



Modernization and social change among Muslim Women in India: From colonial to post-colonial period

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Abstract

Social change is a never-ending phenomenon of a society and modernization is a process through which we can understand the pattern of changes in a particular society. Modernization can be thought of as an indicator of social change. Modernization is not a benchmark, not certainly an end. There is no ideal type of modernization, it is a process with no model that one can confirm and compare other cases with. In India modernization process was started with the arrival of the British but modernization in the life of women made its appearance with the initiative of 19th century social reformers. In the post-independent India, the state the modernization in women's lives has been politically driven, and the state has been making efforts to modernize the women and bring them to mainstream, and out of socially anachronistic traditions. This paper intends to find out the impact and process of modernization process by giving special focus on the journey of modernization among Muslim women during colonial period to post-colonial period.

Keywords: phenomenon, Muslim women, mainstream, Social

1. Introduction

There has been a lot of scholarly disagreement over the meaning of Modernization. Some scholars like Eisenstadt and Schluchter (1998) argue that the process of modernization started and flourished in the West and then proliferated to other parts of the world ^[1]. Others like Chakrabarty (2011) hold a counter opinion, and even contest the use of the term ^[2]. The dictionary meaning of modernization refers to "the process of adapting something to modern needs or habits ^[3]." The etymology of the word can be traced back to the Latin word 'modo' which means 'now, recently' ^[4]. Although, change has been the characteristic of every society at every period of history, not every change can be said to be a step towards modernization. The tendency among the scholars and sociologists is to see the process of modernization as a particular form of change from pre-modern or traditional society to modern or secular, industrial, and urban society. The roots of the process of modernization thus are seen to have emerged from Europe which gained significance following the industrial revolution.

2. Process of modernization in colonial India

The systematic process of modernization in India was started with the colonization of the Indian sub-continent by Britain. Although many social, economic and political changes had taken place in India at different points of history before the coming of the British but the specific social change in the form of modernization started with the beginning of colonial rule. Rationalised system of bureaucracy, development of impersonal laws, modern infrastructure such as railways, telegraph, postal system, development of roads, motor transport etc. was introduced by the British at different periods of time in the colonial history. Although this was done by the British colonialists to meet their specific objective of systematically siphoning off the raw material and wealth of India to feed and sustain the Industrial Revolution back home, the development

nonetheless was very important for modernizing the so far traditional and feudal social and political order of India.

Although modernization in India made its appearance with the arrival of the Britishers but modernization in regards of socio-economic life of women got boost only in the 19th century. Efforts taken by 19th century social reformers resulted in the beginning of the process that stimulated the modernization of the life of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was a staunch believer of western education launched a crusade against the redundant social values of India and founded Brahma Samaj in 1828. This has been called a renaissance in Hindu religion. Arya Samaj another social reform movement founded by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875 was fundamentally a movement to reform Hindu religion and promoted the values and practices of Vedas. However, all these reform movements and organizations left out the Muslim women from their ambit of concern.

Moreover, the 19th century reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar were engaged in reforming evil social practices, supported female education and heavily influenced by western-inspired modernization but they were strictly knit with their social norms of caste Hinduism. Therefore, the debate of women's modernization became a pendulum between the Western model and the Indian ideals. Indian ideals taught to improve the condition of women not outside the four walls of the house. The Indian definition of modernization of women was quite supportive of the patriarchal norms of the society, and was not ready to go for a radical change. In this connection the condition of Muslim women was more vulnerable as no serious effort was taking place separately to find out their subordination and deplorable status in India in general and Assam in particular in the colonial time. Social reform of 19th century did not take effort to reform the prejudices prevalent among Muslims and did not care to promote formal education among Muslims girls.

However, some Muslim on their part took much effort themselves to modernize their community. Some Muslim

women boldly raised issues like purdah, polygamy and so on. Responses in favour of education came from Muslims across India. Anjuman-e-Islam, an educational institution, was established in Mumbai by Badruddin Tyabji. In Bengal, Central Mohammadan Association was formed in 1877 by Syed Amir Ali. Like that Himayat-e-Islam in Lahore was established and Mohammadan Educational Conference was formed in UP. Authors like Maulvi Nazir gave attention to women's oppression and commented that with the practice of purdah Muslim women will not be able to enjoy their rights in a fullest manner^[5]. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain tremendously fought for female education and their emancipation. She gave a very emotional speech in a Women's educational conference held in Bengal where she said:

I have been crying for the lowliest creature in India for the last twenty years. Do you know who that lowliest creature in India is? It is the Indian women... There are people also who feel for animals, so we see animals' rights groups everywhere. If a dog is hit by a car, we hear an outcry in the Anglo-Indian media. But here is not a single soul in the whole of the subcontinent to mourn for incarcerated women like us^[6].

Through her writings Rokeya was trying to show that how women were exploited and deprived of their rights by the society based on patriarchal line on the one hand and on the other the picture of imaginative land where women have been equal to men in knowledge, intelligence, vision, thinking and so on. Some of her writing are: Motichur I (1904), Motichur II (1922), Padmarang (1924), Avarodhbasini (1931) etc.^[7]. In 1886 Mohammadan Educational Conference was set up and passed the resolution of seeking women rights in 1888. *Tahzib-Un-Nawan*, an Urdu women's magazine founded by Mumtaz Ali in 1898 promoted female education of Muslim, covered serious issues written by women like domestic duties, religion, short stories news related to Muslims women and encouraged women for further writing^[8]. In 1900 Purdah Club was formed to offer a platform where women could discuss their issues. In 1901 Lady Afsar-Ul-Mulk had formed Anjuman-e-Khwateen in Hyderabad to contribute the way of modernizing women. In 1904, Urdu publication for women was originated. The magazine promoted women education, abolition of purdah and supported feminism. These themes were covered by all the journals in the country. In 1905 Attiya Begum established a Muslim women conference at Aligarh. In the same year, a poet and novel writer of British India named Khawaja Altaf Hussain Hali in his novel *Chup Ki Dad* (Voices of the Silent) presented the case of "women oppression", and argued for female education, although he felt this should be imparted at home^[9]. In 1907 Anjuman-e-Khwateen-e-Islam was established in Lahore by Begum Mohammad Shafi. Begum Shafi also presided in Muslim Ladies Conference which was held in 1909. Begum Shah Nawaz was also very active and she proposed the resolution against polygamy^[10]. Amir Ali, a Bengali lawyer who published *The Spirit of Islam* in 1922 argued against polygamy and reform of Muslim law. In 1929 Shah Jahan, the Begum of Bhopal who was very much active in women rights rejected the custom of purdah system and removed her veil publicly in the All India Women Conference^[11]. Purdah, contrary to popular perception, and contrary to what most of the writers subscribe to, is not an indicator of social oppression as long as it is a personal

choice, but its imposition upon women by force certainly constitutes oppression.

3. Process of modernization in post-colonial India

After independence the new constitution of Modern India along with other initiatives, made a significant effort for establishing gender equality by incorporating Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and Fundamental Duties. The Constitution also provides direction to the state to take affirmative action or positive discrimination in favour of women. The constitution of India also puts emphasis on "the needs of women to enable them to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development"^[12]. Planned development was the most innovative initiative to address various significant problems which also had a considerable impact on the status of women. From the first to fifth Five-year plan, attention had been given for the welfare of women. But from the fifth five-year plan it took a shift away from welfare approach to developmental approach and from the eighth Five-year plan onwards government started to give importance to the empowerment of women, thus taking a shift from developmental approach to empowerment approach.

There was a continuous pressure on the government of India for the formulation of a national policy for women since late 1970s. In 1974, a report was submitted to Prof. Nur-ul-Hassan (the then Education Minister) titled *Towards Equality* that highlighted the appalling conditions of women in all spheres of life and the findings of the Report "remain grim reminders of the need to change the realities of women's lives in India"^[13]. The guiding principles of the report are as follows:

1. Equality of women is necessary, not merely on the grounds of social justice, but as a basic condition for social, economic and political development of the nation.
2. In order to release women from their dependent and unequal status, improvement of their employment opportunities and earning power has to be given the highest priority.
3. Society owes a special responsibility to women because of their child bearing function. Safe bearing and rearing of children is an obligation that has to be shared by the mother, the father and society.
4. The contribution made by an active housewife to the running and management of a family should be admitted as economically and socially productive, and contributing to national savings and development.
5. Marriage and motherhood should not become a disability in women fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of national development. Therefore, it is important that society, including women themselves, must accept their responsibility in this field.
6. Disabilities and inequalities imposed on women have to be seen in the total context of a society, where large sections of the population male and female, adults and children - suffer under the oppression of an exploitative system. It is not possible to remove these inequalities for women only. Any policy or movement for the emancipation and development of women has to form a part of a total movement for removal of inequalities and oppressive social institutions, if the benefits and privileges won by such action are to be shared by the

entire women population and not to be monopolized by a small minority.

7. If our society is to move in the direction of the goals set by the Constitution, then special temporary measures will be necessary to transform *de jure* into *de facto* equality^[14].

Later, the Government of India formulated the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 that contained a huge amount of recommendations and suggestions for the government of India. It emphasised on freedom of women from all kind of social oppression and encouraged industrialization in rural areas to provide employment opportunity to rural women. In 1996 the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was launched by the Government for "creating a conducive socio-cultural, economic and political environment to enable women enjoy *de jure* and *de facto* fundamental rights and realise their full potential^[15]." Similarly, in 2001 National Policy for Women was crafted followed by another one in 2016 (Re-scripting Women Empowerment) with two additional policies such as logistical, concerned with monitoring evaluation and audit systems and welfare-based, dealing with development and empowerment of women belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups. And thus, the process of modernization is evolving in its own direction.

Apart from incorporating modern social values like liberty, equality, justice, fraternity in the Indian constitution, the constitution makers made it a point to abolish evil practices such as Sati, child marriage and untouchability from the society. Education was chosen as the prime tool for the realization of national goals by providing free and compulsory education. Minority rights were given prominence and special focus was given to women irrespective of religion. Much has been done in the legal sphere that counts for the modernization of women. Many Acts like the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986, The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 and so on have been enacted. Several women-specific schemes Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Ujjawala Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Working Women Hostels Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme etc. have been given a legal shape, and much has been achieved in comparison to the position of women at the time of independence. But if we compare the Muslim women's position in India with the rest of the other women, there remains a lot to be done.

4. Conclusion

Being one of the minority communities, Muslims are lagging behind in modernization and social change in

comparison to other communities. The women belonging to Muslim community face a double disadvantage of firstly being women, and then being a women of a backward minority community. Muslims in India in general and Muslim women in particular are attributed with characteristics of being poor, economically backward, illiterate, etc. According to Tanweer Fazal's study relating to the application of the Millennium developmental Goals highlighted some of the facts about Indian Muslims that point towards their backwardness. According to Fazal, poverty among Muslims is 6% higher than national average in rural areas and 4% in urban areas; the prevalence of illiteracy among Muslim males is 35 per cent and among Muslim females is 47 per cent of Muslims females; 19 per cent of the Muslim boys and 23% Muslim girls are not enrolled in any school; while national average infant mortality rate is 57 per 1000 live births, the average of the same for Muslims is lower at 52 per 1000; awareness of AIDS among Muslims is slightly lower than the national average; access to sanitation facilities is poor among Muslims with 50 per cent households not having access to toilets^[16]. Sachar Committee report (2005) also found the conditions of Indian Muslims quite deplorable which found the rampant prevalence of backwardness, poor livelihood, illiteracy etc. among Muslims.

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