

# Historical Aspect of Gender Identification as Exemplified by Muslim Women in the Light of Tatar and Indian Background

Guzel Ferdinandovna Mratkuzina<sup>1,\*</sup>, Rezida Ilgizovna Khoraskina<sup>1</sup>,  
Dmitriy Vyacheslavovich Bobkov<sup>1</sup> and Ishtyak Gilkar Ahmad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kazan Federal University, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Center for the Development of relations between Tatarstan and India

**Abstract:** In the recent decades, investigation of transformation of gender relations in the countries of the world are becoming even more relevant. This process shows similar traits in societies of different type, yet in each country and in every region it takes a different path, which depends on a number of external and internal factors.

It is interesting to compare the place and activity level of Muslim women in Tatarstan and India. Relevance of the investigated topic is attributed to the importance of understanding the ways and methods of awakening and development of the religious and national self-awareness of the Tatar people. As an essential tradition keeper of the Tatar people, Muslim women has long since functioned as enthusiastic defenders and supporters of restoration of religious and cultural traditions.

Further relevance of the investigated topic is conditioned upon still debatable status of women in India, as they talk about equality of women in modern Indian society, while realities often prove to be different.

The present article is aimed at achieving the following goal – exposing conceptual and factual content of the problems of Islam's place in the system of religious identities of Tatar and Indian society, gender peculiarity of traditional Tatar and Indian society, status of Muslim women in Tatarstan and India and analysis of their social-political activity.

The leading approach in investigating this topic is systemic and complex analysis and evaluation of the phenomenon of Indian Muslim women in the public perception and in the academic circles.

The key findings of the article imply addressing the following research problems: 1) Scientifically-based reconstruction of the history of emergence and expansion of Islam in India; 2) Understanding of religious and gender peculiarity of Indian society; 3) Evaluation of historical limits, typology, scale and deepness of investigation of Muslim traditions in Indian society; 4) Justification of theoretical, historiographic, source-based foundation of the topic investigation, as well as systemization accumulated materials; 5) Determination of the degree of historical and culturological importance of the topic under consideration in Tatarstan.

The materials of the article can be useful when determining relevant sectors of conventional and new agenda of the topic under consideration. Tatar and Indian women nowadays have achieved much, compared to Medieval times when their status in the society was utterly low. Yet in fact, they still have to go a long and difficult path to acquiring total freedom. Even though Indian women are still miles away from achievements of feminists in the West, yet due to social reformers the public is gradually beginning to recognize the true potential of women. As a result, old barriers started to break down, so Tatar and Indian Muslim women are gaining a rightful place in the society.

**Keywords:** Modern Indian and Tatar society, Gender identification, Muslim women.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The religious awakening in the 1990s put various forth into the social and political arena zealously acting social groups. As a result of social and political transformation of the Russian society, religious associations acquired a new social and legal status, which led to revitalization of the Muslim women movement. The existing public organizations of Muslim women has become and important factor of the national spiritual awakening in the Republic of Tatarstan.

Detecting the main activity paths of Muslim women organizations of Tatarstan, the mechanism of their

impact on the social and cultural life of the society represents the attempt of the analysis of interconnection and mutual influence of social, ethnic and confessional components of the contemporary life in the Republic. In order to realize the goal of determining the place and role of Tatar Muslim women in the modern public, social and cultural life, the scope of activity of their functioning groups is revealed, specific features of forms and mechanisms of their influence on the society are described, their contribution into preservation of religious and national traditions, as well as into sustainable development of the society on the whole is considered.

In the course of social and economic and political development of India for the last half a century, significant positive changes have happened in the

\*Address correspondence to this author at the Kazan Federal University, Russia; Tel: +79272466242; E-mail: gmatkhuzina@gmail.com

status of Indian women. The Constitution of the country states their equality in political and economic life.

And still, usually women represent a more submissive part of population. This is reflected, in particular, in the fact that India is one of the few countries where there are fewer women than men, and their life expectancy is lower.

The dependent status of Indian women is also affected by the fact that up to now family links, marital connections and ancestral relations are regulated by the personal right of individual religious congregations. The status of Indian women still for the most part depend on historically adopted system of views on the role and place of women.

Ceremonial cleanliness as component of the religious status of family and caste was achieved by keeping vegetarianism, abstinence and a set of rules governing the conduct of a woman. Chastity, innocence were required of a woman, as well as total submission and deification of husband, ability to bear rightful sons, and the *purdah*. A woman's conduct impacted the honor of not only her husband, her father's and mother's families, but also of the whole endogamous group.

It can be stated that as androcentric caste-ridden society assert itself, the status of a woman was constantly aggravated. The more she was tied in slavery to the man, turning into a "slave" of his desires, a mere instrument of child-bearing and a recluse, the more ceremonially clean and prestigious the family and caste became. The difference in the status of caste in the scale of ceremonial cleanliness and abomination was ultimately determined by the status of women. Hinduism, facing other local cults, adapted and assimilated them, using the mechanism which assigned a special role to women in caste ranging.

Hinduism as a system of traditional values assumes a great influence on the status of women even today. Yet the changes that happened in social, political and economic life in India for the last few decades became an important factor of Indian women's emancipation.

It is problematic to assign Indian women with common traits distinguishing them from women of other countries. Indian women are to such an extent different as different historical traditions, religious convictions, caste restrictions common to this country. Every Indian woman bears the imprint of the environment and moral principles set from her very birth. One can find here the

whole specter of contradictions in relation to women, in women themselves, in family traditions and customs that women have to keep.

Contrary to the widely spread idea about passiveness and even intimidation of Muslim women, the history of Islamic world is full of examples of women's active participation in political and social life. But such examples are not so numerous in India. Despite the religious diversity of Indian population, the statistics is worryingly sad in all groups – those of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims or Christians. The influence of religion in this case is minor, but traditions play a big role.

The status and degree of freedom of women in India for the most part depend on which social strata and which religious congregation they belong to. In the upper classes, especially in the Muslim religious tradition, the duty of women still consists only in wifedom and motherhood.

Starting with the 1880s, middle class women began to more actively be involved in professional activities and reform movements, even though the progress was slow and difficult. One of the brightest women of that time was Pandita Ramabai who took a stand for education for young widows, admission of women into medical educational establishments and training of women teachers. And the future leader of the women movement Sarojini Naidu said this, "The hand swinging a cradle can rule the world". She tried to pick up worthy examples from the lives of Indian goddesses to facilitate participation of Indian women in political fight. The same level of women activity continued into the contemporary history, from 1920s until India won independence in 1947. During that period, women and men alike took part in civil disobedience campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi in his fight for Indian independence.

After India won independence, women focused their efforts again on the issues of equality. Women hoped that the new government would put their demands into the Constitution and new legislation of the country. Indeed, equality of sexes was guaranteed by the Constitution of 1950 adopted by Jawaharlal Nehru. However, the new legislation did not envisage raising the majority and marriage age, women's right to divorce, amendments to the laws on inheritance and dowry.

Yet it was only in 1970-80s that true development of women movements became possible. Cities, towns,

settlements and villages formed women lead groups, setting the aim of resolving local problems and defending the interests of local population. The "Manushi" women magazine started in 1978 analyzed the place of women, their role in the society and views on life. Women we aware of their common interests, as well as existing contradictions.

In 2005, a dynamic team of young educated women started trailing a phenomenal way to success through the non-governmental organization "All India Muslim Personal Law Board" (AIMPLB), the leading agency of the Muslim thought. In 2012, Indian Muslim women held an event where they discussed their problems and measures to activate the rights guaranteed to them by the Holy Quran. President of the Muslim women organization Naish Hasan confirmed that it is necessary to restore Muslim women Quranic rights put them in the Indian legislation. At the same time, the participants of the «Daughters of Islam Demand Justice» conference discussed problems of women in the Muslim community, such as illiteracy and lack of laws protecting women.

Lately, the hot issue of public debates is marginalization of Muslims in India. Yet, in those discussions, Muslim women are often either neglected or considered as a homogeneous group having a common set of interests.

The first Congress of Muslim women of Russia took place in Kazan in 1917. One of the currently influential public associations started to form as an organization only in 2005 when the first Congress of Muslim women of Tatarstan took place in Kazan.

In Kazan, the chronicle of religious events recorded, in successive order (besides the widely known move for the right of Muslim women to take passport photos in head coverings that ended in success), opening of the Muslim women club (2004), women division of the Russian Islamic University (2004), Muslim women union campaign against obscene images at billboards (2003), initiative of the same union for improvement of health situation in the city of Kazan (2005). In 2007, the union initiated the conference "Educated woman as a jewel of Islamic heritage" that took place in Kazan. The largest events of those years were the above-mentioned first united congress of Muslim women of Tatarstan, which involved 300 delegates from all districts of the Republic and from 10 regions of Russia (2005) and the Women Forum of the of the Turkic world involving 300 delegates from over 40 regions of

Russia and from abroad (2007). The public organization of Muslim women of Tatarstan "Muslima", the republican public organizations "Women of Tatarstan" and "Ak kalfak", executive committee of the World Tatar Congress and the "Union of Muslim women of Tatarstan" actively propagate religious education. "Ak kalfak" owns a press organ, the "Suyumbike" magazine, the only all-Tatar magazine for women distributed all over Russian Federation and beyond.

The Marjani mosque hosted the inaugural meeting of the "Union of Muslim women of Tatarstan" metropolitan office on April 11, 2012. On April 26, 2012 Moscow hosted the All-Russia съезд of Muslim women. N. Ziganshina pointed out that the "Union of Muslim women of Tatarstan" was recently founded, but already got a massive public outcry. The most important task the Union set before itself is to unite women resources, activities and positive practices in order to steer all that for the sake of society.

Focus on women will allow to expose types of religious identity in connection with other individual manifestations, including social stratification class, status, regional affiliation and gender role.

## **2. METHODS**

The topic of the Muslim women phenomenon is represented by a variety of materials, as modern research literature on this topic contains some factual and conceptual material.

Historians have done a lot of work attempting to understand various aspects of the topic, however, in historiography and source study, the literature on the indicated problems has not been systematized until recently. Until recently, the experience of presenting the author's main approaches and points of view, the evolution of scientific research in the coverage of the issues of this topic in Russian and foreign literature have remained fragmentary and incomplete.

The need of the modern era demands objective coverage of the main trends in the interpretation of the topic, and a critical approach to these issues creates a problematic situation in the academic research.

Comprehension of the topic for the authors of the article has become the object of independent research, and this topic should be generalized. Historiography and source study of topical issues of the phenomenon of Muslim women in India and Tatarstan should

become the *subject of research* and *critical discourse analysis* (CDA). The CDA needs to be discussed in more detail considering the way some authors have identified the gender issue. The methodology of the topic expands due to the critical selection of literature for the study of the topic; we relied on famous historical figures and recognized researchers—Indian, Pakistani, Russian and Tatar colleagues.

Today it is important to be able to justify the use of methodology and method of research. Methodology contributes toward mastering practices of previous development of scientific thought, variety of scholar views, ways and procedures of research work.

It is suggested to study the phenomenon of Muslim women in India on the *local and regional level*. The materials of the article is presented on the basis of *analytical and synthetic method* of research. *Problematic and chronological principle* of the materials layout is employed, which will allow to study the objective process of extension of domestic historiography and source-based studies, evolution of scientific concepts.

The main content of historiographic analysis is exposure, evaluation and critique of scientific concepts. Historiographic synthesis is based on the principle of concepts correspondence, as they stand out as most characteristic ones for the whole scientific research.

The result of the theoretical and methodological materials is evaluation of continuity and indication of further opportunities of use of historiographic and source-based research.

Holistic approach to the whole array of the materials is used consistent with *stylistic culture* as well as *formal and logical way* of presentation.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The topic is provided with sources introduced into scientific use. The main source for such research is represented by *official and documented materials*. The normative base of the research consists in the materials of the Laws of Manu (Dharma Shastra of Manu) and Indian Constitution, where the rules of common law, enactments on state administration, rituals and issues of religions and cults, and most importantly – stratification of Indian society have been regulated.

The context of the research makes it necessary to turn to *personal provenance sources and memoirs*.

Travelers Afanasy Nikitin and Ismagil Bigmukhmetov 1995 compiled their sketches of impressions about India where, among other things, of special value are their reflections on religious differences in Indian society. Those collection of memoirs are based on personal observations of partakers of the specified events and occurrences, often unedited or demanding additions, not in full sequential layout. Yet, these sources are still valuable due to the fact that the authors witnessed the events, which also provides valuable materials. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, 2004, themselves deeply religious, considered that Islam as one of Indian religions would continue to spread and flourish in India.

The large source base provides for the necessary representativeness and reliability of factual materials.

Critical analysis of *literature* allows to make a conclusion concerning the extent of investigation of the topic on the whole and its individual aspects, to acquire the required information for consistent study of the materials. All literature differ in the scientific level, content of factual materials.

Special investigations, both *domestic and foreign*, are linked to traditions and innovations that signify the level of research of the specified topic. Among the most significant *contemporary researchers* in the framework of the specified topic we can name, first of all, Rostislav Rybakov, 1991, a Russian indologist, specialist in problems of the history of culture, intercultural cooperation. He is famous for his contribution into studying the synthesis of the modern and traditional in religious and cultural sphere of Indian society. The works by E. Yurlova, 1998 are dedicated to the status of women in India, they develop new concepts of features of formation and functioning of women population of Indian society, which is a peculiarity of Indian culture and have been raised by the country's public into the rank of social life rule. A special role is given by the authors to hierarchy schemes and markers of women status in Indian society.

In Kazan University, researchers deal with investigation of the problems of Indian history and culture. A certain contribution into the study of the specified topic has been made by the dissertation theses: Alexandra Balabolina "Problems of the caste system of India in the coverage of national historiography..." and Guzel Mratkhezina "Russian-Indian relations in the national historiography", as well as her specialized course textbook «Muslim women of

India: religious and gender aspects» 2001, 2019. These works, in their own way touching upon the problems of religious and caste relationships in India, have also made a certain contribution into studying the peculiarities of Indian society.

Of special interest is the publication of the Tatar by A.I. Sattarova "Muslim women in contemporary social and cultural life of Tatarstan", 2004. This article analyses the major trends and socio-cultural components of women's Muslim union in the Republic of Tatarstan. The nature and forms of social activity of Muslim women defines on the example of public unions. Forms of Muslim movement in the republic's public life had been shown on the basis of materials of modern periodicals.

*In foreign* historiography, there are few works on the specified problematics, however, foreign scholars have achieved significant success in studying castes. Among British researchers, we can distinguish a historian and indologist, the author of the best selling monograph "The wonder that was India" Arthur Llewellyn Basham, 2000.

An Indian historian, member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain Sinharaja Tammita Delgoda, 2010 in the series "Great Countries Biographies" demonstrates history and culture of the country to a person of European culture, asserting that the peculiarity of Indian social structure even today is one of important features of Indian existence predominant in the ideology and cultural life of Indian peoples.

It should be noted that in a foreign (English) language there is sufficient number of research on the specified topic. First of all, the works of doctor Nida Kirmani, 2013, associate professor of humanities and social sciences at Delhi State University. Her scientific interests include problems of correspondence between gender and Islam, women movements and processes of regional segregation and urban marginalization in India. She has recently published a book based on the materials of doctoral thesis titled "Muslim women survey. Identity and safety in Indian urban areas". The author throws light on religious stereotypes and gender psychology in modern Indian society. Her other work "Understanding of Muslims marginalization processes in urban India" discusses the problem of soaring marginalization and ghettoization of Indian Muslims. It presents rich empirical data from Indian Muslim residential areas, shows the key ideas in the complicated nature of this assumed deterioration.

Doctor Narain Vrinda, 1998, is a professor of the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, McGill University, and fellow of the Asian Institute of the Center for International Research at University of Toronto (Canada). Her research and teaching activities focus on the problems of social diversity and feminist theory of law. Here is Vrinda's thoughtful and blunt answer to the question about the role of academics in discussions about 'inclusive democracy': The role of the academic is to start and pursue an engaged dialogue so we can have a more informed debate and an inclusion of perspectives that have been marginalized, particularly Muslim women, racialized women and racialized minority groups.

As we have pointed out, contemporary domestic and foreign historiography touches upon a wide range of problems on the topic of the research. The complex of source-based and historiographic materials makes a significant contribution into interpretation of the specified problems. And so far we provide only a short listing of the authors and their formulation of problems in order to lend this topic to the discussion.

#### 4. SUMMARY

The status of Muslim women in Tatarstan and India has recently become the subject of public debates.

Tatarstan Muslim women associations come out in various areas of life, such as educational activities, public relations concerning dawa (call for Islam), training, charity, fashion in the tradition of the Muslim women in Russia. They also promote themselves in the media, on the radio and TV. According to current opinion of Tatarstan citizens, positive social role of the Muslim women movement is to no small degree connected with traditional ideas regarding cleanliness, womanhood, submission and keepers of the family hearth.

The main element of the events held by Tatarstan Muslim women organizations is their focus on preservation and development of religious tolerance traditions as the basis for interdenominational accord and foundation for sustainable development of the whole society. They concern a vast range of issues—from Muslim clothes to flexibility in keeping the Sharia-based regulations with regard to the currently changed conditions. The activity of the Muslim women organizations makes an essential development factor of spiritual and cultural values of the Tatar people, their more harmonious integration into the common social and cultural space of the Republic of Tatarstan.

The research exposes ways of how Muslim women's religious identity overlaps their individual manifestations, including class, status, denominational affiliation and gender role. It throws light on religious stereotypes and gender psychology of Muslim women in modern Indian society.

The authors demonstrate the complexity of life and several hazard levels which Indian Muslim women face. The fight for movement in defence of the rights of the poor and illiterate Muslim women in India is being initiated. Of course, it is still noticeable that women are lagging behind in the area of literacy and education. The custom of the Muslim women purdah is still practised in India. The status and degree of freedom of women in India for the most part depend on which social strata and which religious congregation they belong to. Most authors still consider that that a considerable number of Indian women base themselves not only on religious, but also on social, patriotic and moral considerations.

Until recently, the experience of presentation of the main approaches and points of view, evolution of intrascientific search in exposing the problems of the topic of the phenomenon of Tatar and Indian Muslim women in domestic and foreign historiography and source-based studies have remained fragmental and incomplete.

Contemporary research literature on this topic contains rich factual and conceptual materials. New historical sources have been introduced into scientific use. Historians have done a great work on understanding various problems of the topic. However, literature and sources on the specified problematics have not been systemized.

## 5. CONCLUSION

We call for a systematic and comprehensive analysis and assessment of the phenomenon of Muslim women in Tatarstan and India in the public and scientific mind. This should aim at highlighting the conceptual and factual content of the problems picturing the place of Islam in the system of religious identities of the Tatar and Indian society, the gender specificity of traditional society, the position of Muslim women in society and analysis of their social and political activity (Mratkhezina G.F., 2019)

Investigation of source-based traditions and innovations of the topic of the phenomenon of Muslim

women in Tatarstan and India is of academic, scientific and humanistic significance. New historiographic and source-based facts introduced into scientific use, formation of original aspects of the topic investigation at present have determined the necessity of the specified topic formulation (Khayrutdinov and Karimov, 2015).

The content of the materials used in the article, critical approach to their analysis testify to the necessity of further investigation of historical and cultural components of the topic.

The present article allows to trace the continuity and originality of the specified topic, expand its theoretical, conceptual, historical and scientific range of problems. The conducted source-based and historiography analysis of the problems raised in the topic under consideration still needs further investigation.

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