

Religious Based Schools: A Study of Islamic School in the Construction of Gender and Identity

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Abstract—*The purpose of this paper is to highlight the characteristics of Islamic education based schools. Generally, these schools are the source of Islamic education and also imparting modern education through the Islamic perspective. Mostly, they emphasize on religious education, gender construction and identity-building according to the Islamic viewpoint. The growth of Islamic schools is the direct result of Islamic revivalist movements. Their aim is to spread the Islamic belief and practices through the mission of inviting other people to revival of religious awareness and devotion to the teaching of Prophet. Obviously, the purpose of Islamic revivalist movement was to liberate the Islamic morality and to encourage people to support the interest of the community with the support and increase of Islamic schools. Particularly, they want to set up the strong Islamic status with emphasize of gender roles and the identity of Muslim through religion based schools.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic schools are quickly expanding all through the world. These schools are constantly religious in character. Islamic religion based schools at last need to propose to plan future Islamic religious researchers. Essentially, these schools are accentuating customary conventions and training like Arabic dialect, Quran, and repetition learning technique. Some Islamic schools instruct both religion and worldly information. Especially, the thought process of Islamic schools is to offer religious construct educational modules centering in light of the Quran, hadith and Islamic writings.

Islamic schools framework accentuates customary and scholarly approach to keep up a true Islamic convention. For the most part, Islamic schools have a restricted sort of training however they are additionally considering English, Science and Math subjects into school educational modules and saving the religious character of Islamic instruction.

The development of Islamic schools is the immediate consequence of Islamic revivalist movements. The principle point of Islamic revivalist is to spread the Islamic conviction and practices through the mission of welcoming other individuals. Additionally, they need to restoration of religious

awareness and dedication to the teaching of Prophet Muhammad. Obviously, the motivation behind Islamic revivalist movement was to liberate the Islamic morality and to encourage people to support the interest of the Muslim community with the support and increase of Islamic schools. Especially, they need to set up the solid Islamic status with accentuate of gender roles and the identity of Muslims through religion based schools.

The development of Islamic revivalists discourse emphasized on *madarsas* (religious schools) guideline into school's educational programs. Islamic revivalists highlight the purposeful comprehension of Islam and the need of *madarsas* sort of preparing into school educational programs. Unmistakably, the underlying reason for Muslim Scholars was to engage the Islamic thoughts and religious guidelines at educational level. As showed by them, Islamic guidelines are essential strategies for the change of Muslim community. Essentially, the intention of various Islamic scholars is to spread the Islamization in the society.

Without a doubt, the structure of Islamic schools is totally reinforcing the Islamic scholar discourses. They are conferring religious style of instruction in schools to the support of *jamaat's* thrust. Islamic schools are strictly following Islamic religion in nature that incorporates Islamic course books. The Islamic educational system offers to children the fear of Allah; faith based motivation behind life and set them up to be future Islamic scholars.

Islamic Schools brought forth the strategies which are embraced from the interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah. With reference to the Quranic interpretation, Islamic schools are spreading stereotypical gendered roles and behavior in the curriculum. For example, dress code, sex-segregation and learning one religion. They strictly follow the concept of *purdah*, sex segregation and teach about the Islamic dress code or style of attire for girls at every age.

I survey an Islamic school in Aligarh. The school is 'Islamic Mission School'.ⁱ This paper is basically based on my survey work. In terms of Islamic Mission Schools, hijab is compulsory for all Muslim women and according to them it encourages the decorum of women. They are actually maintaining the Muslim identity through dress code and segregation. They emphasize that girls/ women must observe the Islamic instruction hijab inside and outside the school. Girls must wear cover the full body, wear headscarf and hijab. They also maintain Muslim identity through the dress code of boys. Boys must wear shirts, pants and head-cover with *Topi*. In fact, Islamic dress code is also required for teachers. The teachers of Islamic Mission Schools are inviting to wear hijab inside and outside the school. Before admitting a child into their school, they also ask their mothers to observe Hijab. Evidently, the obligation Islamic dress code (hijab) is a restraining part of Islamic laws in schools and it is also a type of destruction for Muslim women in order to choose their clothing.

Further, Islamic Mission School emphasizes the necessary gender segregation for all classes in the school. To emphasize the identity formation they oppose free mixing of both the sexes which are prohibited in Islam considered as forbidden and what is permissible with regard to both the sexes. In this way, they never consider the free fixing of boys and girls. Students cannot study or play together. For this reason girls and boys have separate transport (bus, van), classrooms and playgrounds. No doubt, Islamic schools are strictly following the Islamic laws to maintain Islamic identity through schools.

Also, I study the textbook of Islamic Mission School. The textbooks are emphasizing the stereotypical gender role of women in society. Islamic schools bring out the Islamic beliefs and gender representation into the course books it uses, whether as a part of pictorial depiction or stories books. In Islamic Mission School, Islamic textbooks and other textbooks represented stereotypical roles of women as dependably the housewife and mother. Women are primarily depicted in home as dealing with children and family.

The textbooks of Islamic schools bring to light the conventional gendered role in society. In general, the representation of textbooks shows up the role of women in home. They emphasize that woman should be engage in the customary and domestic roles. I only take the example of one textbook of Islamic Mission School 'A to Z Akhlaaq'.ⁱⁱ The author of 'A to Z Akhlaaq' textbook plays a very important role to serve an ideal image of Islamic moral values for children with the support of pictorial representations of male and female in the family and society. The representation of Muslim women shows the customary manner or behavior in the family and society. The pictures of Islamic textbooks portray the girls are required to wear hijab and responsible in the household work. See the picture of textbook below.

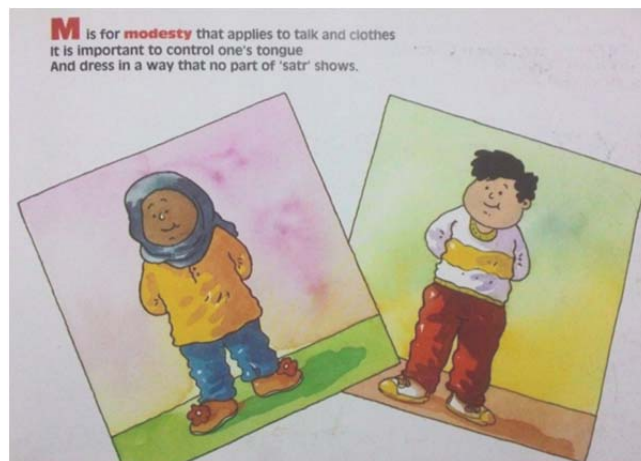


Fig. 1. A page of a textbook

In this textbook, it describe in words that "M is for modesty that applies to talk and clothes it is important to control one's tongue and dress in a way that no part of 'satr' shows".ⁱⁱⁱ This line explain the humility of Muslim community is depends on Islamic dresses, in which Muslim girls and women are depicted in the 'hijab' and committed to their religion and culture through the regulation of Islamic dress code. The textbook implies that girls and women have to purdah in Islam and it is also a duty of Muslim women and girls to observe Islamic command. Also, the textbook is showing the stereotypical image of women as a careful mother and a responsible member of her family through the depiction of women engage in feeding her children. See the picture of textbook below.

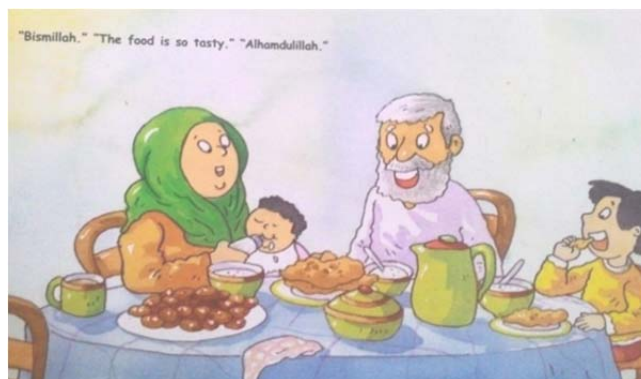


Fig. 2. A page of a textbook^{iv}

An Islamic scholar highlight the role of women toward children 'Successful upbringing of children depends on a mother who is alert and intelligent, and understands her responsibility towards her children, so that she does a good job and raises children who will be a boon to their parents and society in general. Families that fail to raise their children properly usually do so because the mother does not understand her responsibility towards her children, so she neglects them

and they become a source of evil and a torment to their parents and others. Children would not become a source of evil if their parents, especially the mother, knew their responsibility and took it seriously.”^{vi}

Additionally, other textbooks of Islamic Mission School also confirm the stereotypical character of women. Like in English and Science textbooks mostly women are depicted in observing salwar suit and engage in household activities like cooking cleaning and washing. In short, textbooks effectively serve the subordinate role of women through the depiction of different gender role. Also, through the depiction of women role Islamic school emphasize the inferior position of women in family and society. It shows that men are considered more authoritative than women.

In an Islamic literature, with reference to Quranic verses, Abdul Ghaffar Hasan, an Islamic scholar emphasize in his book **‘The Rights and Duties of Women in Islam (2004)’** “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (v. 4:34)”^{vi}

Clearly, Islamic scholars frequently dominate gender role man as maintainer and protector and a woman is obedient, dependable, and dutiful. Only a woman can provide a good environment for the family. Scholars proclaim that Allah has made men to be physically and mentally stronger than women and more intelligent to have job outside. Generally, Muslim religion has a patriarchal outlook of the relationship between the genders. From this perspective, Islamic scholar’s practices are raising a conflict against gender roles. Continuously, Islamic revivalists are growing the Islamic schools to control the education system towards Islamic tradition.

2. CONCLUSION

Islamic education based school directly highlights the Islamic identity through the Islamic education like Quran, and Arabic language, Islamic dress code of boys and girls and separation in school. Also, the textbooks of Islamic school stress the Islamic identity and gender construction through the depiction of gender roles in textbooks. Textbooks visibly deal with men’s domain is public sphere and women domain is private sphere. A woman involvement in all essential professions is clearly made invisible. It restricts the primary position of Muslim women in home as a maintainer and care provider of family. These activities and depiction of Islamic school curriculum are showing the inferior status of Muslim community. Children are socialized into gender role through society and their schools but the curriculum of Islamic school constricted their minds through emphasize of more Islamic traditions and Islamic education in schools.

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