

Individual Autonomy of Muslim Married Working Women in India and Iran: A Comparative Study of Mysore and Ahvaz Cities

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ABSTRACT This research intends to report the individual autonomy of Muslim working women in government offices in Mysore and Ahvaz cities and discuss the effective factors in increasing the individual autonomy of Muslim working women in their families. The methodology which was used in this comparative study relied on interviewing and questionnaire as the primary data gathering methods. Total sample comprised 300 Muslim women working in the government sectors, 150 in Mysore (India) and 150 in Ahvaz (Iran). Results revealed that although individual autonomy of Muslim working women is low, a change of attitude can be observed among Muslim men towards women and their role in the individual autonomy. Moreover, women are not totally ignored and are consulted. Men's education seems to play a major role in the involvement of Muslim women in the process of decision-making, and it can reduce erroneous traditions among the Muslims. Overall, the results indicate a shift from one-sided male authority to sharing the power by both husband and wife.

INTRODUCTION

In Oxford dictionary 'Autonomy' means the right of a person, an organization, a region, etc. to govern or control his/her/its own affairs (Steel 2006: 38). In other words, the condition or the quality of being autonomous, specifically the power or the right of self-governing is called autonomy. The term can be extended to cover even the smallest group in a society and an individual. Most people lead their lives constrained by family, clan, religion, etc. People spend their whole lives following the course dictated by their position in society (ACC Niagara). They have to ignore their individual autonomy at times.

In the social structure of any society, women are considered as the second-class citizens without any freedom and are consciously or unconsciously forced to fulfil all their duties without any rights of their own. In a patriarchal structure, a woman is oppressed and exploited and wholly subordinate to the male members, that is, father, husband, or son, who are considered the head of the family. Her job is to manage the house and bring up the children (Urmila 1988: 211). In traditional societies, women are economically dependent on their husbands who control most of the productive resources, income, tools, knowledge and skills. In most cases,

women are not given any opportunities to have any access to goods and services, but made to depend on income earned by their husbands and/or the other males in the family (Dak 1988: 9-10).

For instance, in the Islamic society, one can perceive these problems. It is worth mentioning that, Islam has given men and women equal rights in every aspect of life and has also given them equality in the idea of creation of human beings (Engineer 1992: 44), however, unfortunately, traditional societies could not apply its principles correctly. These societies, with erroneous interpretations have given men superiorities in every field, especially in the economic, social and political situations. Moreover, in a society or family that is dominated by men, men are considered to be the main decision-makers in the family structure. Women's role and their freedom depend mainly on men. In such a society, men decide upon women's education, their work outside home, their property rights, and so on. In other words, women's individual autonomy is limited. therefore, the majority of Muslim women have been pushed into seclusion and segregation, and it [Islam] restricts individual autonomy of Muslim women and girls.

On the other hand, excessive dependence on men has deprived them of enjoying many privileges like extending and continuing higher education, taking jobs, developing self-identity, etc. Meanwhile, the involvement of Muslim women in the decision-making process is seen to be minimal (Azim 1997: 148-166).

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Of course, modernization and development of Muslim communities, especially in India and Iran, have brought about several changes in the status of Muslim women, but they are not sufficient. Observations have indicated that working women who have taken a job outside their home, their autonomy in the family structure were low and they are deprived of more social activities.

In the present study, 'individual autonomy' has been defined as the freedom enjoyed by a person in decision-making with regard to household maintenance, shopping, marketing, marriage and occupation of children, traveling, family income, buying and changing houses, freedom to own earning and spending, looking after property, and participating in political and social activities. Meanwhile, it was attempted to explore individual autonomy of Muslim married working women in Mysore (India) and Ahvaz (Iran) cities (This section explored the individual autonomy of the married working women; the total number of widowed, divorced and married women was considered as married women), and factors increasing the individual autonomy of married working women in the family and society. The present study has set the following objectives:

- To study the socio-economic status of Muslim working women
- To study the individual autonomy of Muslim working women in the family structure
- To study the factors that can affect increasing the individual autonomy of Muslim working women.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the researcher adopted a comparative method of collecting and analyzing the data. The researcher gathered the data from both primary and secondary sources. Total sample comprised 300 Muslim women who were randomly selected from the governmental sectors, 150 in Mysore (India) and 150 in Ahvaz (Iran).

In general, to determine the sample population of this study (Mysore (India) and Ahvaz (Iran)) 4 characteristics were considered: being female, married, Muslim, and working in governmental offices or departments. Content validity of the questionnaire was determined

with the help of 6 experts (3 experts in India and 3 experts in Iran) specialized in the field of Ph.D. The subject experts examined the items in detail and considering the unanimity of the experts' suggestions, changes were made accordingly. Some of the questions were also deleted. The questions related to *hijab* were changed, and the questions related to water resource was omitted in Persian questionnaire. Meanwhile, reliability co-efficient established by Cronbach's Alpha method was $r=0.81$ in India and $r=0.85$ in Iran.

To collect the data, a questionnaire was designed and developed and an interview was conducted.

In order to select the Muslim working women in the governmental offices/departments in the selected cities (Mysore City in India and Ahvaz City in Iran), first the researcher required a list of the total number of Muslim women who worked in the governmental offices/departments of the selected cities. However, there were no records or available data of the target population in these cities. The researcher was unable to collect the accurate size of Muslim working women in governmental offices/departments of the selected cities, so it was decided to study 400 random samples -200 in Mysore (India) and 200 in Ahvaz (Iran), but because of lack of responsiveness and cooperation of the respondents around 100 questionnaires were lost by them, whether deliberately or by negligence. Then, the researcher was forced to reduce the sample to 300, 150 in Mysore (India) and 150 in Ahvaz (Iran) - for the study, who were then interviewed and therefore, the required data for the present study was selected. For this purpose a questionnaire was prepared and variables were analyzed using suitable statistical techniques such as Pearson Coefficient of Correlation.

RESULTS

The comparison of the results in the two cities shows that the age structure of the working woman population in Ahvaz (Iran) is younger than that of Mysore (India): 78 per cent of working women in Ahvaz (Iran) are in the age-group 29-48, while 54.7 per cent of the working women in Mysore (India) are in the age-group 39-60. Furthermore, the comparison of the results in both cities indicates that one-fifth of the working women in Mysore (India) were in the

age-group of 18-28 while this percentage in Ahvaz (Iran) was less than one-fifth. In other words, more job opportunities are provided for the women in Mysore in this age-group (India) than in Ahvaz (Iran); that is, in Mysore (India) women have more opportunities to enter a job compared to Ahvaz (Iran).

The comparison of the results obtained from the two cities shows that job opportunities for the illiterate women in Mysore (India) are much more than those in Ahvaz (Iran).

Moreover, the results indicate that job opportunities for the below SSLC/ SSLC and PUC are higher in Mysore (India) than in Ahvaz (Iran). For example, a woman with these educational degrees cannot easily find jobs in Ahvaz (Iran) while 40.7 per cent of Muslim women in Mysore (India) having the same educational qualifications have occupied positions in governmental sectors, not bringing into account, the private sector. Furthermore, the results show that a sizeable percentage of women hold graduate degrees, but the ones with postgraduate and advanced professional degree courses are not many: that is 16 per cent in Mysore (India) and 12.6 per cent in Ahvaz (Iran). In other words, a small percentage of women have tried to acquire higher education.

Meanwhile, the results reveal that 90 per cent have teaching career from the total of Muslim working women in Mysore (India), 6 per cent work as clerks, 0.6 per cent are in engineering industry and 0.6 per cent work as doctors, and 2.7 per cent of them work as peon-servant attendants. Meanwhile 64.3 per cent of respondents begin their jobs or their economic activities before getting married. The minimum age of a Muslim woman to begin to work is 15 and the maximum age is 43.

The results in Ahvaz (Iran) indicate that 72 per cent of women are in teaching career, 24.7 per cent work as clerks, 1.3 per cent of them work in engineering industry and 1.3 per cent were working as nurses and doctors and only 0.7 per cent of women work as peon-servant attendants. In addition, it can be concluded that 51.7 per cent of respondents begin their jobs or their economic activities before getting married. The minimum age of a Muslim woman in Ahvaz (Iran) to begin to work is 16 and the maximum age is 32.

In general, the results show that the percentage of women choosing teaching career among

the respondents in both cities, especially in Mysore (India) exceeds the other career percentages because most females choose teaching as their most-wanted career for the reasons of high job security and acceptability of this job in the society and their families.

The results show that most of the Muslim working women in the two cities have to perform and fulfill several domestic duties such as carrying out household duties and taking care of children for which they do not get help from their husbands. Husbands expect their wives to look after them and home along with performing their jobs. Only some of the respondents in Mysore (India) employ part-time domestic servants to serve them with their household duties. A low percentage of the married women have sufficient time to meet all their household duties. A considerable percentage of the married respondents felt that they were neglected by their husbands and children. This percentage is less in Mysore (India) than in Ahvaz (Iran).

Decision-making is an activity process by which a course of action is consciously chosen among from available alternatives. This process involves three stages, namely, awareness of the situation, evaluation of the alternatives and making the final decision. With reference to decision-making in the family, while in the first two stages various members of the family may be involved; in the final stage someone will have the final say. This generally rests upon the person who has ultimate responsibility on the family front. Just as roles go with the status, decision-making goes with roles. This is an ideal pattern, where parity between responsibility and authority should prevail. However, when it comes to the division of authority between the spouses, it is highly influenced by the tradition. In Indian and Iranian societies where the patrilineal, patrilocal and patronymic traditions are the rule, the position of the wife in a family is governed by the inegalitarian ethos (Indira Devi 1987: 123-124).

Then, one of the indicators of status of married women in a family's structure is whether she is given a share in the decision-making process. Based on Dehlstrom (1967) "One of the most important objectives of the feminist movement has been to remove various external barriers to equally influence and participate in decision making by women of the family, in work-

ing life, in organization and in public life” (Menon 1981: 81). In addition, decision-making and the distribution of power within the family is a basic element. We wanted to know how much decision-making power a Muslim woman possesses.

Hence, in this study, an attempt was made to explore whether married working women take part in the decision-making process. If yes, what are the matters that they can decide independently? Do they enjoy decision-making power in a family's structure? If yes, in what kind of decision they are involved?

According to the above matters, the following themes were formed in questions that were asked of the respondents:

1. Purchase of household articles
2. Marriage of the children
3. Employment of children
4. Education of children
5. Buying and changing house
6. Traveling
7. Making decision on family income

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that a considerable percentage of married women expressed that their husbands involved them in decision-making process. As nearly half of the married women presented that their husbands sought their opinions in matters such as purchase of household articles, marriage and occupation and education of children and traveling. Of course, the results reveal that husbands, par-

Table 1: Married working women and pattern of their decision

Member of family	Shopping/ marketing	Marriage of children	Employment of children	Education of children	Buying and changing house	Traveling	Decision making divide family income
<i>Self</i>							
Mysore (India)	42 (39.3%)	23 (25.1%)	23 (25.1%)	23 (25.1%)	11(10.3%)	17 (15.9%)	11 (10.3%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	25 (21.0%)	11 (9.2%)	11 (9.2%)	11 (9.2%)	8(6.7%)	11 (9.2%)	7 (5.9%)
Total	67 (29.6%)	34 (15%)	34 (15%)	34 (15%)	19(8.4%)	28 (12.4%)	18 (8.0%)
<i>Husband</i>							
Mysore (India)	32 (29.2%)	44 (41.1%)	46 (43.0%)	44 (41.1%)	65 (60.7%)	54 (50%)	62 (57.9%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	47 (39.5%)	48 (40.3%)	48 (40.3%)	48 (40.3%)	73 (61.3%)	49 (41.2%)	73 (61.3%)
Total	79 (35%)	92 (40.7%)	94 (41.5%)	92 (40.7%)	138 (61.1%)	103 (45.6%)	135 (59.7%)
<i>Self and Husband</i>							
Mysore (India)	29 (27.1%)	35 (32.7%)	35 (32.7%)	37 (43.6%)	25 (23.4%)	32 (29.9%)	27 (25.2%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	44 (37%)	57 (47.9%)	57 (47.9%)	57 (47.9%)	34 (28.9%)	56 (47.1%)	35 (29.4%)
Total	73 (32.3%)	92 (40.7%)	32 (40.7%)	94 (44.2%)	59 (26.1%)	88 (38.9%)	62 (27.4%)
<i>Father</i>							
Mysore (India)	2 (1.9%)	3 (2.8%)	3 (2.8%)	3 (2.8%)	4 (3.7%)	3 (2.8%)	5 (4.7%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.4%)	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.5%)
Total	4 (1.8%)	5 (2.2%)	5 (2.2%)	5 (2.2%)	8 (3.5%)	5 (2.2%)	8 (3.5%)
<i>Mother</i>							
Mysore (India)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (0.8%)
Total	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)
<i>Children</i>							
Mysore (India)	2 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	1 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	3 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i>Father-in-Law</i>							
Mysore (India)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.9%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.4%)
<i>Mother-in-law</i>							
Mysore (India)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)
<i>Total</i>							
Mysore (India)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)	119(100.0%)
Ahvaz (Iran)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	107(100.0%)
Total	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)	226(100.0%)

Source: Primary Data Survey 2007

Married women include married, divorced and widowed women

ents and other adult male members are also involved in decision-making in matters like buying and changing houses and the distribution of family income. In other words, married women have less influence in these matters, and their husbands usually do not seek their opinions with these regards.

Meanwhile, the comparison of the results obtained from the survey in both cities show that in Mysore (India) men involved their wives in decision-making process regarding household chores. In other words, men consult more with their wives in matters related to their children and going shopping. Also the data depict that married women participate less in the economic functions of household such as buying and changing houses and the distribution and division of the family's income. Husbands and male members have an active role in this regard. The same situation was also observed in Ahvaz (Iran).

Generally speaking, according to the results in Table 1, it can be observed that there is a change in the attitude of Muslim men towards their wives and their role in decision-making process. Women are not totally ignored and men directly involved their wives in household functions. This point returns to the education of men. 60.2 per cent of the respondents' husbands in Mysore (India) and 69.6 per cent of the respondents' husbands in Ahvaz (Iran) had studied from PUC to Ph.D, as it has enabled men to understand the abilities and feelings of their wives.

In general, the results in both cities, in Table 1 revealed that the dominant pattern of decision-making was identified by classifying the congruent responses into three categories, as 'husband dominant', 'wife dominant' and 'joint'. The considerable percentage of families was considered in 'husband dominant' but Muslim women's education and employment increase their competence to participate in decision-making process. Then, it is expected to have joint decision-making process among the spouses. It can be concluded that Muslim women's education and employment in the future will increase.

Various studies have highlighted this fact that educated working women are better-off than their non-working counterparts in some aspects such as health, education and material resources. They also enjoy greater authority than non-working women. Besides this, women's access to the

family's economic resources seems to be of greater significance than their being as an earner. Luthra (1976) quotes the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, as freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political and if a woman is not economically free she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependents are never free. The association of man and woman should be of perfect freedom and perfect comradeship with no dependence of one on the other.

Consequently, economic freedom provides women with self-assurance and self-confidence, resulting in changes in their attitudes, aspirations and effective participation in different aspects of life. In this study, economic autonomy was attempted to be measured by considering the following aspects:

1. Intra-family distribution of income
2. Extent of control over budgeting the salary
3. Limitations on spending the family income and saving
4. Controlling the personal property

The ultimate authority in the house, especially when economic matters are concerned, still lies largely on male members of the family. As decisions made on issues involve high expenditures, male members pose a more considerable role as compared to women. In fact, the degree of the participation in decision-making and taking autonomous decisions in the family reveal the status of women in the family. The male-dominated decisions show the conventional structure of the family. Women's participation in economic activities influences their status in a positive manner within the family as it enhances their power of taking autonomous and joint decisions. Gore (1968) has maintained that women's lower status in the family is related to their exclusion from the economic activities (Upreti 2000: 19).

In this study, money-based decisions were chosen because working women also contribute to the family income and decisions made in this realm influence the decisions in other realms. As it was asked "Who controls the finance in your home?", the results reveal that in Mysore (India) nearly two-thirds of the married women expressed their husbands or male members, that is, fathers or father-in-laws, to control financial resources in the family. 23.4 per cent of them stated that they themselves control financial resources in their families who were of course

mostly divorced or widowed. In other words, this means that women in this situation assume a male role. Only 10.3 per cent of them said that their husbands consulted with them in this regard. In Ahvaz (Iran) the data show that 58 per cent of the married women expressed their husbands or male members, that is, fathers, to control financial resources in the family, and 9.2 per cent of them stated that they themselves control financial resources in their families who were of course mostly divorced or widowed. In other words, this means that women in this situation assume a male role and 30.3 per cent of them stated that their husbands consulted with them in this regard.

Meanwhile, the comparison of the results depicts that in the two cities husbands and male members play an important role in controlling financial resources of their households as the family structure is patriarchal in Mysore (India) and Ahvaz (Iran) and the ultimate authority lies largely on men in their house. Of course, the results also show that men did not totally ignore their wives in this regard and directly involved them in taking decisions. This result was more observed in Ahvaz (Iran (30.3 per cent)) than Mysore (India (10.3 per cent)).

It can be concluded that the salary of a working woman is expected to make her more influential in intra-family distribution of the income.

On the other hand, according to Ross (1961), money management and control over financial expenditure are considered to be the task of the head of the household or the male who earns for the entire family. Women's education improves their resourcefulness and facilitates employment opportunities that naturally have an impact on sharing the tasks by the spouses (Indira Devi 1987: 94).

It has been proved by various studies that even an educated working woman is not always a joint owner of the purse. The real situation is that most of the working women give their salary to their husbands or in-laws. Goldstein (1975) in her study indicated that working women and highly educated working women have to hand over part of their salary to the husband (Upreti 2000: 15-16). Patel (1988) stated that in some cases they are not given even the pocket allowance or the amount to buy things even for their personal use. They have to demand and are given some money as a grace granted to them (Upreti 2000: 16).

In this study, the results show that in Mysore (India) 61.7 per cent of married women have expressed that they enjoy freedom to own their earnings and 38.3 per cent of them have referred to lack of economic autonomy over their salary. On the other hand, it was asked "Does/did your husband expect your salary to be handed over to him?" where the response was 64.5 per cent 'yes', 34.6 per cent 'no' and 0.9 per cent 'sometimes'. Besides 5.7 per cent of them give their full salary to their husbands, 37.1 per cent of them give a part of their salary and 57.1 per cent of them whenever it is required.

Further, it was asked "Do/did you and your husband have misunderstanding or quarrels over the use of your earning?" where the response was 1.9 per cent 'Always', 40.2 per cent 'Sometimes' and 57.9 per cent 'Never'.

While these results in Ahvaz (Iran) reveal that 81.5 per cent of the married women have expressed that they have freedom to own their earnings and 18.5 per cent of them have referred to lack of economic autonomy over their salary. Moreover 56.3 per cent of them asserted that their husbands expect them to hand over their salary to them. Besides, 10.4 per cent of them give their full salary to their husbands, 40.3 per cent of them a portion of their salary and 49.3 per cent of them whenever it is required. Further, it was asked "Do/did you and your husband have misunderstanding or quarrels over the use of your earning?" where the response was 1.7 per cent 'Always', 44.5 per cent 'Sometimes' and 53.8 per cent 'Never'.

In general, the comparison of the results obtained in the two cities indicates that whereas a considerable percentage of married women presented theoretically that they have freedom to own their earning; practically they have to give full or part of their salary to their husbands. In other words, a number of the married women surveyed, accept the position of their husbands as superior to maintain family harmony. If they try to oppose their husbands' authority, they (husbands) reject the claim of equality. In such cases the conflicts are unavoidable. Then married women try to prevent misunderstanding or quarrels in the household by giving full or some of their earnings to the husbands most of the time. But as a matter of fact Muslim working women have obtained more economic autonomy than ever before.

The assumption is that salary is an important basis of economic power and so the control

over the use of income leads to the possession of economic power. The salary and its distribution to the family income although may not increase women's status, it can make a real power in administering the family resources, that is spending income.

The former shows a reflection of the real power one possesses in this field than the latter in which it gives her an opportunity to enforce the decisions on money matters. Her contribution to the family income would enable her to have a voice in spending the income and greater co-operation and respect from other family members (Uperti 2000: 15).

In the present study, the results depict that in Mysore (India) 61.7 of the married working women expressed that they have freedom to own their earning, but nearly two-fifths of them allocated their salary to household expenses. On the other hand, the analysis of the data shows spending on personal affairs (22.4 per cent) and saving in the bank (29.9 per cent). Of course, one-fifth of them preferred to invest part of their salary in jewellery. They asserted that it may be used for daughters' marriage or in case of economic difficulty (Table 2).

Table 2: Limitations on spending the family income and savings

Earning	Mysore (India)	Ahvaz (Iran)	Total
<i>Freedom to Own Their Earnings</i>			
Yes	73 (61.7%)	87 (81.0%)	160(76.8.0%)
No	46 (38.3%)	20 (19.0%)	66 (29.2%)
Total	119(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	226(100.0%)
<i>How Spend Their Earning</i>			
Personal affairs	16 (22.4%)	25 (28.1%)	41 (25.6%)
Saving in the bank	22 (29.9%)	30 (34.4%)	52 (32.5%)
Buying land	0 (0.0%)	8 (9.4%)	8 (5.0%)
Any other	35 (47.9%)	24 (28.1%)	59 (36.9%)
Total	73(100.0%)	87(100.0%)	160(100.0%)

In Ahvaz (Iran), the analysis of the data reveals that more than 80 per cent of married women stated that they have freedom to own their earning, but nearly one-third of them allocated their salary to household expenditures. In spite of this matter, it was observed that there are three ways of spending the income among Ahvazi (Iranian) women like spending on personal affairs (28.1 per cent), saving in the bank (34.4 per cent) and buying land (9.4 per cent). In other words, one-third of them preferred to

invest part of their salary in jewellery and then on house/land. They stated that it may be used for children's marriage or in case of economic difficulty (Table 2).

In general, the results in the two cities show that a significant percentage of married working women have freedom to own their earning, but a number of them have to spend it on their households. This point was observed more in Mysore (India) than in Ahvaz (Iran). But in spite of the matter, it was observed that there are three ways of spending the income and also the respondents enjoyed self-dominated spending.

In fact, the pattern that emerged from the above discussions shows that definite changes are taking place in the interpersonal relationships among the male and female members of the family.

Regarding the economic power structure in the family, controlling the family property is expected to be correlated with the degree of economic autonomy of women. Working outside home may contribute to the freedom of women in various ways of spending. Their property would enable them to extend their influence to a great extent. A women's status to a large extent is determined by her right to hold property and disposing it off according to her will. According to Venkatarayappa (1966), the prefect and complete individuality of the women is manifested in the most striking manner in the matter of property (Menon 1981: 92).

In this study, it was attempted to explore how married women look after their property, so it was asked "Who is looking after your property?" The results in Mysore (India) indicate that 54.2 per cent of the married working women own personal property, but unfortunately the majority of them (82.7 per cent) cannot look after their personal property, and they have to depend upon their husbands (74.3 per cent), fathers (5.3 per cent) and sons (3.5 per cent), and they emphasized on the skills and experience of their male members in this matter. In addition, the data show that a few of the married working women (9.7 per cent) consulted with their husbands on the above-mentioned matters, and also a few of the divorced and widowed women solely (7.2 per cent) look after personal property because there's no male member in their families (Table 3).

Meanwhile, in Ahvaz (Iran), it was found that 54.6 per cent of married working women owned

Table 3: Control over the personal property

Property	Mysore (India)	Ahvaz (Iran)	Total
<i>Have Any Property</i>			
Yes	65 (54.2%)	66 (54.6%)	131 (76.8%)
No	54 (45.8%)	41 (45.4%)	95 (29.2%)
Total	119(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	226(100.0%)
<i>Who is Looking After Their Property</i>			
Self	11 (16.9%)	31 (47.6%)	42 (32.1%)
Husband	49 (74.3%)	34 (50.9%)	83 (63.3%)
Father	3 (5.3%)	1 (1.5%)	4 (3.1%)
Sons	2 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
Total	65(100.0%)	66(100.0%)	131(100.0%)

houses and other forms (land, garden and car) of wealth in their names, but male members as husbands (50.9 per cent), and fathers (1.5 per cent) look after their personal property. In other words, the results indicate that a considerable percentage of the married working women, who possessed property, hand over the control of their property (Land and garden etc.) to their husbands and other male members. Moreover, the data show that more than one-third of the married working women (33.8 per cent) consulted with their husbands on the above-mentioned matters, and also a number of the divorced and widowed women (13.8 per cent) look after personal property alone because there's no male member in their families (Table 3).

Generally, the comparison of the foregoing analysis of the findings from both cities indicates that a considerable percentage of married working women who possess personal property depend upon male members and husbands for controlling their property. Because they believe that male members have requisite skills and relevant experience regarding the above matters, it seems that for enjoying any benefit out of their property such as sale, married working women have to depend upon their male members. This point was more observed among Mysorean (Indian) women than among Ahvazi (Iranian) women. Of course, the results depict that a few of the men, having the role of father, husband or son, have given the married working women an individual autonomy over controlling their property. This point was seen on a higher degree among Ahvazi (Iranian) women than among Mysorean (Indian) women. It is evident from the above discussion that we can observe a change in the attitude of Muslim men towards the abilities and capacities of women. As a result, married working women obtain a low degree of economic autonomy in the family structure and among the male members.

Taking part in political and social activities can boost the individual autonomy of working women and can also give women a better status. According to Hutheesing (1944) "If a nation is to be developed on the right lines to enable it to achieve something, its women must share the burden of planning and shaping its destiny side by side with the men, sharing the rough side of life as well as the smooth. Again, if we wish to achieve rapid and effective progress and to maintain a status of equality with other nations, women must have a definite role and cannot be left out of the affairs of their country" (Menon 1981: 103).

In this study, the married respondents were asked "Do you support any political party?" and "Do you like to become a candidate for presidency/prime minister?" The responses were interesting: in Mysore (India) 97.2 per cent of married women presented that they do not support any political party, and 86.9 per cent of them expressed that they do not like to become a candidate for presidency/prime minister, and they referred to such reasons as 'hard responsibility', 'not a piece of cake (not my cup of tea as stated)', 'not necessary', and 'no time' (Table 4). Besides, it was attempted to find out whether married working women possess membership of any professional organization/union. The results show that 11.2 per cent of women (12 women) were the members of professional organization/union where only 4 females are participating in the organizational activities but not regularly. Also the results in Ahvaz (Iran) were very similar to those in Mysore (India) as 95 per cent of married women presented that they do not support any political party, and 89.1 per cent of them presented not to like to become a candidate for presidency/prime minister, and they have referred to such reasons as 'hard responsibility', 'not a piece of cake (not my cup of tea as stated)', 'not necessary', 'no time and

Table 4: Individual autonomy in participating in political and social activities

Politics	Mysore (India)	Ahvaz (Iran)	Total
<i>Support Political Party</i>			
Yes	3 (2.8%)	5 (5.0%)	8 (3.5%)
No	116 (97.2%)	102 (95.0%)	218 (96.5%)
Total	119(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	226(100.0%)
<i>Become Candidate for President/Prime Minister</i>			
Yes	16 (13.1%)	11 (10.9%)	27 (11.9%)
No	103 (86.9%)	96 (89.1%)	199 (88.1%)
Total	119(100.0%)	107(100.0%)	226(100.0%)

being mainly this activity' (Table 4). Moreover, it was attempted to find out whether married working women possess membership of any professional organization/union. The results show that 15.1 per cent of women (18 females) are the members of professional organization/union where more than half of them (10 women) were participating in the organizational activities but not regularly.

According to the foregoing discussion, it may be stated that the number of Muslim women entering politics in Mysore (India) and Ahvaz (Iran) is low. While high literacy rate and employment of them could not reduce negative attitude in the life of the Muslim women, religion factor has got much influence on their life. According to Saenger "Differences in religion are far more important than educational differences in determining the extent of a person's political awareness" (Bendix and Seymour 1963). In other words, the personal law of Muslims, customs and traditions would not allow women to move about freely in public. As many Muslim women, Muslim men think that politics is not a field suitable for women. In the Islamic history there are no restrictions for women's full participation in the economic, political, and social spheres of society (Shamley-Shorish, 1985).

Overall, women have to practice existent traditions and customs, and their limited political and social participation would affect their individual autonomy.

In this study, it was attempted to explore the factors which can help to increase individual autonomy of Muslim married working women, so variables were determined as qualification of Muslim married working women, their salary, age, and qualification of their husbands.

Results which were statistically analyzed are as follows:

Further, in this study, it was attempted to explore the relationship between individual autonomy of Muslim working women and their husbands' academic qualifications. The results reveal that in Mysore (India) there is a significant relationship between individual autonomy of the Muslim working women and their husbands' academic qualifications. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.411$) at $p=0.004$ is less than 1% level. As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H1) can be accepted. It means that the husbands' academic qualifications factor affects the individual autonomy of women. There is a direct relationship between individual autonomy of women and their husbands' academic qualifications. R^2 (coefficient of determination) is 16.9 per cent. The results show that the husbands' academic qualifications factor has a positive effect on the individual autonomy of Mysorean (Indian) women.

In addition, the results in Iran indicate that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. The coefficient correlation between the two variables is $r=0.189$, and there is also a direct and positive correlation between individual autonomy of women and their husbands' academic qualifications. R^2 (coefficient of determination) is 3.6 per cent. The results show that the husbands' academic qualifications factor has a positive effect on the individual autonomy of Ahvazi (Iranian) women (Table 5).

According to the foregoing analysis, high academic qualifications of working women's husbands could boost the individual autonomy of the respondents in the family structure in the two cities. Male members with M.A. or Ph.D.

Table 5: Correlation coefficient of individual autonomy of Muslim married working women and effective factors on it (their husbands' academic qualifications, womens' academic qualifications, age and salary)

Variables	Cities	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>	Result
Husbands' academic qualifications	Mysore (India)	0.411**	0.004	HS
	Ahvaz (Iran)	0.189*	0.045	S
Womens' academic qualifications	Mysore (India)	0.019	0.886	NS
	Ahvaz (Iran)	0.101	0.061	NS
Womens' age	Mysore (India)	0.226**	0.005	HS
	Ahvaz (Iran)	0.409**	0.000	HS
Womens' salary	Mysore (India)	-0.001	0.986	NS
	Ahvaz (Iran)	0.159	0.051	NS

Source: Primary Data Survey 2007

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed);

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

HS: High Significant; S: Significant; NS: Insignificant.

degrees have given a higher individual autonomy to their wives. In other words, men's qualifications could create a change in the attitude of male Muslims toward increasing the women's individual autonomy (Table 5). In Ahvaz (Iran), the results show that there is a significant relationship between the two variables, as well.

The comparison of the results in the two cities shows that the educational level of married working women's husbands could have a positive effect on women's individual autonomy. In other words, the educational level of men could have a substantial influence on their attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions toward their working abilities (Table 5).

Another factor is the academic qualifications of Muslim working women. The data in Mysore (India) depict that there is no significant relationship between this variable and individual autonomy of the respondents. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.019$) at $p=0.886$ is higher than 5%. As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H1) can be rejected. It means that the factor of academic qualifications of working women does not affect their individual autonomy.

Moreover, this matter was explored in Ahvaz (Iran). The obtained results indicate that there is no significant relationship between individual autonomy of Muslim working women and their academic qualifications. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.101$) at $p=0.061$ is higher than 5%, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected (Table 5).

Then the comparison of the results reveals that there is no significant difference between the two studied variables, and women who have higher academic qualifications could not obtain higher individual autonomy in their family structure.

Another factor is women's age. The data in Table 5 reveals that in Mysore (India) there is a significant relationship between individual autonomy of the Muslim working women and their age. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.226$) at ($p=0.005$) level of significance is less than 1% level. As a result, the Alternative hypothesis (H1) can be accepted. It means that the age factor affects the individual autonomy of women. Individual autonomy is significantly, positively correlated to women's age. R^2 (coefficient of determination) is 5.1 per

cent. The results show that the age factor has a positive effect on the individual autonomy of Mysorean (Indian) women.

Moreover, this point was also analyzed in Ahvaz (Iran). The results indicate that the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.409$) is highly significant between the two variables, and individual autonomy is significantly, positively correlated to women's age. R^2 (coefficient of determination) is 16.7 per cent. The results show that the age factor has a positive effect on the individual autonomy of Ahvazi (Iranian) women.

Overall, the results in the two cities show that as women's age increases, she can obtain higher empowerment in making the family-related decisions. In other words, elderly individuals (men and women) always have had an important role in decision-making, and in fact, this factor cannot particularly have a major role in increasing the individual autonomy of a Muslim woman.

The comparison of the results shows that the age factor could positively influence women's individual autonomy level. In the traditional communities, of course, this factor always resulted in increase in power of the family structure where the middle-aged and the elders enjoyed a solid and powerful position and the other age groups had to obey their rules and decisions. Therefore, this factor has not specifically escalated the married women's individual autonomy; however, the same increase in the traditional families elevated people's positions.

Meanwhile, in this study, it is hypothesized that women's salary can affect their individual autonomy in the family, the results in Mysore (India) depict that there is no significant relationship between individual autonomy of Muslim working women and their salary. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=-0.001$) at ($p=0.986$) level of significance is higher than 5% level. As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H1) can be rejected. It means that the salary factor does not affect individual autonomy of women.

Moreover, this matter was explored in Ahvaz (Iran). The obtained results indicate that there is not a significant relationship between individual autonomy of Muslim working women and their salary. In other words, the coefficient of correlation ($r=0.159$) at ($p=0.051$) is higher than 5%, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected (Table 5).

Thus, the comparison of the results obtained in the two cities shows that the individual autonomy of Muslim working women is not positively correlated to their salary. It is true that married working women who take a job should allocate their part or full salary to the family, so this factor cannot affect their decision-making process in the family.

DISCUSSION

Muslim working women constitute an important segment of the society. They have taken jobs out of home and have acquired and developed new skills and abilities in all the spheres of working life, yet cultural and norms constraints have hindered their path toward progress. Meanwhile patriarchal system has prohibited them to come equal with their male counterparts. Moreover, they have to obey their male members in the family. The increase of education and consequent impact of modernization are gradually reducing the gender difference, but economic activity of Muslim working women cannot guarantee their individual autonomy. Although, education with employment has facilitated to move a few steps ahead in the social hierarchy but for raising individual autonomy of married women other motives are also needed. The results reveal that the individual autonomy of Muslim married working women has improved, but more in the domains of education, employment and marriage of their children etc; however, economic power structure in the family and control over family income are taken by male members, and males share less with their wives with these regards. However, we can find that the involvement of Muslim women in the decision making process has begun. In addition, there are several factors that can affect the individual autonomy of Muslim married working women such as academic qualifications of men (higher education) which has certainly enabled them to understand the abilities and feelings of their wives, and has also helped to increase men's perception and level of awareness.

Moreover, the results show that as women age, they can obtain higher empowerment in taking decisions in the family. In other words, elderly male and female individuals always have had an important role in decision-making process, and in fact, this factor cannot particularly

have a major role in increasing the individual autonomy of a Muslim woman.

Therefore, it is evident from the above discussion that a change can be noticed in the attitude of Muslim men towards women and their role in the individual autonomy, and women are not totally ignored and they are being consulted, however for raising individual and economic autonomy of Muslim women, there is a need to increase the level of awareness among male members in the family structure. Men's education seems to play a major role in involving the Muslim women in the decision making process, and it can reduce erroneous traditions among Muslims. In fact, the results indicate the shift from one-sided male authority to sharing the power by both husband and wife.

CONCLUSION

According to the foregoing analysis, high academic qualifications of working women's husbands could raise individual autonomy of the respondents in the family structure in the two cities. As male members who have studied up to M.A. or Ph.D. have given a higher individual autonomy to their wives. In other words, it can be presented that men's qualifications could create a change in the attitude of male Muslims toward the increasing of women individual autonomy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, various legislations, policies and programmes have been implemented to protect the interests of women and to improve their status especially that of Muslim women, unfortunately, quite often they are not properly implemented or they are not adequately enforced with proper legislation. In general, according to the results of this study, suggestions are divided into two sections: one section about India and the other section about Iran.

India

- It is suggested that proper policy programmes be implemented to improve and increase the level of awareness among Muslim men toward women's positions and rights. These programmes should spread this belief that women, like men, have enough ability and skills in work activities.

- It is essential that self-confidence should be increased among Muslim women by encouraging them to improve their status without any fear and hesitation.
- Gender quality, which upholds the human dignity and social justice, is not a target of feminists alone; rather it is a target of every modern society. Then, the realization of gender equality demands the eradication of the problems like low individual autonomy, unemployment, illiteracy, lower level of education, low job opportunities, and limited freedom in political and social activities among Muslim women.

Iran

- It is recommended that Muslim women organizations and Muslim women's activities be improved.
- Women should be encouraged to take a greater role in policy-making decisions at their department and government offices and of course the government must set up the foundation for the materialization of women's participation.
- It is necessary that Muslim personal law be re-examined and reformed so as to prevent gender discrimination against women.

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