

Executive Summary of the
MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

On

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF MUSLIM
WOMEN IN MALABAR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MALAPPURAM DISTRICT**

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By

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The Muslims of Malabar were one of the earliest traditional communities in South Asia with their own socio-cultural entity. Women were the most marginalized group within the community. Twentieth century witnessed a rapid and visible change in each and every aspect of their life. The causes for this transformation are to be explored. Apart from education which is having a vital role, there were several other factors like the emergence of socio-religious reforms initiated by different organizations, economic changes, gulf boom, globalization, etc which brought into these changes. The changes are visible in all walks of life like overall outlook, dress habits, active participation in public life, day to day politics, etc. The present study is a socio-historical analysis about the changes happened to Muslim women in Malabar with special reference to Malappuram district.

The female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census is 65.46%, where the male literacy rate is over 80%. According to 2001 census report, overall literacy of Indian women was 54%. The Muslim women's literacy rate was 50.1 per cent against 53.7 per cent of Hindu women. There is an obvious contrast between Muslim women in Kerala and their counterparts in other states. In Kerala, they have achieved some enviable status in literacy and social fields. The average national sex ratio in India is 940 as per latest reports of Census 2011 Directorate. In 2011 census, child sex ratio is 965 girls per 1000 boys compared to figure of 960 girls per 1000 boys of 2001 census data. Still, Kerala is continuing with the best sex ratio in India with 1084 for 1000 male.

On analyzing and examining the process of modernization and social inclusion of Muslim women in Malabar, the present study establishes the fact that the socio-economic and educational status of Muslim women during the last decades has faced a drastic change. The quality and

quantity of the changes are unexpected comparing to the past days. New avenues have been opened up to enter into social, economic and political aspects of their lives.

Apart from the basic search towards the theocratic discussion about the position of women in Islam and historical analysis about the origin of Islam in Kerala, sociological search about the socio – cultural conditions of Mappila Muslim of Malabar, the present study aims at a dissection of the performance by the Malabar Muslim women at school and higher levels of education based on data collected from secondary sources such as books and articles and the primary data collected via unstructured interviews. The study has focused on Malappuram district, one of the very few Muslim majority districts in India which is also having many peculiar features in the development and community organizational structure.

The socio-economic life of the women in Malabar before independence has been explored and detailed in the project report. The process and changes in the field of education of Muslim women in Malabar with special reference to Malappuram district has been traced and analyzed the transformation process of the community during the last century. The economic growth of the region and its impact on women has been traced. The most important achievement of the project may be the information about the Mappila community in Andaman Islands.

While analyzing the role of education, it has revealed the unearthed information about a group called '*Pen Usthad*' or '*Mollachis*' (Women teachers). This group of women worked as teachers in Malabar. The comparative analysis of Mappila Muslim women living in Andaman Islands with their counterparts in Malabar has also created attention among academic circles. The last chapter of the project is based on a field survey about the socio-educational situation

of Muslim girls in Malappuram district. The findings of the survey are expected to be useful for policy making process of government and social institutions.

The study reached into a conclusion that a specialized and systematic historical study on the theme has not been done so far. The investigator has made an attempt to understand the traditional education systems, attitudes of community towards modern and secular education, educational policies of the government, educational performance of the Malabar Muslim women and the reasons for the backwardness of the community during the period of British rule over the region. There is a discussion about the educational performance of Muslim women at school and higher level after independence, the role of individuals and organizations, socio- cultural and economic factors influenced the development, the status of women and the impact of education in Muslim community.

The attitude of the community has undergone radical changes in the last few decades. As the British Government introduced modern education in the region, Mappila community was reluctant to join the schools. Even though the British government introduced some sort of incentives to attract the Mappila community into schools, the move was viewed as a challenge to their religion and tradition. Dearth of qualitative leadership among the community was another major setback for educational attainment in earlier periods.

The emergence of religious and political organizations and capable leadership during the second decade of 20th century had been great impetus in altering the attitude of community. Even though the leaders faced stubborn opposition from conservatives in the initial stage, they succeeded in making the people matured enough to accept the changes of the society. But, even now, the plight of Muslim women in major parts of India has been miserable. For instance, the

illiteracy rates of Muslim women in Hariyana, UP, Bihar and Delhi are 98, 85, 87 and 62 percents respectively. However, it is less than 20 percent in Kerala.

The successive governments of Kerala ever since its formation in 1956 have been playing vital role in promoting education for all by creating opportunities, taking appropriate policies, enabling reservation for backward communities and giving scholarships for girls students from Muslim and other backward communities to make them able to catch high positions in the society. The political leadership from Malabar also strived hard to make up the educational backwardness of the region, even though, a quantitative and qualitative analysis shows a big gap in the educational progress and infrastructural development when compared to the other geographical part of the state - Tiruvithamkur and Cochin.

The last decades have been witnessing the growing desire of Mappila women to embrace higher and professional education. The trend has been very clear from the statistics of students from leading Muslim colleges in Malappuram. In many graduate and postgraduate courses, they have already outnumbered the Muslim boys in these colleges especially in arts and science subjects. The Muslim boys hold a slender majority over them only in in commerce subjects. Now Muslim girls have outnumbered boys in many Arabic colleges, where male had majority until recently. The trend proves it all, including the conservatives, everyone is willing to give opportunities to women to study to a higher level. Verily, in near future the Mappila women will be enjoying all privileges, which they could not even imagine two decades ago.

Religious harmony plays a significant role in the development of education. The most respectful and cohesive inter-religious relationship and the interaction between the communities in Kerala has been a reality since ancient age. Changes occurring in one community will be translated to other communities within immediate future. The rapid progress in the status of

Christian and Hindu women has highly influenced the achievement of Muslim women in the fields of education. The fast growing migration to gulf countries has been a significant factor in changing attitudes towards education by providing economic stability after 1980s.

With regard to political participation and space in the public sphere, Malappuram has become a center of the changes. Number of Muslim women candidates participated in the elections to local self government bodies has increased and many of them were elected. We can see much active presence of Muslim women leaders in local self government bodies as leaders or as members. Presence of Muslim women in public sphere also has been increased in the last decade.

In fact, the last decades of twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of competent leaders among the Mappila women. Many religious and political parties has began its women wing and given them the freedom to prepare and conduct programs. Muslim league, the major political party, has started a women wing and girl's wing called '*haritha*'. Almost all religious organizations except orthodox Sunni groups has started women's wing. Jamathe Islami women's wing has organized a historical Kerala Muslim Women's Conference at Tirur in 2014.

This specific scenario in which Muslim women are progressing into the public sphere has been discussed in detail in this project. The de-centralization of power enhanced the responsibilities of people in Panchayats and more than 50 per cent reservation for women exerted pressure on community to reconsider their concept on women's public appearance. Today, many Muslim women hold responsible positions in local self government. The impact of the reservation on emancipation of Muslim women has also been discussed in this project.

There is a tendency to condemn the Islamic dress code as the reason for ongoing backwardness of Muslim women. But, the Muslim women's experience in Malabar is contrary

to these findings. The increasing religious awareness among the educated Muslim women proves that all allegations are baseless and it is targeted to denigrate the dignity of the pure religion. By keeping religious practices and Islamic dress code, Mappila women have brushed aside all the fears of the community towards education. It is a matter of fact that the majority of learners in the School of Learning and Research Centers (SLRC) and Qur'an Learning Centers (QLC) are well-educated women. The filed survey conducted as part of this project work revealed the fact that majority of women use *Purdha* or *Hijab* at their own interest and not due to any compulsion. They feel comfortable by using this type of dress code. Interestingly, it has been noted that there are very few Muslim Mahal Committees (The religious community body under a mazjid or area/*Mahal*) where women are given membership.

Mappila women, however, face some problems regarding their educational attainment. One of the hindrances on the way of higher education is the scarcity of colleges and technical institutions. The Government, social organizations and individuals should take an initiative to establish various kinds of colleges and higher institutions. Another obstacle that haunts them is the nightmare of unemployment. The society and community should sit together to contemplate on an enduring solution of the problem. Only government can make its women citizen self sufficient and self depended by providing them appropriate jobs.

Contrary to all these concerns, the attitude of both parents and community to send their girl for a job has not completely changed. The study revealed that majority of Muslim girls who were completed any professional courses like MBBS, BDS or engineering are not working. It means that the educational revolution on girls' education in Malappuram has only resulted to the creation of a new 'well educated or professionally qualified house wife'. The participation of Muslim women in public sphere is limited. Apart from the discussion and analysis of the data

collected from various parts of the state, the causes for this peculiar scenario have to be researched and discussed in detailed for policy making process of the community and government.

On analyzing and examining the process of modernization and social inclusion of Muslim women in Malabar, the present study establishes the fact that the socio economic and educational status of Muslim women during the last decades has faced a drastic change. The quality and quantity of the changes are unexpected comparing to the past days. New avenues have been opened up to enter into social, economic and political aspects of their lives. The study assumes to be relevant, while the most of the Indian states are lagging behind in providing female education, the experience of Kerala women in general and the Muslim women in particular is markedly different.

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especially in arts and science subjects. The trend proves that all, including conservatives, are willing to give women opportunities to study as long as they can. Religious harmony plays a significant role in the development of education. The most respectful and cohesive inter-religious relationship and the interaction between the communities in Kerala has been a reality since ancient age. The rapid progress in the status of Christian and Hindu women has highly influenced the achievement of Muslim women.

The project has unearthed much important historical information as in connection with Muslim women in Malabar. It also formulated suggestions and recommendations to community organizations, parents, managements and government. It is believed that the recommendations put forward by the research project can make positive change in the upbringing of the marginalized group, Muslim women in Malabar. It may be also use full for policy and program preparation of community organizations and government as well.