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Education of Muslim Women in Kerala and Rising of Certain Women Contributors during 1900 to 1970s with Special Reference to Haleema Beevi

Abstract

Mass education was popularized as a part of the National Movement in colonial India. But women's education gained no popularity, though there were certain women leaders who pleaded highly for the education and social development during the period. Women leaders from Muslim community were very rare in the colonial period in Kerala. Muslim women were religiously denied education for a long time. The opportunity for general education to Muslim girls was forbidden by religious rules. Though public education was deprived of by the Islamic religious leaders, there were certain women from the community who went to schools and later contributed for the education of other Muslim women. This paper is an attempt to trace out an unrecognized woman contributor from Muslim Community in Kerala, named Haleema Beevi. She tried to habituate and prescribe gender equality and social justice among the people of Muslim community. Haleema Beevi was the first woman journalist from Muslim community in Kerala.

Keywords: Education of Muslim women, educational contributors, unrecognized contributors, woman journalist.

Introduction

“Commit to memory, be aware of how you became who you are” is a piece of canto from popular poem Kurathi (in Malayalam) written by a famous Kerala poet Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan. Literally the verse indicates the relevance of recognizing the ideal self of each human being in a society, irrespective of his or her caste, creed, family status and any of such social or religious notions. Leaving a person with rich contributions unidentified is a social offence. A society must recognize and reveal the contributions of the personalities who renounced the luxuries of their life for the welfare of the society. There is a factual observation that we left behind many such notable contributors without giving them the deserving recognition.

According to Krishnakumari (2011) women participated and contributed equal part as men for making the History. But the role of women was either dishonored or expelled while documenting. Krishnakumari comments that patriarchal social system intentionally denied and marginalized the participation of women in any movement while illustrating it. The makers of history purposefully forgot the role of women in feeding their family while the most of the men were in jail or hide as the part of social/political/national movements. Sreekumari (2019) mentions that the strikes and strives of women were abandoned from the documents of History for a long time and continues now also. The highly acknowledged fact here is that the women leaders have innate capacity to break the gender, social and religious disparities prevailing on any time, but it is not properly addressed by the societies.

Education of Muslim Women in Kerala During 1900s

Presently, Muslim women in Kerala are having equal privileges as the women of any other religion. Picture was different almost up to 1980s. During the stint before independence and at the early decades after independence, schooling was not easy for Muslim girls. Regular practice among the Muslim families at that time was against the girls' education. Girl children were receiving education maximum to upper primary level only. Early marriage was a usual practice during those days. High school and beyond high school were distant destination for the common Muslim girls in Kerala in the decades of 1990. Distinguished will power of the family and of the individual was necessary to get education.

Muslim girls were lived without equality of educational opportunity due to religious rules. The Muslim community leaders denied promoting the girls education. Some Muslim religious groups in Kerala during

that time believed that learning the Malayalam alphabet was against Islam and it will dilute the devotion to the God Allah. Religious rulings (fatwas) were issued by fundamental religious leaders against learning the Malayalam alphabet. They proposed Arabic as the language and learning from Madrassa only.

While having a religious based discussion, it can be identified that the Christian community during the pre and post independent period in Kerala was highly focused on educating the individuals irrespective of gender. Both male and female Christian children got education. Christian women of the period were never religiously denied attaining modern education and naturally they were recognized by the society. Among Hindus, the higher caste people were having opportunity to get education. The contradiction was that the women from Brahmin community and lower caste communities have denied education beyond the school level. These facts can be précised as in table-1.

Table 1

Religion based Opportunities for Women Education in Kerala during the period 1900–1970s:

Religion	Opportunity Level
Hindu	Had no religious avowal against education. Caste based system existed. Higher caste people had educational opportunities. Opportunities for women were not satisfactory. Girls from lower caste were rarely sent to schools. Brahmin families also restricted public education to girls.
Christian	Education was open to all. Both girls and boys were provided opportunities for education among the Christian families. Even financial barriers were overwhelmed.
Islam	Religious leaders opposed learning Malayalam and English for all. They supported only learning Arabic and Madrassa education. Women were denied public education. Most of the girls from Muslim community were sent only to Madrassa. The approach began to change slowly by 1970s.

As mentioned above, the Muslim women had the hindrance of religious beliefs to get public education. Educating women was believed as an anti Islamic practice. This concept existed for decades among the Muslims of Kerala, extended even up to the commencement of 21st

century. Some women from the Muslim community were emanated to attain education by the inner fire though the entire social, cultural and religious situations acted against them. These types of religious and social hurdles were broken by the interactions of Muslim women themselves, but very slowly.

According to Jyoti (2011) in a Muslim community woman is considered as an “instrument” to transmit religion. Women in Muslim community were forced to follow her colonizer i.e., men.

There was dichotomy among Muslims in the case of education for women during the pre and post colonial period. As mentioned in table 1, religious leaders from the Islamic community strongly opposed educating women in public education system. They supported only religious education in Madrassa or at home for female children. On the contrary, some social leaders from the Islamic community demanded for public education of the Muslim women. This controversy between religious and social leaders from the Islamic community continued for a long time. In such a soiled condition, education was truly a tedious task to Muslim women. Those who with strong will and family support only reached school and colleges from the Muslims at this historic episode. Haleema Beevi was such a lady from Muslims with strong will power and unending quench to get education and also to light the torch of educational developments for others. Haleema Beevi educated by challenging the religious customs practiced in her time and also paved the way for attaining education to many others from her community.

Significance of Studying Education of Muslim Women in Kerala

Even though having sumptuous contributions, some may be alienated from the history of native society. This may happen due to many reasons like political, social and cultural. There are many charismatic personalities who fought for reforming society through their writings, speeches, literature, and many other forms of arts and acts. Among them some were mentioned, remembered and respected. But there are many people who were intentionally or accidentally neglected.

In the global education context the gender equality is a highlighted concept. The concept of inclusiveness and properly addressing the excluded is important. It is the need of the hour to search back the donations of certain people to the development of a state. They were

unacknowledged because of being part of a particular class. But they have their own role in the reconstruction of a society. Significance of this study is that it tries to reveal the contributions of certain personalities, who never reached the lime light. The study also focuses on the educational status of Muslim women in Kerala before and after independence. The study is very significant as it is an attempt to reveal the educational life of a community during a period of social development in Kerala state.

Objectives of the Study

This research is pursued with the following objectives.

- To trace out the unrecognized women educational contributors from Muslim community in Kerala during the pre and post colonial period
- To detail the contributions of Haleema Beevi as an educational reformer for the social development of Muslim women in Kerala

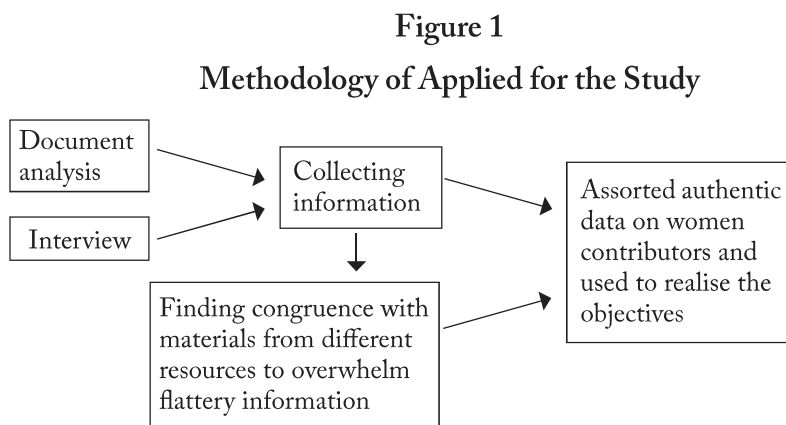
Methodology

The study basically followed historic research design. Details were collected from different resources through three different methods. The open-ended interview with the experts helped to collect details on the contributions of various unrecognized Muslim women including Haleema Beevi. The books and articles in religious journals that were published during 1990s gave an outline of Muslim women education on that time. Contributions of Haleema Beevi were sort out from the books and articles written by her and about her.

Researcher confronted with bias on information while collecting data by document analysis. Most of the books and articles written on the Muslim women, who are with notable contributions, are written by acknowledged Muslim religious leaders or by the heads of Muslim organizations. It is quite common that a Muslim religious leader may bring forth flattery writing on the contributions of a Muslim woman. So the authenticity of the article or write up or discourse may be questioned. In order to overcome the bias of information, researcher analyzed the congruence of received information in the light of different sources. That information which is given by two or more sources and those are without contradictions is considered as authentic information. The two step document analysis was followed in the present study; it means (a) collected documents from different sources on the contributions of women leader. (b) assorted the articles or write ups of different

authors (c) identified the flattery write ups or articles (c) analyzed the collected data in the light of different resources and (d) identified the authenticity of information by analyzing the write-ups through a three tier document analyses.

The research method can be summarized in the figure 1



Muslim Women Educational Contributors of Kerala

The first objective of this study is to trace out the educational contributors from among the Muslim women. Document analysis and informal interview with experts were used to collect information in this regard. The information received was analyzed as mentioned in the figure -1. Details are given under.

There are many recognized women personalities in the educational and socio-political fields of Kerala region in 1990s. But women from Muslim community were rare. There is common opinion that the Muslim women were marginalized and they were rarely mainstreamed. Other than the restrictions from Islamic leaders, the Muslim women faced social discriminations. These two types of marginalization have reduced there presentation of Muslim women in education. But, though the number is very less, there are some Muslim women contributors in the early decades of independence and they should be properly identified and recognized (Abdul Rahman, 2022; Noora, 2002).

Analyses of the back volumes of the magazines such as Nisa-Ul-Islam, Mappila Review, Ansari Magazines and Malayalam Weekly special edition are referred to identify certain (Details of the magazines are duly acknowledged in the reference). Some of the Muslim women

educational contributors are listed in the table 2.

Table 2

Certain Muslim Women Educational Contributors of Kerala during the early decades of independence

Name	Place to which they belong	District (presently)
N. Habba Biwi	Neyyattinkara	Thiruvananthapuram
M K Aishukutty	Eranakulam	Eranakulam
Habsha Beevi Marakkar	Moonnar	Idukki
Ayisha Beevi Marakkar	Moonnar	Idukki
Khadeejakkutty	Tirur	Malappuram
Jameela Malik	Kollam	Kollam
Ayisha Mayan	Thalasseri	Kannur
Amina Mayan	Thalasseri	Kannur
Haleema Beevi	Tiruvalla	Pathanthitta
Malu Hajjumma	Karuvarakkund	Malappuram

All these Muslim unrecognized persons contributed highly for the educational development of their community in some or other way. Investigating the contributions of each personalities of this list is a time consuming task. Presently it is focused on Haleema Beevi and her unidentified educational contributions. Haleema Beevi was the first women journalist from Muslim community in Kerala. She was bold enough to question the male centered religious practices in her community. She worked for the development of Muslim women through different ways.

Haleema Beevi: A Life Sketch

Haleema Beevi was born in 1918 (exact date of birth is not available) to Peer Muhammad (father) and Maiteen Biwi (mother) in an ordinary Muslim family. She belongs to Adoor, presently in Pathanamthitta district, Kerala. Haleema Beevi died in 2000.

During her childhood the Muslim girls were not used to going to school. But, Haleema Beevi got opportunity to go to school. She studied in the NSS School Adoor up to the 7th standard. She was the only Muslim girl who completed seventh standard at her time from her native village. Haleema Beevi got married at the age of 16. It was actually a 'late aged

marriage' in that time. Her husband was K. M. Muhammad Maulavi who was a religious scholar and writer and was a follower of Vakkom Maulavi. Vakkom Moulavi was a religious reformer and run a periodical named Ansari Magazine. It is surprising to know that wife of a Muslim religious leader became a spoke person against the illogical religious practices of Islam during the middle decades of 1900s (Haleema, 1960).

Life with husband was the turning point in Haleema Beevi's social attitude. With the support of her husband she launched 'Muslim Woman Magazine' in 1938, which was published from Thiruvalla, a municipal town where she lived after marriage. Haleema entered the field of journalism as editor of this women's magazine. Haleema was the printer, editor and publisher of the magazine. Hence she was marked in the history as first Muslim women editor in Malayalam. Another periodical magazine named 'Bharata Chandrika' was started in 1946 by a few Muslim women under the custodianship of Haleema. 'Bharata Chandrika' had an astounding editorial board with eminent writers of that time. It is amazing to know that acclaimed Malayalam writers of those decades like Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Ponkunnam Varki, Balamaniyamma, Changampuzha, S. Gupthan Nair etc. were the chief writers of Bharata Chandrika. In 1949, Haleema Beevi had to stop publishing Bharata Chandrika due to extreme financial crisis.

Halima Beevi returned to journalism in 1970 with a new magazine called 'Adhunika Vanita' (Modern Women), started to publish from Perumbavoor. Haleema was very conscious to appoint only women in the team of 'Adhunika Vanita' as the managing editor, co-editors, printer and publisher. It was the only one magazine in its kind in Kerala.

Along with the tasks of publication and journalism, she initiated to reform women's societies to empower Muslim women. She convened "Muslim Women's Conference" in 1939 at Thiruvalla. 'Akhila Travancore Muslim Women Samajam' (All Travancore Muslim Women's Organisation) was formed in the conference. The conference called for approval for free will and equality of educational opportunity for Muslim women.

Haleema Beevi spoke against the fundamental Islamic customs and rules of religious leaders against learning Malayalam and attaining school education by Muslim girls. She spoke for the essentiality of general education to Muslim women. Education of Muslim women was the topic discussed in most of her articles. She spoke not against

the religion Islam, but against the superstitious beliefs of the leaders of Islam. She was the first journalist from Muslim community.

Contributions of Haleema Beevi for Educational Development of Muslim Women

The educational contributions of Haleema Beevi are traced out by (i) open interview with the experts in the specific area, (ii) with her family members and (iii) analysis of books and articles written by herself and by others on her.

The collected data were employed for qualitative analysis. The crux of the educational spoken by Haleema Beevi can be summarized as below;

- Halima Beevi tried to modernize Muslim Women as her prime agenda
- She actively engaged in print media journalism along with educational activities
- She made use of print media and Muslim women organizations as tools for empowering women in her community
- She used lay man language in her speeches and writings for creating awareness in the ladies of her community
- Through the meetings and conferences of women organizations she argued to provide special placement for the educated Muslim ladies in Government jobs
- She opposed the 'religious rules' (fatwa) of Muslim community leaders. The rule of religious leaders was that general education is illicit (Haram) to women. She questioned the fundamental priesthood in her community
- She argued that general education can never be replaced by religious education or vice versa.
- She strongly argued for the equal rights of women
- She believed liberation of women is the only measure to community refinement

She argued for gender equality in Muslim community in every aspect of life. She strongly believed the relevance of economic independence of women. She justified the importance of general education than religious education and opined that the priesthood need to take care of religious education and not the general education.

Haleema Beevi strongly believed that the embodiment of women is the most prior process in the development of any community, society and to the whole country. She continuously interacted with different segments of people through different methods. Her ways of interactions were:

- ‘Speech on stages’ as a medium to transact her ideology on education and social status of women in her community
- Through the periodical titled ‘Muslim Vanitha’, of which she was the publisher, published many articles on the issues of Muslim women. She published her own works and write ups of many other authors.

She worked ceaselessly through her speech and profession of journalism.

Educational Ideology of Haleema Beevi

Haleema preached that emancipation of women is the prime necessity for the development of community. All the tools and measures that trigger the development of a community should be set out through the educated women. Haleema Beevi considered education as a pathfinder to independent thinking and social services (Shamsad, 2009). In the opinion of Mumtas (2018) Haleema Beevi realized general education other than the religious education as the best tool to liberate the Muslim women who were immersed in superstitions and unethical believes.

Haleema Beevi rendered immense effort to make women of her community to develop a sense of identity and self-conscious. Her general and educational ideology helped her in succeeding it. The general ideas of Haleema Beevi on education reveal her visions and philosophies. Haleema wrote that knowledge should be able to equip a person to elaborate and express his/her ideas. Educated men are contributing mainly to the family, but educated women work for molding a new knowledge society. Unlike educated men, women never lag behind in giving and transmitting knowledge to the future generation. (Mumtas, 2018; Kinaloor, 2003). Education should address the issues of the marginalized and be able to make them identity conscious. Education must make women vocationally trained. Education should inculcate social value, personal values, and democratic values, values of gender equality, social realization and social justice in the minds of people. True education should enable people to fight against all types of inequalities (Shamsad, 2009). Haleema Beevi talked about the humanitarian face of education, not about the religious face.

Conclusion

Social contributors are made not in one day. The renowned people have a history of renunciation and exertion. If they are reaching to the lime light from a highly fundamental social background, their contribution must be told apart. The educational and social life of Muslim women in the period of 1900 to 1950s was pathetic in Kerala. The fundamental priesthood of Islamic religion denied easy access for general education to the Muslim women during these decades. They supported only religious education. Women with high will, exertion and urge only were able to break the religious restrictions. Some women from the community during the period broke these restrictions with the social support of democratic organizations and family supports. Haleema Beevi was one among them. She is made up of her own efforts, with the support of her family and social organizations. The contributions of such great individuals have paved the way for the present socially and educationally rich life of Muslim women in Kerala. The first government of Kerala formed separate scholarships and legal provisions for the education of Muslim girls based on the watch words of the social contributors like Haleema Beevi. Contributors like her must be well reeled and explained before the future generations to fire their social aspirations. As noted by Mubhashir, (2018) at a time when a society is falling in the grip of conservatism, irrationalism religious fundamentalism and over-religiosity, we must remind ourselves of the works of the people like Late Haleema Beevi; one who was born and brought up in a religiously fundamental society and later fought against the fundamentalism and brought revolutionary changes in the society for women.

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