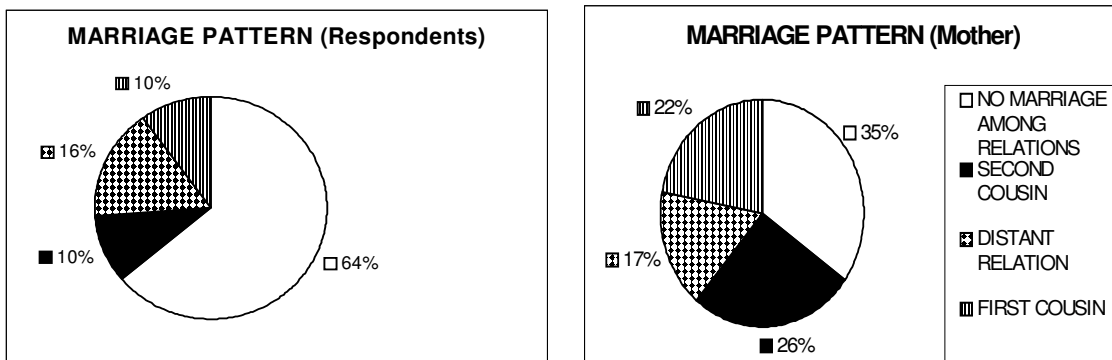
#### b) Changes in Marriage Patterns

Another trend of change which is noticeable is a change in the pattern of marriage: 10 per cent of the women had got married to their first cousins while in the



mothers' generation it was 22 per cent. In the respondents' generation, 64 per cent of the marriages were outside their kin, while in the mothers' generation it was only 35 per cent. Similarly, marriage to second cousins also decreases from 26 per cent to 10 per cent. No major change was found with regard to marriage among distant relatives. More interestingly, 54 per cent of the respondents are not in favour of daughters marrying among kin. Also, regarding the age of marriage for daughters, 54 per cent preferred it to be between 22-24. No one was in favour of early marriage i.e. below 15 years of age, including illiterate and poor wage earners. The reasons given by them vary with their educational levels. Educated women stress the social and medical factors while the uneducated see this more in terms of early responsibility and chances of more children. But women of both the categories are aware about the disadvantages of early marriage.

**Chart - 4**



Related to marriage is fixation and payment of Mehr in Islam. As per Islamic law it should be paid at the time of Nikah or before the consummation of marriage. But in practice it is paid generally during the life time either in the form of land, house, jewellery, or the women waives the amount. It is not just an exhibition of wealth and status as is the common misconception but rather a binding, recognition of the responsibility, which a husband owes to his wife.

The women were asked whether they have the knowledge of the Mehr fixed at the time of their Nikah and also whether they have received it. It was found that the majority of the women (92 per cent) know about their Mehr, and 34 per cent got it in the form of house, 4 per cent in the form of land and 54 per cent have not received it yet.

When we compare the respondents' knowledge about their Mehr with that of their mothers it was found that 74 per cent respondents' mothers knew about the amount of their Mehr out of which 61 per cent had received it in the form of house and 10 per cent in the form of land.

Thus there is not much difference between the respondents and their mothers as far as the knowledge of the amount of their Mehr is concerned.

**c) Changes in Family Structure**

Changes in family structure affect the attitudes and behaviour of an individual. Those who belong to nuclear families have more open attitudes and get more chances to develop their knowledge as well as personality in comparison to those

who belong to joint families. Generally, in joint families, the head of the family has the authority to decide about the whole family. As far as adoption and internalisation of new values is concerned women from nuclear families have more chances of changing their status and roles than women of joint families due to the authoritarian nature and structure of the joint family.

In the present study it was found that 91 per cent of the respondents live in nuclear families while only 66 per cent of respondents' mothers lived in nuclear families. The change in the structure of family is due to migration of men from rural to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities, decreasing viability of traditional occupations, lowered productivity of land due to fragmentation of holdings and impact of modern technology etc. The data reveals that there is a noticeable shift in occupation between grand-fathers' generation and fathers' generation. Thus, 57 per cent of grandfathers' generation were engaged in cultivation and lived in joint families while this came down to five per cent in fathers' generation. Other occupations like business and government employment started predominating in the fathers' generation, the former increasing by 32 per cent and the latter by nine per cent.

It has been emphasised here that shift in occupation affects the structure of the family which has direct impact on the status of women. Women who got higher education and entered into professions generally lived in nuclear families.

#### **d) Changes in Family Size and the Use of Contraceptive Devices**

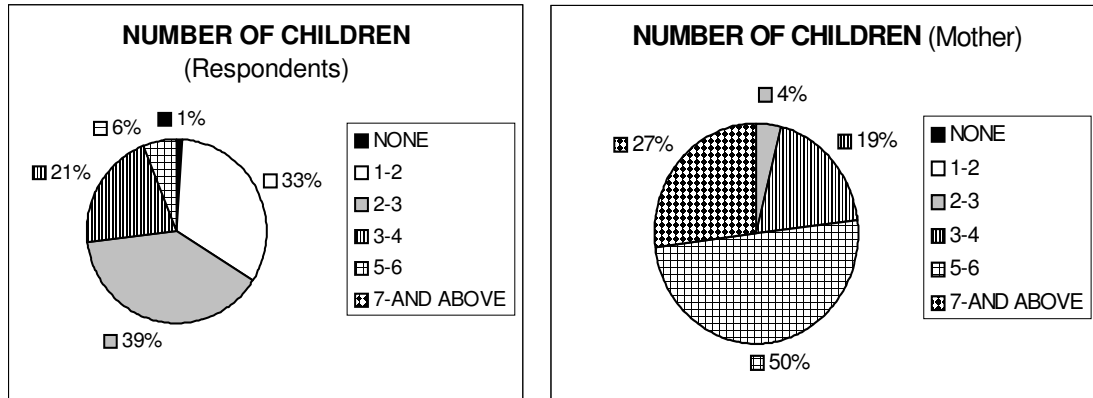
Family size and the number of children desired is influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors. The value attached to motherhood greatly influences the reproductive decisions of couples. The woman's identity and status is dependent on her becoming a mother. (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Ravindran, 1993 b) Her vulnerability and dependence on relatives increases particularly in the event of her not having a son. In order to protect herself from this situation, the woman tends to have more children. Her physical mobility is curtailed by the social values which in turn limits her ability to seek help from the local PHCs and hospitals about various family planning devices. (Jain and Visaria, 1988) Also, various studies done on fertility behaviour reveals that socio-economic indicators of development at micro-level, i.e. level of family income, the opportunity cost of mother's time, understanding of cost and value of children leads to changes in the traditional norm of large family size. (Becker, 1991; Sheclov Guy, 1998) Studies done in Bangladesh (UNFPA, 1998:38) reveal that "...women recognise that their children face a future that will be very different from their own experience, and that they will need new skills and greater social involvement and mobility in order to prosper and compete with the changing scenario of socio-economic development." Thus children are an expensive investment and their perceived cost stimulates the desire for smaller family size. All these factors have direct impact on reproductive behaviour, family size norms and use of contraceptives.

In the background of this, we present comparative data regarding number of children between two generations; secondly, the increasing awareness about small family size norms, reasons for this changing awareness and use of various methods of family planning.

The data shows that there is a decline in the number of children in the respondents' generation as compared with that of their mothers. It was found that 39 per cent of respondents have 2-3 children, 33 per cent have 1-2 children, and

21 per cent have 3-4 children while only six per cent have 5-6 children. On the other hand, if we look at the family size of the respondents' mothers, we find that 50 per cent of them had 5-6 children and 27 per cent had 7 and above children. Only four per cent had 1-2 children followed by 19 per cent who had 2-3 children.

**Chart - 5**



The most striking difference that has been found between the mothers' and respondents' generation is with regard to the maximum number of children. Thus the percentage of women having 5 and above children in the respondents' generation has gone down to six per cent, while it was 50 per cent in the mothers' generation, and those having more than 7 children were nil among the respondents. This shows the increasing awareness among women regarding small families, the reasons put forth being primarily socio-economic. Around 70 per cent of the respondents were in favour of small families, 22 per cent were against it on religious grounds while nine per cent did not respond. Among the respondents who advocated small family size, 34 per cent had undergone tubectomy 14 per cent observe the rhythm cycle, ten per cent either used Copper T or pills and eight per cent of respondents' husbands had vasectomy done. The reasons given by the respondents in favour of small families were: the need to provide adequate education in order to develop new skills for facing the competitive modern social environment and to have a better quality of life. In spite of being in favour of small families, nearly 50 per cent of the respondents felt that they have little freedom in deciding the number of children. .

**e) Preference of Male Child**

In this section we evaluate the changes in the attitudes of the respondents with that of their mothers regarding preference of sons. The following data regarding the mothers' preference is based on the respondents' perceptions. The data reveals that there is no significant change between the two generations with regard to preference for sons; however, there is a sharp rise of the percentage (42) of respondents who have no particular preference for sons, while it was only 11 per cent in the mothers' generation. The respondents felt that son-preference could be one of the reasons for larger family size in the previous generation.

**f) Change in Perception of Gender Discrimination**

This is an important area to be investigated since it is the perception of gender discrimination among the respondents, which brings about change and mobility.

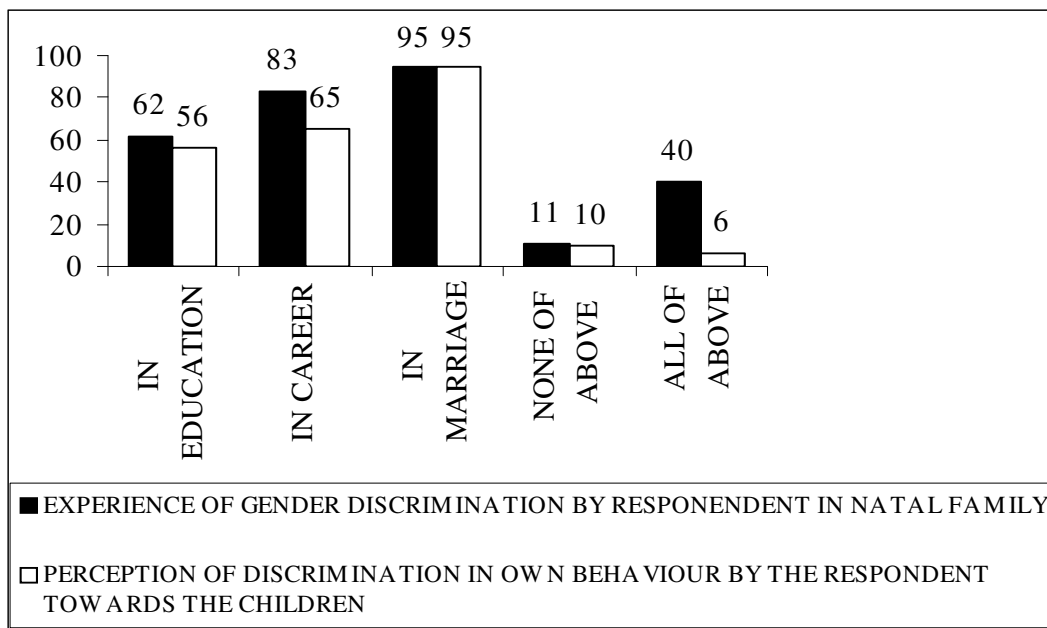
We explore the differences between the respondents' experience and perception of discrimination in their natal family and their attitudes to and expectations for their children. The three areas which we have identified for this purpose are education, career and marriage.

The data reveals that the respondent did feel discriminated against in all the areas mentioned above which directly and indirectly affect the development of personality, confidence and self-esteem. About 40 per cent of the respondents felt discriminated against in all the areas. However, 62 per cent felt that they were discriminated against in the matter of education. The brothers were privileged in the matter of admission to good schools and colleges, purchase of books and getting special coaching. Even in the matter of the kind of education, the respondents felt that they were given an education merely to help them cope with any difficult situation in their marital life while their brothers were educated for taking up employment and being self-reliant and supporting the family. Further 83 per cent of the respondents felt that they were not given equal opportunity in carving out a career of their choice inspite of their better performance in education, while their brothers were sent for technical/ professional courses inspite of their relatively poor performance and family's economic condition.

In the matter of selection of marriage partner, 95 per cent were not even given a chance to express their views, whereas in about seven per cent of the cases there was a greater acceptability of their brothers' spouses even though they may have married outside the community.

**Chart - 6**

**Changing Perception of Gender Discrimination**



Turning our focus towards the behaviour of the respondents towards their own children, we notice quite a different trend especially in the matter of education and choice of career. There has been a discernible change in attitudes particularly with regard to education and career. Interestingly, a reverse pattern is found where only

six per cent respondents stated that they were not in favour of providing equal opportunities for their sons and daughters, while 40 per cent of the respondents were denied the same in their natal family. More categorically, 56 per cent women, especially those from the lower socio-economic strata were not willing to provide the same educational facilities and privileges to their sons and daughters while it was 62 per cent in the respondents' natal family. The reasons were that sons were viewed as a source of security in their old age whereas the daughters were to be married off. With regard to choice of career, there is a difference of 18 per cent in the attitude of the respondents. Another indicator of the significant change in attitudes in two generations is the fact that while only one per cent had had no experience of any form of discrimination, there were ten per cent respondents who stated that they would not practise any form of discrimination.

#### **g) Change in Purdah system**

The purdah or segregation of women is a well-known custom in Islamic culture. (Brijbhushan, 1980:21) It has become an indispensable part of Muslim social structure because a high status was attributed to families in which women observed purdah. As time passed, this practice of elite families was taken up by other families as well.

In India after independence these features were adopted by large section of the population, mainly in North and Central India, including the converted Muslims, who were aspiring for higher status. Thus, the Indian Muslim women started using Purdah in the form of burqa more as a status symbol. The practice of seclusion or Purdah which is observed by Indian Muslim women, has restricted their movement, to some extent, especially in the case of the women of non-ashraf groups which are in the process of upward economic mobility.

We have tried to elicit the opinion of the respondents as to whether they perceive purdah as an obstacle to their mobility and progress and whether they desire any change. It was found that 45 per cent of the respondents never observed purdah while it was only 29 per cent in the case of the respondents' mothers. There was a further increase in this percentage in the respondents' daughters generation with 52 per cent not observing purdah at all. If we were to examine the age of observance of purdah, we find that only 11 per cent of the respondents started observing purdah below the age of 15, while this figure was a steep 54 per cent in the mothers' generation; this figure goes down even further in the respondents' daughters' generation to a mere three per cent. Twenty eight per cent of the respondents started observing purdah between the ages of 16-18 whereas it was only 11 per cent in the previous generation ( since most of the latter started observing it at a much earlier age). As far as the reasons given for the observance of purdah, we find that 50 per cent of the respondents observed it more as a family custom, 32 per cent out of compulsion of parents, nine per cent due to the local milieu and nine per cent because of religion.

The perception of purdah has also changed. The young generation is not ready to accept any imposition; rather they argue drawing on the experiences of other Muslim countries that this custom is very restrictive and hampers women from availing of opportunities in the contemporary social environment. A few of the respondents as well as their daughters felt that purdah is an obstacle for taking up certain jobs like the administrative services, business management and jobs in the private sector. Since these professions require free movement and interaction, they

felt that strict observance of the custom would prevent their entry into these spheres. Instead they emphasised that there should be modesty in appearance.

Another aspect of change that needs to be noted relates to the steady erosion of segregation in the private and public domains, women being traditionally confined to the former and men's preserve being the latter. This has often been seen as part of the Islamic tradition. Here, we have tried to go into the extent to which women move out into the world without male escorts. The data for the respondents and their mothers' generation shows that there has been a remarkable change. While in the mothers' generation 63 per cent women never went out without a male escort, this percentage drastically decreases to five in the respondents' generation. Correspondingly, the percentage of those women who went out without any male escort was 21 in the mothers' generation while this goes up to 67 in the respondents' generation. This we believe is due to the increase in education, exposure to mass media, migration of males as well as increased interaction with women of other communities and confidence to move.

#### **h) Changes in the Pattern of Decision-Making Through Women's Participation**

For the present purpose, we have taken women's participation in decision-making as being indicative of their status and role. In order to get around the methodological and conceptual problems for assessing participation in decision-making we have relied solely on the perception of the respondents. This we believe will give us a reasonably good idea of changes in this sphere. Furthermore, in our society irrespective of religion, cultural norms govern conjugal relations in which a problem of assessment of decision-making arises. This only strengthened the case for relying on the respondents' perceptions. But to overcome the subjective bias, we also tried to make the respondents understand the distinction between empirical and normative decision making. So the respondents were asked to give the actual situation about who decides the various matters in the family. The respondents were given three choices: decision made by husband, by wife herself, and by both. We have not included the fourth choice, i.e., others in the family since most of the households were nuclear. Also for the convenience of analysis, along with the customary decision-making areas such as food, clothes, entertainment, children's schooling, career and marriage, new areas of decision making in urban setting have also been included in the present study. The decision-making areas are broadly divided into two categories: recurring and non-recurring.

The decision-making areas have broadly been divided into two categories:

- 1) Recurring decisions include expenditure on food, clothing, entertainment, going to movies, visiting friends, children's schooling, career and marriage, going out for vacation, giving presents, visiting doctors, expenditure on house rent etc.
- 2) Non-recurring decision includes purchase and construction of house or land, purchase of time saving gadgets, gas-stove, furniture, household articles, purchase of car, scooter or bicycle, LIC policy, how much to save, jewellery, working of wife etc.

These areas of decision-making have been categorised to minimize non-response problems as well as problems of ambiguity in response. Is the traditional pattern

still continuing in decision-making or are women aware of the situation and involve themselves in this process?

**Table - 1**

Decision	Mother				Respondents			
	Husband	Self	Both	Total	Husband	Self	Both	Total
Expenditure on food, cloth & House rent	14	74	12	100	25	41	34	100
Expenditure of Entertainment, movie, visiting fund	61	19	11	100	8	66	26	100
Children's schooling, career and marriage	88	02	10	100	38	10	52	100
Going out for vacation giving presents, visiting doctors	63	21	16	100	30	49	21	100
Purchase or construction of house land, shops	88	01	11	100	60	04	36	100
Purchase of time saving gadgets, furniture, etc.	59	22	19	100	11	31	58	100
Purchase of Car, scooter, bicycle	86	01	13	100	50	31	29	100
LIC Policy, Loan, Share, Jewellery	94	02	04	100	55	11	34	100
Working of Wife	89	03	08	100	16	67	17	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>104</b>		<b>257</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>266</b>	

It has been found that there is significant change in the area of decision making among respondents as compared to that of their mothers. If we compare the respondents' role with that of their mothers in decisions regarding expenditure on food, clothes and house rent, we find that there is a slight difference in percentage i.e. 86 per cent of respondents decide these matters in comparison to 74 per cent among their mothers. But it is interesting to notice that areas like children's schooling, purchase of house, land, scooter, car, LIC Policy, taking loans etc. there is not much change in decision making. These areas are still dominated by male members of the family; however, this percentage has come down and the percentage of joint decision has shown an upward trend. In the mothers' generation the percentage of joint decision was only 19 per cent while in the respondents' generation it is 52 per cent.

Thus the women under study have shown a positive trend of mobility and change in different aspects of their lives which was absent in the previous generation. The women have achieved a certain amount of upward mobility in almost all the areas discussed above which has positively affected their status and expanded their role.

This reflects their own awareness regarding the changing socio-economic environment and their own responses to it.

## **Conclusion**

Thus the stereotyped image of Muslim women as educationally backward and their being non-responsive to social change etc. seems to be an exaggerated perception which has been the staple of mainstream academics and media projections. There is no doubt that more research is needed in this area, particularly in the present context of rapid socio-economic and political change, and the impact of this on women. We as social scientists need to develop new approaches and methodologies to study the problem of Muslim women in India who are a minority within a minority. The approach should not merely focus on the narrow textual aspects of religion, nor even on the narrowly economic but a holistic approach wherein the economic, social, religio-cultural, historical and political strands are brought together. At the same time, micro studies are needed to see the impact of wider macro-processes and structures and the varying responses of the Muslim community, including its women to these changes. The challenge for social scientists is to simultaneously see the commonality of the problems of Muslim women with the rest of Indian women as well as the specificity of their situation. This calls for a sensitive understanding of the historical and political context and location within which Indian Muslim women are placed.



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