

A study on Muslim Women Political Participation in India

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“Educate a man, you educate an individual; if you educate a Woman, you educate the whole family” -Dr. Karve

Abstract

Women are the most vulnerable categories in the field of social, political, economical, cultural and in other development activities. The patriarchal and feudal setups do not allow the empowerment of women in the various fields of development. Though it has been a tougher task of empowering women from various forms of social evils against them, they are still showing positive signs of empowerment in various fields of development. Likewise, women empowerment in each and every religion shows shocking statistics that even today a set of community is being neglected by their traditional taboos in education, employment and in economic generation activities. Muslims are the second largest community in the world where their male counterparts and women counterparts are neglected in all the means of development in developing countries. Particularly when it comes to Muslim women are the most vulnerable categories where they are excluded in the means of availing education, employment, health & sanitation and neglected from their basic rights.

There is a myth among the Muslim traditionalists they are not ready to educate

their women as most of their male counterparts are not highly educated as they involve in business activities, working in shops, food stalls, vendors, etc. In the case of Muslim women if they are well educated it is not easy to find a proper bridegroom within the Muslim community. In many situations most of the Muslim women are stopped out from schooling as the imbalance of the male can be rectified. Prophet Mohammed says in his words seeking knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim man and Muslim woman but these quotes are only in paper and not in action. As soon as Muslim women attain puberty their participation in education has reduced as they are married at the younger age for their Muslim men. According to the Census data of religious communities 2011, Jains with 94.9% literates are followed by the Christians, whose literacy rate is 84.5%. The Buddhists have 81.3% literates, the Sikhs 75.4%, the Hindus 73.3% and the Muslims 68.5%. Likewise Jain women also lead in the literacy charts with a literacy rate of 92.9%, followed by Christians (81.5%), Buddhists (74%), Sikhs (70.3%), Hindus

(64.3 %) and Muslims (62%)[Newpost.D(2015)].

Muslims have the lowest share of working people about 33% among all religious communities in India. This is lower than the nationwide average work participation rate of 40%. In the work participation of Muslim women also stands low in work force. Women's participation is just 15% for Muslims and Sikhs, and even lower at 12% among Jains. Among Hindus, there are 27% working women, while it is 31% for Christians and 33% for Buddhists. Several smaller faiths fall under 'Other Religions'. These are mostly tribal communities from peninsular India and the northeastern states. Their work participation rates are markedly different from other communities. Nearly 48% of members of this section work, more than any of the country's six major religious communities. Women's work participation is also highest in tribal communities, at nearly 44% [Subodh Varma(2016)].

Muslim Women and Political Participation

Muslim women have various responsibilities said by their holy book Quran which highly speaks about equality of men and women.

"And [as for] the believers, both men and women - they are friends and protectors of one another: they enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His apostle. It is they upon whom God will bestow His grace: verily, God is almighty, wise." (Quran 9:71)

This verse shows that women and men are to work together in the religious realm (the reference to prayer), in the social realm (rendering purifying dues, presumably to help the needy), and in the political and educational realm (the reference to heeding God and His apostle -- one must understand what God commands and have a voice in society to heed God's teachings). The references in the verse to the activities required, e.g. enjoining the right, prayer, etc. show that both women and men are to take an active role in society rather than merely a passive one [Muslim Women's League(1995)].

The Qur'an addresses the issue of women giving the bai'ah to Prophet Muhammad and God tells Muhammad (pbuh) to accept the pledge of the women:

"O Prophet! Whenever believing women come unto thee to pledge their allegiance to thee...then accept their pledge of allegiance." (Qur'an Surah al Mumtahana: 12)

Women can also hold political positions in Islam. No Qur'anic verses exist that prevent women from holding positions of leadership [Rahman.F.N.(2012)]. There is nothing in the authentic sources of Islam that prevents women from running for political offices if they are confident of their expertise and credentials to make a positive difference - provided they are not doing so at the expense of their greater responsibilities of nurturing and caring for their families. Here, it must be stressed at all times that Islam considers a woman's role as a mother to be the noblest duty she can ever perform; nothing else can replace it.

However, if her involvement in politics does not come in the way of this crucial role, there is nothing in Islam to dissuade her from it [Kutty,A(2004)].

India a country with multiple diversities follows various forms of religions and cultures which shows the integrity and its unity in diversity. Though we are rapidly developing in all the forms of economic and social development it is also the right to educate the marginalized and women. Likewise, when looked into women education and participation in politics are still a milestone yet to be achieved. Indian women are still under the clutches of feudal and patriarchal setup makes them lack of political participation. It may make us think that Indian women has acquired voting rights along with men and also has the right to contest in the election starting from local bodies to parliament elections. This has lead women to participate in the first general elections starting from 1952 onwards which is said to be the positive signs of women empowerment and equality. When looking into community wise participation of women in politics is also very much low compared with the national average of 11 percent in the parliament. Among the women folk in India, Muslim women are neglected to participate in political activities or contesting in the elections, due to Islamic traditions and culture. It not only affects the political participation but even their rights like employment, education, health, property, etc.

In this context, many Muslim who are ready to participate in politics are always threatened by Islamic laws were only few

are successful in changing as political leaders. Most of the Muslim women are underrepresented in politics even if they win elections (whether it may be parliament or local body elections). Muslim women also face the feudal and patriarchal setup which restricts their political participation by Islamic laws by issuing fatwa's. In India three majorities of Muslim populated states like Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh do not have due representation in parliament as well as in state assemblies form their community.

There are various obstacles faced by Muslim they have been kept away from politics lack of education, feudal setup, patriarchy, lack of family support, social biases, inability, lack of awareness,etc. The patriarchal and feudal culture that has dominated the society with its social attitude and role expectation has placed women within the realm of domestic life or in narrowly defined work roles. In addition, most of the religious-based parties, all the time wanted to restrict women's rights and equality and intentionally deny women's political participation. In most of the Muslim societies, the fundamentalists urge the full submission of women to their husbands and expect them to always be obedient in the name of social order and religious doctrines.[Salma Sohhan(1994)]

The below table shows the general picture about the Muslim women political participation in Lok Sabha (Lower House) starting from the first general election from 1952 onwards. Their overall percent is within single digits, only during the 1980 general election it has crossed the double

digit of 10 percent. When calculating the total number of Muslim women members from 1952 till now it has been just 22 out of 454 Muslims which shows the lowest

representation of Muslim women in Lok Sabha. Even in Rajya Sabha (Upper House) also their representation is just 18 members from 1952 onwards.

Table -1

Muslim Women Political representation in the Lok Sabha (1952 onwards)

S.No	Year of polls	Number of MP's	Muslim Women MP's	%
1	1952	11	-	-
2	1957	19	2	4
3	1962	20	1	4
4	1967	25	-	5
5	1971	28	-	6
6	1977	34	4	7
7	1980	49	1	10
8	1984	42	3	8
9	1989	27	1	6
10	1991	25	-	5
11	1996	29	1	6
12	1998	28	-	6
13	1999	31	1	6
14	2004	34	2	7
15	2009	30	2	6
16	2014	22	4	4
Total		454	22	20.6

Source: Election Commission of India

Likewise when we analyze the participation of Muslim women in state assemblies of India their representation is also low. Out of 335 Muslim MLA's only 17 women Muslim MLA's are elected in the state assemblies.

Table -2

Muslim Women MLA's in State Assemblies of India

S.No	States	Total Muslim MLA	Muslim Women MLA
1.	Tamil Nadu (2016)	5	1
2.	Kerala(2016)	32	-
3.	Karnataka(2013)	11	-
4.	Andhra Pradesh(2014)	7	-
5.	Telangana(2014)	12	-
6.	West Bengal(2016)	59	8
7.	Odisha(2014)	1	-
8.	Madhya Pradesh(2013)	1	-
9.	Gujarat (2012)	2	-
10.	Chhattisgarh (2014)	-	-
11.	Rajasthan (2013)	2	-
12.	Haryana(2014)	3	-
13.	Maharashtra(2014)	10	-
14.	Jammu and Kashmir(2014)	57	4
15.	Bihar(2015)	24	-
16.	Uttar Pradesh(2012)	25	-

17.	Pondicherry(2016)	1	-
18.	Assam (2016)	30	-
19.	Goa (2017)	-	-
20.	Manipur (2017)	3	-
21.	Meghalaya(2013)	1	-
22.	Tripura (2013)	1	-
23.	Nagaland (2014)	-	-
24.	Arunachal Pradesh(2014)	-	-
25.	Sikkim(2014)	2	-
26.	Punjab(2017)	6	1
27.	Delhi(2015)	4	-
28.	Mizoram(2013)	-	-
29.	Jharkhand(2014)	2	-
30.	Uttrakhand(2017)	2	-
Total		335	17

Source: Election Commission of India

Statement of the problem

The Constitution of India provides equal political rights to every citizen without any discrimination on the grounds of caste, color, sex, religion, race, language, etc. Likewise women also have equal rights in participating in social, economic, political aspects of development. Though women are participating in all the aspects of development their representation in politics is very much limited by social taboos. In this context, Muslim women in India are also

considered as the most vulnerable category (compared with Hindu women and Christian women) where their rights are neglected by various religious and cultural taboos. Muslim women's representation in politics is also very much limited by situational barriers, economic problems and dependency, political instability, lack of education and political knowledge. The above discussed problem is also studied in the present study focusing on the political

awareness, political participation, political status and political career and perception about politics.

Objectives of the study

- To study the socio-economic profile of Muslim women.
- To analyze the political status and political career of Muslim women.
- To study the obstacles which are restraining Muslim women political participation.

Methodology of the Study

The present study is mainly focusing on the political participation of Muslim women. They face various obstacles in entering politics their participation is very much restricted by their male counterparts. Though there are separate Muslim political parties and other organization Muslim women representation is limited due to

religious taboos. The study moreover used primary data to study all above mentioned factors. For data collection an interview schedule was prepared covering various aspects political participation and political awareness are focused socio economic conditions, the education particulars, family size, obstacles,etc. For data collection, simple random sampling technique has been used and 200 Muslim women respondents were selected from Begambur,Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu,India.

Integrated Analysis

As per the framework of the study the Muslim women political participation starts from the socio-economic demographic profile of each and every respondents based upon age,education,occupation,marital status and others are discussed below.

Table-3

Matrix on the Socio-Economic Demographic profile of Muslim women

S.No	Socio-Economic Profile		Total
1.	Age	21-30	76
		31-40	52
		41-50	50
		51-60	14
		60 above	8
		Total	200
2.	Education	Primary	38
		Secondary	114
		Hr. Secondary	26
		Degree	8

		Illiterate	14
		Total	200
3.	Marital status	Married	192
		Unmarried	8
		Total	200
4.	Family Type	Joint	86
		Nuclear	114
		Total	200
5.	Sub Caste	Ravuthar	56
		Lebbhai	144
		Total	200
6.	Occupation	Self Employed	5
		Sales woman	4
		Vendors	11
		Homemaker	178
		Total	200
7.	Type of House	Thatched	7
		Pucca	40
		Tiled	70
		Concrete	83
		Total	200
8.	Economic Status	High	23
		Medium	86
		Low	91
		Total	200

Socio-Economic demographic profile

The socio-economic conditions play an important role in the emergence of political participation of Muslim women. Those who have strong economical background are having the highest proportion in participation in politics and the lowest economic background has the least proportion in politics. Likewise,

Muslim women are socially and economically denied from various rights which make them less empowered.

While analysing the Age wise distribution, out of 200 respondents, 76(38 percent) respondents are between the age group of 21-30, 52(26 percent) respondents are between the age group of

31-40, 50(25 percent) respondents are between the age group of 41-50, 14(7 percent) respondents are between the age group of 51-60, 8(4 percent) respondents are between the age group of 61 and above. When it comes to education, out of 200 respondents, 38(19 percent) respondents have completed primary schooling, 114(57 percent) respondents have completed secondary schooling, 26(13 percent) respondents have completed higher secondary schooling, 8 respondents have completed degree and 14(7 percent) respondents are illiterate.

When looking into the marital status of Muslim women out of 200 respondents, 192(96 percent) respondents are married and 8(4 percent) respondents are unmarried. Whereas in Muslim community family types are strong as they are influenced by feudal and patriarchal setup. Out of 200 respondents 114(57 percent) respondents live in nuclear family and 86(43 percent) respondents are living in joint family. Caste groups are very

strong in India it has its rudiments from the rural and feudal setups though Muslims do not have caste there is also an existence of caste groups. Out of 200 respondents 144(72 percent) respondents belong to Lebbhai community and 56(28 percent) belong to Ravuthar community. When it comes to occupation, out of 200 respondents, 178(89 percent) respondents are homemakers, 11(5.5 percent) respondents are vendors, 5(2.5 percent) respondents are self employed and 4 respondents are sales women. Mostly Muslim women are not allowed to involve in economic generation activity as they are only focused to be mothers and caretakers of children. Focusing upon the economic status of Muslim women, out of 200 respondents, 91(45.5 percent) respondents are in the lower level economic status, 86(43 percent) respondents are in the medium level economic status, 23(11.5 percent) respondents are in the higher level economic status.

Table-4

Matrix on the Political Participation of Muslim women

S.No	Political Participation of Muslim Women		Total
1.	Casting the Vote	First time	10
		Second time	42
		More than twice	148
		Total	200
2.	Membership in any Political party	Yes	-
		No	200
		Total	200
		Husband	-

3.	Support to participate in Politics	Family	-
		Community	-
		Political party	-
		No support	200
		Total	200
4.	Awareness about Politics	Yes	69
		No	131
		Total	200
5.	Holding any positions in political Parties	Yes	-
		No	200
		Total	200
6.	Membership in community based Political party	Yes	168
		No	32
		Total	200
7.	Contested in Elections	Yes	8
		No	192
		Total	200

Political Participation of Muslim women

Muslim women political participation are always under represented by various cultural and traditional values. They are not allowed to enter into politics due to various taboos of the Muslim community. Mostly they are restricted by the patriarchal and feudal setup of their community. When it comes to casting their vote out of 200 respondents, 148(74 percent) respondents have casted their vote for more than two times, 42(21 percent) respondents have casted their vote for two times and 10(5 percent) respondents have casted their votes for the first time in election. Hereto, the role of community plays an important role where they are not allowed to cast their vote on their own. Often they are influenced

by the family members and by their community political party which has coalition with major political parties. When it comes to political party membership out of 200 respondents, all the respondents do not have any party membership whereas Muslim men have membership in their community party.

While analyzing the Muslim women participation in politics they do not have support from family, community, political party. Out of 200 respondents, all the respondents do not get support to participate in politics. They are often neglected by religious taboos and cultural bounds, were they are not represented by their male folk and by the community. When it come to the awareness about politics, though Muslim

women are being neglected in political participation they to have a certain extent of knowledge towards politics. Out of 200 respondents, 131(65.5 percent) respondents are not aware about politics and 69 (35.5 percent) respondents are aware about politics. Holding positions in political parties is one of the stepping stone of empowerment especially for Muslim women, out of 200 respondents all the respondents do not hold any position in any political party. Membership in community based political party is not allowed by Muslim community many communities based political party who speak about political empowerment do not focus on

Muslim women political participation. Out of 200 respondents, 168(84 percent) respondents have membership in community based political party and 32(16 percent) respondents do not have membership in any community based political party. When analyzing the Muslim women contesting in any elections their participation is very low. Muslim women can contest in for state assembly and for parliament but it is difficult to contest in local body election as the feudal setups are very strong. Out of 200 respondents, 192(88 percent) respondents have not contested in any election and 8(12 percent) respondents have contested in elections.

Table-5

Matrix on the Obstacles faced by Muslim women in Political Participation

S.No	Obstacles faced by Muslim Women in Political Participation	Total	
1.	Lack of Support	Family	65
		Community	93
		Political party	42
		Total	200
2.	Restrictions from Religious party	Yes	114
		No	86
		Total	200
3.	Economically vulnerable	Yes	177
		No	23
		Total	200
4.	Lack of Awareness	Yes	134
		No	66
		Total	200
5.	Lack of Education	Yes	146
		No	54
		Total	200

6.	Lack of Political Knowledge	Yes	187
		No	13
		Total	200
7.	Cultural values	Yes	191
		No	9
		Total	200
8.	Lack of Institutional support	Yes	176
		No	24
		Total	200

Factors restraining Muslim Women Political Participation

There are various factors which restrain the political participation of Muslim women. There are various myths and cultural bindings which restrain their participation in politics. Firstly, Muslim women lack their support from family members, community, political party and others. Out of the 200 respondents, 93(46.5 percent) respondents do not have the support from the community, 65(32.5 percent) respondents do not have the support from family members and 42 (21percent) respondents do not have the support from the political party. On the other side the political party which is owned only for Muslim community also restricts Muslim women participation in politics. Out of the 200 respondents, 114(57 percent) respondents are restricted by the religious party and 86(43 percent) respondents are not restricted by any religious party.

Muslim women do not have sound economic background to contest in election and only a few are successful by fighting the odds of feudal and patriarchal setup. While

analyzing the economic background most of the Muslim women are economically vulnerable. Out of 200 respondents, 177(88.5 percent) respondents are economically vulnerable and 8(11.5 percent) respondents are not economically vulnerable. Lack of awareness about politics is also one of the constrains for Muslim women political participation. Out of 200 respondents, 134(67 percent) respondents are aware about politics and 66(33 percent) respondents are not aware about politics. Education plays an important role in the empowerment of Muslim women political participation. In general many of the Muslim community do not allow Muslim women to be highly educated as most of the male counterparts are not highly educated and engage themselves in business. Lack of education is a constrain of Muslim women political participation, out of 200 respondents, 146(73 percent) respondents have lack of education and mostly dropouts in schoolings, 54 (27 percent) respondents do not have lack of education.

Lack of political knowledge where political socialization is not possible within

the Muslim community. Most of the male counterparts also do not have strong political interest which doesn't make Muslim women also not aware about political knowledge. Mostly the community party which has coalition with major political party controls the Muslim suffrage. Out of 200 respondents, 187(93.5 percent) respondents are not aware about political knowledge and 13 (6.5 percent) respondents are not aware about political knowledge. On the another side cultural values plays an important role in restricting Muslim women in politics where fatwa is most common in restricting women. Out of 200 respondents, 191(95.5 percent) respondents are controlled by cultural values and 9(4.5 percent) respondents are not controlled by cultural values.

Institutional support can make stronger political participation of women whereas Muslim women lack from the support institutions like Ngo's. Out of 200 respondents, 176 (88 percent) respondents do not institutional support and 24(12 percent) respondents have institutional support to participate in politics and in election.

Conclusion

The political participation of Muslim women is still a milestone yet to be achieved to guarantee them in political empowerment. Muslims have separate political parties and political pressure groups but there is a huge quorum of Muslim men compared with women. The various obstacles like lack of education and awareness, cultural values, networking, economic dependency,

patriarchy, feudal setup, poverty, Islamic laws,etc . If they are ready to participate in politics also the religious taboos and cultural taboos doesn't allow them to represent themselves politics. Only Muslim women with strong economic background and strong exposure in the public are representing themselves in politics. The main reason for low political participation of Muslim women in politics is the patriarchal structure of society. Our traditions and culture, view the participation of women in politics against the generally accepted role of women as wife, homemaker, etc. The patriarchal values have subjugated and disempowered Muslim women Most of the Muslim women are viewed as wife and homemaker to look after children and the male counterparts also think them to be like this. They do not like their women to enter into politics and wish them to be subservient to them. There are certain ways to make Muslim women to participate in politics like creating political knowledge and awareness, leadership development, affirmative action, training and awareness of Muslim women, change in value system, etc.

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