

Rise of Muslim Female Education: A Case Study of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Education has been a major tool for creating an egalitarian society and bringing in empowerment of women. Accessibility of education by everyone, without a major hindrance, results in upward social mobility and social change. Although Islam emphasizes the right and importance of education on women unequivocally, access of Muslim women to education in Sri Lanka historically has not been much worthy to elaborate in the popular academic discourses. During the colonial and in the mid post-colonial period, they lacked interest or motivation in education due to various reasons. However, with the open economy and the impact of globalization and modernization in the mid-1970s, Muslim women were drawn tremendously to the realm of education-secondary or tertiary level, in an unprecedented manner. More importantly, with the establishment of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka in 1995, the interest or inspiration among Muslim women towards higher education had radically risen. In this backdrop, this study explores the factors that contributed to the rapid shift of Muslim female education in Sri Lanka, specifically focusing on the enrolment female students at the South Eastern University and resultant impact upon the society. This is a qualitative study encompassing different data collection techniques. While primary data was collected based on the observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles and other secondary materials. The study found that 66 % of students at South Eastern University are female and it also revealed that the motivation of parents and families, economic urge, family situation, social status, influence of modernization and media, easy access to education, mode of overcoming the social malaise like dowry, higher percentage of women (in birthrate), and significant role of women in socialization are some of the factors that contributed to the rise of Muslim female education. The study concludes that although the level of Muslim female education rises to certain degree, their status in the social level has not improved significantly.

Key words: Empowerment, Open Economy, Globalization, Social Status

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