

EDUCATION STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN KAYALPATTINAM

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Abstract

In Tamil Nadu, education was regarded as an important aspect of society. During the pre-British period, Muslim women received little attention in education, as male education dominated. Though Islam encouraged women's learning, social customs like the purdah system and early marriages restricted their access. The arrival of the British and the influence of Christian missionaries marked a turning point in Muslim women's education. Before 1850 A.D., there were no organized Muslim institutions in Tuticorin; education took place at teachers' homes where Lebbais taught the Quran, Arabic, moral values, Tamil, and basic mathematics. Most families depended on fishing, weaving, cultivation, and cattle grazing for livelihood, which limited girls' education. Kayalpattinam, an ancient settlement famous since the Sangam age, along with Korkai, Tiruchendur, and Tuticorin, became centers symbolizing Muslim culture and learning in southern Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Muslim women, Kayalpattinam, Islamic education, Tuticorin, gender inequality, traditional occupations, fishing, weaving.

Introduction

Education is a very important factor in Islam and it is stressed in the Quran in several places, such as "God will exalt those of you who believed and those who have knowledge to high degrees", "O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge" and As God has taught him, so let him write. These motivating and inspiring words made the Islamic community to educate themselves. In Islam, education is considered rich intellectual tradition. It is evident through 800 references that knowledge had occupied an important position in Islam and Quran and also considered as one of the most referred books. In Tamilnadu, education was considered as an important part. During the Pre-British period, Muslim women were not given much importance by the society. Male alone, were allowed to study. Apart from studies, they were permitted to enter into politics, and women's role were less. The early history of education influenced the religion and other social factors that did not permit women's education. But Islam encouraged women's education by making a restricted place to educate. Again Purdah system curbed the education of women, as early marriages were very common among Muslims. As a result, the education for women were neglected. British power brought a new era in women's education. The west educated intellectuals, the Christian missionaries and British Government paved way for Muslim women's education.

Right from the advent of Islam, it is evident that it has stressed on two types of knowledge. First one is revealed knowledge and another one is earthly knowledge. Revealed knowledge comes from God and the earthly knowledge is created by human being. Islam sees that both the knowledge are important for the people and it insists the followers to go accordingly to seek the knowledge.¹ The society of Arab has utilized the oral tradition, and according to Muslim People, Quran is considered to be the word of God and it has to be interacted while fading and reciting its verses. So, they felt more religious and believed that they get the full blessings of God through Quran and it is considered as the most inspiration and aspiration for most of the Muslims. So, education in Islam derived its origin through symbiotic relationship with Quran's instruction. It was a great revolution for the illiterate Arabian society during the advent of the Quran in the seventh century. The Muslim's primary education was Quran recitation and they utter the first word "Iqra" which means 'read'. Islamic education began in this way where the pious Muslims were committed to make the Islamic education and Quran easier for the people. They taught how to be faithful to other human beings in this world. It is known as Kuttab which is Katatib in plural form. Historians are unaware of the establishment of this word "Katatib", but its widespread notion that every Muslim wishes to study the Quran,

Katatib is found that the rulers of Islamic empire at the middle of the eighth century.² Before the beginning of the western model, education was introduced in the modern period, where the Kuttab served as an important social function and it is has been considered as a public instruction for the children who belong to primary level.

Purpose of Education in Islam

The main objective of education in Islam is to transform every student to a virtuous, pious and God-fearing man. It enables the students to guide and correct their natural potentials towards proper direction and to strengthen love, affection and a strong sense of obedience to live in this world and they are very thankful to Allah for all the blessings showered on human beings. All are expected to fulfill individual responsibilities and collective social duties. These serve the purpose of education in Islam. Every individual must know what is right and wrong which is called Halal and Haram in Islam. This is that which brings forgiveness in all aspects of social life.³ As far as, economic purpose considered, it was seriously viewed by most of the people. Islam did not deny but recognized it as a common motive.

Women Education in the light of the Holy Quran and Hadith

In Islam, women are liable to get equal rights to get education like men. The verses that are said in Islamic custom and traditions are both for men and women. To highlight the points the Apostle of Allah said : whoever brings up three girls, and who teaches them culture and good manners, and who gets them married and who treats them well, for him is Paradise (Abu Daud). Malik of Huwairith reported that to know about religion, few young men stayed with the Prophet for twenty days. After a long stay, the Prophet felt that the young men were anxious to go home. The Prophet asked them to go home and tell their family members what they learnt and practiced. In another occasion, a man told Prophet that he wanted to marry, the Prophet asked him if he had got anything with him to give her as dowry. The man did not have anything to give as dowry. The Prophet asked the man to remember the portions of the Holy Quran and he was able to remember the verses in Holy Quran. The Prophet told him to teach those remembered verses to her.⁴ Abu Musa Al- Ashari brought a message from a messenger of Allah. There was an incident where a man got a slave girl, taught her good manners and educated her and finally married her and that was a double reward for him. It is said in the history of Islam that the wives of the Prophet would learn Holy Quran in the company of Muhammad. They too got the education of Holy Quran and Ahadiths, which was applicable and suitable for women in common. This will be useful for the mothers in coming generations and Quran would enable them to be a good educated women in the society so that they can cultivate good habits and manners to make a cultured and better generation.

Traditional Religious Education

Traditional religious education was important to understand the difference between Koranic and Madarasa education. The Maktab or Koranic school was a place where children recite and read Koran only. The schools were established in the mosque, under a tree, in the house of the teacher or under the open sky. The Madarasa is an organized school set up with classrooms like a regular school.⁵ Teachers will be working under different levels. Boarding and lodging facilities were offered at free of cost. In religious mode education was provided in Madarasa. Koranic was a place for lower level of education. In Koranic school, the recitation and pronunciation of the Koran were taught. In Mosques, Koran was compiled. It was the place for Muslims to find solution to their problems related to the newly revealed knowledge. So this was the place for them to get their answers. The first school in Islam was Mosque. In earlier days, there was no hierarchy in Islamic religion.⁶ So whoever master the content of Koran could lead the prayers and guide the people. It was evident, that most of the Muslims particularly learned people gather at Mosque to debate and discuss on various issues.

In Tamilnadu, education was considered as an important part. During the Pre-British period, Muslim women were not given much importance by the society. Male alone, were allowed to study. Apart from studies, they were permitted to enter into politics, and women's role were less. The early history of education influenced the religion and other social factors that did not permit women's education. But Islam encouraged women's education by making a restricted place to educate. Again Purdah system curbed the education of women, as early marriages were very common among Muslims. As a result, the education for women were neglected. British power brought a new era in women's education. The western educated intellectuals, the Christian missionaries and British Government paved way for Muslim women's education.⁷

The Advent of Western Education and its Impact on the Muslim Society

Missionary's contribution towards education were more in Tamilnadu. They established schools and colleges. Muslim women were allowed to get education. It was a constant encouragement which was benefitted by the

government. The Hunter commission, in 1882, recommended the government that women's education must be given importance, so they should be encouraged and it was the responsibility of the government to spread education among women. The Muslim women's education started very fast in the beginning of the 20th century.⁸ Education was carried through traditional system when Madras Presidency was established. Elementary education in the indigenous school were far from satisfactory. Lower classes were forbidden by higher education. Muslims established their own educational institutions. After Hunter commission, Woods educational scheme supported traditional schools and mass education (1854). Western education was spread by the British government in India and encouraged candidates for public administration. A steady expansion of education was possible in Tamilnadu.

It was the great effort that was putforth by some important Christian missionaries and also the support and efforts of learned men like Macaulay, Hunter, Wood and other English people. Education started to spread all over the country. It was because of this education, that Muslim people started to awake from darkness. New ideas made the Muslim people to experience political and social realities.⁹ Miss Carpenter, an activist of women's education and a philanthropist of England, played an important role in the education of the women in Tamilnadu. She encouraged to establish many schools in Tamilnadu. On the recommendations given by her, Wood dispatched Christian missionaries and established Zenana education in Madras Presidency. Many Zenana educational centers were established between 1863 and 1867. They were started in Madras, Vellore and Madurai regions. Further it was extended to many towns and villages. The educational scheme of Zenana schools were different. The qualified teachers visited the houses of Hindu and Muslims, formed them into different divisions as per the students age and taught them various subjects. The salaries were paid by the Government as per Grant-in-Aid code.¹⁰ The responsibilities of appointing teachers were given to the school managers of girls school, or a regularly constituted committee, society or association.

Regular Scheme for Women

During the period (1871 to 1881), education for women attained a great momentum and a definite structure was given. The Christian Missionaries created awareness on secular education. They also encouraged and motivated Muslim girls to enroll in schools. It was evident to their assurance, that they have showed a remarkable strength in Zenana schools. In addition to the efforts taken by them, some educated foreign women supported and extended their contribution with service mind. They formed several associations for promoting women's education. These association took special interest in Muslim girls' education because Muslim women strictly followed the Purdah (Veil) system when compared to the Hindu women.¹¹ The National Association in Bombay played a significant role in imparting location for Muslim girls. In connection with the education, an English lady named Miss Carpenter started an Association in Madras. In the Zenana schools, secular subjects and Principles of Christian faith were taught. Earlier, Miss Carpenter thought that teaching Christian faith may not be acceptable by the Indians. So, she planned to provide Western Education on non-missionary principles. This attitude received wide recognition among English ladies, gentlemen and they decided to enroll themselves as members of this association. So, many were joined and promoted the cause of Western education. This association established many Zenana schools for Muslim women in different parts of the Madras Presidency.

Muslim girls received a regular system of education from the Hobart schools. It also provided educational opportunities to the economically deprived Muslim girls. It was found that so many Muslim girls were under the condition to go to do menial jobs to earn for their livelihood. The government and Christian missionaries would like to stop the Muslim girls who were employed throughout the day and paved way for their education.¹² In 1880, the Christian Missionaries started night schools in many towns and villages of Tamilnadu for the benefits of these Muslim women. In 1880, the missionaries started night schools in the buildings of regular schools at many towns and villages of Tamilnadu that benefitted the Muslim women. They appointed qualified women teachers to teach only for two hours every day. The Education Department controlled and regularized the functioning of the night schools. After consultation and opinion of the local communities, the schools were started.¹³ The Government started normal schools and Hobart schools during 1884-85 started to provide conveyance to all the pupils studying in the Hobart school. The Inspectors of Girl's school arranged many bullock carts for transportation purpose. The girls residing faraway from schools can avail these opportunities. The cost of the transport was taken from other resources. The plan behind this arrangement was that these Muslim women would be trained as teachers and these teachers would be appointed in various places. Thus the establishment of the normal school helped Muslim women in getting training as teachers. Moreover, the Government gave incentives to these trained teachers and also give honoraria to the Muslim women teachers even if they had minimum attendance. By this way, the government supported and encouraged Muslim women teachers and girls to educate.¹⁴ In 1884, the government planned to make the education attractive to Hindu and Muslim women, consequently, the Government Started new girls' schools. Muslim women teachers were wanted

more in government schools. By giving more and liberal honararium, the government attracted the teachers and students.

Role of Muslim Women in Arabic and Islamic Education

The Prophet along with his wives Ummahatul Momeneen and other female followers of the Muhammad played a significant role in imparting the teachings of Quran and Sunnah. The contributions of so many Muslim women belonged to Various fields were explained in the Encyclopedia of Seerah. Muslim women had memorized the whole book of Holy Quran.¹⁵ Among them are Umme Salma, Umme waraqah, Aisha, Hind, Ummu Hashimid also knew some parts of Quran by heart. Aisha was well versed in Holy Quran and had a sound knowledge of Hadith. Umm-u-Atiyah, Asma, the female followers were also great narrators of the Prophet's Hadith. There were no organized institutions in Tuticorin for Muslims on religious ground since 1850 A.D. So Lebbais taught Holy Quran, Arabic and moral values for Muslim students at the houses of the teacher. Apart from these subjects, the teachers were taught how to read, write and some fundamental Mathematics along with Tamil subject. Students when they grow to adolescents, they started to help their family.¹⁶ They too went with their parents to do menial jobs to earn livelihood and add few economic to their family. The occupations they employed were cultivation, fishing, weaving and grazing cattle. Population growth was slow in olden days and the demanded of the people were also less. People used bullock-carts to travel for short distance and boats for long distance. Inventions were less to find way and means to travel. Educational institutions were in old setup. Students approached scholars and saints at the scholars houses or at the Taikes, near the mosques during the morning hours. Kayal, was a village which made Thoothukudi famous. It was popular in Sangam age. Korkai, Tiruchendur, Tuticorin and Kayalpattinam are the places which stands as a symbol of Muslim culture.¹⁷

Muaskaru Rahuman Women's Arabic College

Moulana Moulavi Al-Hai-Al-Hafi H.A. Ahamed Abdul Kader Alim Mahalari founded a Mauskaru Women's Arabic College in 1988. The college followed Ahla - Sunnah principle. Arabic literature, Arabic Grammar, Quranic interpretation, Tradition (Hadith) Jurisprudence (fiqh) Aqueede, Tasawwath and other subjects were taught for three years in this college. Lady professors taught in this institution. Weekly thrice, students can opt to study computer science and stitching. It had introduced a small saving scheme for students. After successful completion of three years, the students were given "AALIMA MUASKARIA DIPLOMA" Nearly 200 to 800 students got Aalima Diploma. Hifil Madarasa attached to this college was started at Halima Thaika at sadukkai street in 1999.

Mahalarathul Qadiriya

Mahalara was the beautiful monument of Qadiriya Tariqah at Kayalpattinam. Tariqah and was followed by Muslim people. People who believed in sophistic thoughts were allowed to follows tariqah of their preference which means a favourable mental attitude. A famous Mahalara was constructed at Ambalamaraikar street in Kayalpattinam. Sayyid Abdullah Moulana, one of the 15th descendants of Muhyideen Abdul Qadin Jailani who came to Kayalpattinam constructed Mahalara on 25th Shawwal 1288 A.H. (1890 A.D).¹⁸ The main aim of Mahalara were to perform Dhikr, which was known as repeating the verse. It was important to teach Quran and also to run an Arabic college. Every Friday and Monday night Dhikr congregation would conduct meetings through the management of this great society.

In South India, Mahalara Arabic College was very famous. Every year Arabic degree was awarded to students after successful completion of the course. Students who got the degree Mahlari had become great scholars in South India and in Ceylon. Quran memorizing classes were also adjoined with this college which is own as Hafil Madarasa. Alims and Hafils were produced every year by the Mahalara Arabic college. In addition to this, every year Prophet Muhammed birthday was celebrated in this college. Women too studied in this institution. This college had introduced twenty three women Hafilas. In senior classes, male professors would teach in a curtained classroom with the help of amplifiers and intercoms.

Aysha Siddiqa Madarasa

Najath group found Aysha Siddiqa Madarasa during 1990. This institution was established near Appa Palli Mosque. Nearly 120 students are studying in this institution. Students from Kayalpattinam are studying. More number of students from other areas of districts are getting benefit of it.¹⁹ They stayed in hostel which was inside the campus of the college. Regular Islamic subjects were taught in this institution for women students. Three years degree courses were offered in Women's Arabic College. In addition to the regular courses, the college trained the students particularly girls students for appearing Afzal Ulama examination.

Mahalarathul Qadriya Arabic College

On 7th January 1872 AD, Sayyid Abdulla Moulana, one of the 15th descendants of Muhyideen Abdul Qadir Jailani visited Kayalpattinam to construct a Mahalara at Amabalammaraikar Street and laid a foundation stone. In Arab, Mahalara was known as assembly hall. It was an Islamic architectural wonder- having equal measurement of 42 feet height, breadth and length. It was built at the cost of Rs.32,000 during eighteenth century. The main aim of the building Mahalara was to perform Dhikr. All type of rituals such as preaching the Quran and running a Madarasa would be performed at Dhikr. Every Friday and Monday Qadriya Tariqah congregate would be performed at night. In South India and in Sri Lanka, Mahalara Arabic College was very popular. A Diploma course was also offered every year in Mahalara College in Arabic language which was termed as Mahlari. Many Alims, Hafils of Islamic scholars study in this Arabic college.²⁰

A1 Madharasathul Sadhiliya Fazia Arabic College

Abul Hasan Ali Shadhiliya, a great Islamic Saint, bom in 1196 in Kimara village of Africa established Shadhiliya Tarika. In Africa, Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli Shadhiliya Tarika propagated Islam. He propagated during the period of Abdul Hasan Ali Shadhilia Waliyulla Sait Abdul Hasan Ali Shadhilia. Caliph Mohammed Ibn Mohammed Fazi too propagated Shadhiliya Tarika in India, Srilanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar and so on. A great Islamic Scholar and saint, Sheik Mohammed Abubacker Miskin Saheb son of first Caliph Sheik Abubakkar Siddique (Rali) lived in this place. He made a pilgrimage to Haj and during this time he had an opportunity to meet St. Mohammed Ibn Mohammed Fazi and to listen to his religious sermons and discourse. It was a remarkable discourse and Saint Sheik Mohammed Abubakkar Miskin Saheb was deeply influenced by the spiritual enlightenment of Saint Mohammed Ibn Mohammed Fazi and got baiadh. Saint Sheik Mohammed Caliph of Shadhiliya Tarika, propogated Islam in Tamilnadu and Srilanka.²¹

It was decided by the followers of Shadhiliya Tarika to build an own building for their rituals, discourses and prayers. In 1868, a new building known as Javiya was established by Shadhiliya Taika for religious purpose and activities. Gradually, in the passage of time, this institution was converted into an Arabic college, which was known as A1 Madharasathul Sadhiliya Fazia. At present nearly forty students are studying in this college and many were graduated in Nizamia and Alim Fazi where degree is offered.²² This institution is managed by a committee of 42 members N.M. Noohu Hajeyyar, the president of this institution, the secretary of this institution Hajee SMM Sadakthullah, Hajee MSM Marakkayar the Vice President and M.A.M. Sadakkathullah the Joint Secretary. Students studying from Madurai, Kulasekarapatnam, Udankudi, Srivaikuntam, Tirunelveli, Kolachal, Thoothukudi, Petai, Ramnad, Athirampatnam and from various parts of Tamilnadu are pursuing degree from this Arabic college. N.M. Hayeyyar is the principal of this College.

Darul Uloom Us mania

On 9th November 1964 AD, an Islamic school known as Madhrasathul Qiratul Quran was started at Melapalayam with an aim of preaching and teaching the A1 Quran to the Muslim children belonging to Melapalayam region. It was also an educational institution that was administered by a committee under the head of Janab C. Mohamed Marakkayar. Janab N.S. Mohamed Hussain Saheb and Janab O.A.K. Meeran Mohideen Saheb joined hands with Janab C. Mohamed Marakkayar, the resident for the development and growth of Madhrasathul Qirat. This institution was functioning in the campus of Kattupatam Madarasa and it was renamed after discussing with some Ulamas and it was called as Madarasathul Qirat U1 Qurania since 10th of July 1969. On 28th November 1971, the first convocation ceremony was held under the presidency of Allhaj M. Mohamed Saheb. At the initial stage only eleven students succeeded in completing the course and they were conferred as Hafil. Moulana Khalil Ur Rahman Riaji and Moulana N.M. Mohamed Hussain Alim delivered a special address in the first convocation meeting. This institution was upgraded as an Arabic college on 17th December 1972.²³

Moulana AlhaiAbdul Salam Hazrat, the founder of Jamia Anwar UI Uloom inaugurated the Arabic College situated in Trichy. Moulana P.A. Khalilur Rahman Riaji the editor of monthly magazine 'Rahmed' presided the opening ceremony. At the initial stage, Darul Uloom Usmania Arabic College had its full operations at big Khutba Mosque. It was also an Arabic College, which had started to have its operations in its new building along with a mosque which was located on Anna Salai Bazar since 30.3.1987. The Chief Guests of the opening ceremony of the new buildings of Darul Uloom Usmania were Moulana Abdul Ahmed Hazrat, Judge of Karnataka Sharia Court and founder of Shabi Ur Raza Arabic College, Bangalore Teaching of Islamic Theology to Muslim Women. Secular training and religious training were the two main education that was given to Muslim women. The education which was based on tradition were mainly religious by nature. Such education initiated the children to read and recite Holy Quran. Nonreligious education was offered at home or at school. Much importance were given to reading and

understanding of Holy Quran. Students were prepared to memorise the Holy Quran or at least read it, even though they weren't able to understand it. Some Students learnt the Holy Quran at home from a tutor whereas others would go to the place at the Mosque and get such education from Ustad, (tutor) In this education, girls were not allowed at schools to receive formal education. About 30 years back, parents gave more preference on traditional spiritual education of learning Arab, Urdu and some basic Arithmetic. The reason is that a girl would be able to acquire spiritual education at the earliest of her childhood.

Schools in Kayalpattinam

In Kayalpattinam, there are few excellent higher secondary schools for boys and girls to learn secular subjects.²⁴ The administrators of Mahalara Arabic College understood the importance and significance of modern education So primary school was started on the Northern side of the Mahlara campus. The incharge of the school was Al-Haj N.l.Abdul hai Alim, who has good experience in teaching field, particularly teaching in primary schools in Srilanka.

L.K. Primary School

In 1940, L.K. Primary school was established by Muhammaed Iqbal. This primary school imparted education from first to fifth standard. It was established on Lebbai road. Four teachers were working in this institution that consisted of one headmaster and three secondary grade teachers. The primary focus of the curriculum of this school was Islamic education. But gradually it started to teach the common syllabus prescribed by Tamilnadu State Board.²⁵ More than 300 boys and girls were studying in this institution. It was started in the name of L.K.Educational Trust. From 2010, Dr. Mohammaed Lebbai was the administrator of this institution. Akbar Shah, a businessman in Kayalpattinam was the joint secretary of this institution. Meritorious students were identified and honoured every year during annual day celebrations.

Kayalpattinam Municipality Government Girls Higher Secondary School

In Kayalpattinam there are seven schools. Among all the schools, Kayalpattinam Girls Higher secondary school was a pioneer in imparting quality education. Girls Higher Secondary School Kayalpattinam Municipal established an elementary school on 15th July 1959. With the great efforts of AlKaaji Sheik Abdul Kaadhar, the school had been upgraded to middle school in the year 1992, and was then upgraded to high School on 26th June 1995.²⁶ It had been upgraded as higher secondary school. It was exclusively established for girl students. They had been studying Islamic religious education, but such education will not be used to get jobs or get entry into higher education on common platform. Based on this view, a separate school had been started by the Government of Tamilnadu. Out of the total strength of the school nearly ninety percent students belonged to Muslim community. The school had imparted religious education during morning hours. With the great efforts of the former Municipal Chairman Natchi Thambi, the school had been upgraded to Higher secondary school so that students can be educated and get employment opportunities. Many students who were educated from this school had got appointment in state and central government and in private concerns. Many students had become doctors, engineers and nurses.

Conclusion

There were no organized institutions in Tuticorin for Muslims on religious ground since 1850 A.D. So Lebbais taught Holy Quran, Arabic and moral values for Muslim students at the houses of the teacher. Apart from these subjects, the teachers were taught how to read, write and some fundamental Mathematics along with Tamil subject. Students when they grow to adolescents, they started to help their family. They too went with their parents to do menial jobs to earn livelihood and add few economic to their family. The occupations they employed were cultivation, fishing, weaving and grazing cattle. Population growth was slow in olden days and the demanded of the people were also less. People used bullock-carts to travel for short distance and boats for long distance. Inventions were less to find way and means to travel. Educational institutions were in old setup. Students approached scholars and saints at the scholars houses or at the Taikes, near the mosques during the morning hours. Kayal, was a village which made Thoothukudi famous. It was popular in Sangam age. Korkai, Tiruchendur, Tuticorin and Kayalpattinam are the places which stands as a symbol of Muslim culture.

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