

**Women and Muslim Marriage  
Practices in Mawanella  
A Gender Perspective**

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**Secretariat for Muslims  
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Women and Muslim Marriage Practices in Mawanella: A Gender Perspective  
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## Abstract

A Muslim woman in Mawanella differs from other women of her caliber in other Muslim villages by several distinguishing features. Interest towards seeking education is definitely an attribute which sets Mawanella apart. Most of the women are clad in long overcoats and a head cover despite their economic and educational levels. A clear seclusion of males and females can be observed in almost all the phases of life from primary school class rooms to marriage ceremonies

This paper is an exploratory and descriptive study of Women and the Marriage practices in Mawanella. The custom of marriage differs in various parts of the world and different marriage patterns emerge from each culture. This research paper aims to study customary marriage practices widespread in Mawanella and the status of women within the marriage practices and their independence in decision making as individuals. The general objective of this research is to evaluate the status of women within the Muslim Marriage practices in Mawanella. The specific objectives are to analyse the social mobility of married women in Mawanella and to identify the marriage practices and transaction prevalent in the area.

Mawanella maintains its own unique identity, a distinctive culture and a different social life distinct from Muslims in other parts of the country. This study was carried out at Mahawaththe GN division which consists of three villages known as Nungamua, Mahawaththe and Nayawala .Mahawaththe GN division represents a diverse Muslim population of 598 families. Nungamuawa is a Sinhalese majority village, while villages Nayawala and Mahawaththe are of Muslim majority. Primary

data was collected using Questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews with key informants and case studies. The structured questionnaire survey was conducted with 50 respondents. The sample for questionnaire survey was selected through the simple random method based on gender, socio-economic background, education level and affiliation to religious organizations. The purposive sampling was used for in-depth interviews that provided qualitative data regarding the prevailing Marriage practices and status of women. The case studies were done using snowball sampling in order obtain more subjective aspects of status of women in marriage practices. The secondary data was obtained from the reports from GS of Mahawaththe Division and Quazi of the area. The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results and findings of this study reveal that married women despite their social and economic status prefer to be financially independent. Though women are respected, they are often deprived from making decisions as individuals, regarding crucial life events, such as choosing a partner in marriage, going for higher education and opting to work outside. Another interesting finding of the study is that the prevailing marriage practices in Mawanella make the groom and his family more dominant over the women. It was also found that the women's participation in social activities is limited in the pre and post context of marriage practices. Mawanella Mosques remain strictly for men except for the occasional festival prayer, where women are allowed to take part. Influential Islamic movements have been working for more than five decades in Mawanella. Mosques and Islamic movements as the powerful faculties of social control are vital determinants of the status of women, as they influence the social norms and patterns of social behaviour. Moreover, the lack of participation of Muslim women in diverse domains such as politics and policy making within the social

institutions is felt immensely. Although pure Islamic teachings recognize women whether married or unmarried as individuals of self-worth, the popular Muslim culture in Mawanella does not allow women to enjoy that properly. The measures to minimize the blockades for women moving forward should seriously be taken into consideration. Islamic movements must reconsider broadening their vision and hierarchical structure, accommodating more women's participation and on diverse fields. As one half of the community women should not be deprived from the right to take part in the decision making process of the Mosque nor in participating in activities of social interest. Researcher suggests that women representation in the form of an advisory committee in Quazi courts and Mosques would be a good move towards enabling social mobility of women.

**Key words**

Marriage practices,

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## **Introduction**

Muslim marriages throughout the world often reflect the diversity of the Muslim population. In Islam, marriage is a social and legal relationship intended to strengthen and extend family relationships. Islamic marriage begins with a search for an appropriate partner, and ends with an agreement of marriage, the contract, followed by wedding feast known as the Waleema. Although some aspects of an Islamic wedding are fairly consistent among Muslims – specifying a gift to the bride, signing a marriage contract, each culture brings unique traditions to an Islamic wedding celebration. Marriage is a vital part of a Muslim's life. In fact marriage is so indispensable in the religion of Islam that it is declared to be one half of one's faith.

To obtain the approval of the society it is necessary that the union be formed and recognized in accordance with the unwritten customs and taboos, as in traditional societies, or in accordance with established laws, as in more civilized societies (Westermarck, 1977).

This paper is an exploratory and descriptive study of Women and the Marriage practices in Mawanella. The custom of marriage differs in various parts of the world and different marriage patterns emerge from each culture. This research paper aims to study customary marriage practices widespread in Mawanella and the status of women within the marriage

practices and their independence in decision making as individuals. The general objective of this research is to evaluate the status of women within the Muslim Marriage practices in Mawanella. The specific objectives are to analyze the social mobility of married women in Mawanella and to identify the marriage practices and transaction prevalent in the area. The general objective of this research is to evaluate the status of women within the Muslim marriage practices in Mawanella. The specific objectives are to evaluate the social mobility of married women in Mawanella and to identify the marriage practices and transaction prevalent in the area.

The research draws links between marriage practices and social mobility of women. It explores the prevailing marriage practices and the ability of women to move hierarchically upward.

The institution of marriage is central to social life in Mawanella. Mawanella, being one distinctive Muslim community which preserves its own marriage practices.

The study discusses the general status of women before moving on to explaining the concept of marriage. Marriage and the status of women in Islam are illustrated in a detailed manner in the next theme. Prevalent marriage practices, from the selection of partner to the Waleema feast is described under the theme, 'Marriage practices'. In the next theme, one of the key findings of the study that 'the prevailing marriage practices allow the groom's family to dominate the women' is brought to the light. In the chapter 'Social mobility of women', three important findings of the research are emphasized under the topics 'women and individual choices', 'women and financial independence' and 'women and social participation', respectively.

## 2

**Objectives****General Objective**

To evaluate the status of women within the Muslim Marriage practices in Mawanella.

**Specific Objectives**

To evaluate the social mobility of married women in Mawanella

To identify the marriage practices and transactions prevalent in the area.

## Literature review

Functionalism views society as a system that is a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. Society is a basic unit of analysis and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole. Thus social institutions such as the family and religion are analysed as a part of the social system rather than as isolated units. In particular they are understood with reference to the contribution they make to the system as a whole.

Functional analysis involves the prior conceptualization of a system and definite emphasis on the primacy of the system over elements. The elements of the system are functionally interrelated. Every element of the system has a function which contributes positively to continued operation of that system.

Functionalism maintains that the dominant condition of society is order reinforced by stability and consensus and not conflict based on coercion and dissention. There are certain functional requisites that must be met if a system is to survive.

Functionalists believe that society is held together by social consensus, or cohesion, in which members of the society agree upon, and work together to achieve, what is best for society as a whole. Emile Durkheim suggested that social consensus takes one of two forms:

Mechanical solidarity is a form of social cohesion that arises when people in a society maintain similar values and beliefs and engage in similar types of work. Mechanical solidarity most commonly occurs in traditional, simple societies such as those in which everyone herds cattle or farms. Amish society exemplifies mechanical solidarity.

In contrast, organic solidarity is a form of social cohesion that arises when the people in a society are interdependent, but hold to varying values and beliefs and engage in varying types of work. Organic solidarity most commonly occurs in industrialized, complex societies such those in large American cities like New York in the 2000s.

According to the functionalist perspective, each aspect of society is inter-reliant and contributes to society's functioning as a whole.

Gender inequality offers a good illustration. According to Functionalist thought, when women are subordinate to men, the components of the society to function smoothly as everyone in the society knows his or her respective position in the hierarchy. The claim, of course, is that, because society is functioning smoothly with gender stratification, such stratification is acceptable and efforts should not be made to change the arrangement. This example illustrates that Functionalism is generally seen as being supportive of the existing state of status variations.

Women from the beginning of time had been adjusting themselves to the roles society had assigned them. As long as they do not leap forward from their conventional arrangement of division of labour and certain values, it is true that society

would be functioning smoothly. But beneath this façade, women might be suffering silently. In here it should be noted that if one gender is subordinated and made to grieve in order to maintain the smooth functioning of the community, would it be called a harmonious society? Perhaps judging from appearances, everything may seemingly be running well but within the core, unresolved problems may exist.

Liberal feminism's major aim is gender equality in the public sphere, equal access to education, equal pay, ending job sex discrimination, better working conditions, principally through legal changes. Private sphere issues are of concern mainly as they influence or hinder equality in the public sphere. Gaining access to and being paid and promoted equally in traditionally male-dominated occupations is an important goal. What do women want? Liberal feminism answers the question 'what does a woman really need in life?' Mostly, what men want: to get an education and skills, to make a decent living, to provide for one's family.

What is described as liberal feminism in theory and work focuses more on issues like equality in the workplace, in education, in political rights. Where liberal feminism looks at issues in the private sphere, it tends to be in terms of equality: how does that private life impede or enhance public equality? Thus, liberal feminists also tend to support marriage as an equal partnership, and more male involvement in child care. Abortion and other reproductive rights have to do with control of one's life choices and autonomy. Ending domestic violence and sexual harassment have to do with removing obstacles to women achieving on an equal level with men.

Betty Friedan is one of the most influential liberal feminists of the 20th century. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan explores the unhappiness of mid-20th century women. She describes women's unhappiness as "the problem that has no name." Women felt this sense of depression because they were forced to be subservient to men financially, mentally, physically, and intellectually. The feminine "mystique" was the idealized image to which women tried to conform despite their lack of fulfillment.

An independent man can choose to take a job and remain married. He is not required to do sacrifice his career for marriage. The same should and indeed must apply to women. This recalls a point made by Mary Wollstonecraft on modesty. When men have license to do what they desire, they tend to look down on women who follow the same policy. Passive women, however, are called modest and virtuous. A state of autonomy is a state in which one is free to follow one's desires and make an honest attempt at happiness.

Liberal feminism does not always sit well with Islam as Islam looks at the collective society and collective thought as part of a key of fashioning individual thought, while individual actions also shape a society. On the opposite side of this Liberalism looks at the society having no impact on shaping the thought of the individual and that the individual must regulate himself solely and is not shaped by any thought but his own. Liberalism, nourished from profane and plural ideals, does not accept a God-consciousness in the equation of man, instead freeing itself from this restriction.

Taking this into account, liberal feminists have also added this to their part of the feminist movement, as they have

accepted the “basic tenets of the liberal framework”. Without understanding the idea of a God in the equation of man, and that according to religious thought God is the creator and so, therefore, has rights over man by way of shaping the laws in which human beings are to live, it makes it difficult for liberal feminism with a secular mindset to understand the nature of religious beliefs and concept of freedom within religion, especially that of Islam.

Liberal Feminists have focused their attention upon “equality of opportunity” between males and females. They have largely ignored the study of social structural factors that other Feminists see as a basic cause of inequality prevailing in societies.

Some of the aspects dealt in this research paper can be very well understood through liberal feminist perspective. Individuality of women can be well understood, yet liberal feminist theory lacking in various aspects to understand the reality prevailing in the society.

Muslims feminism is not a new movement. In the beginning of the nineteenth century a few great Islamic thinkers such as Sayyid Jamal-ad-Din Asadabadi (al-Afqani), Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Reza, and especially Qasim Amin and later “the Sister’s movement” in the Arabic countries tried to give a modern, liberal, reformist and feminist reinterpretation of Islam (Svensson, 1996). Theirs ideas never became dominating in any Islamic country. But during the 1980s and 1990s, a similar tendency to reinterpret Islam in a feminist context reappeared in several Islamic countries.

Several secular feminist scholars (e.g., Fatima Mernissi, Aziza Al-Hibri), who earlier criticized Islam, changed their

position and tried to offer a feminist interpretation of Islam, making it quite difficult to place Muslim feminist into a “neat” category (Mernessi, 1996; Afshari, 1994) Jan Hjärpe (1995), a Swedish scholar of theology separates Islamic feminism from Muslim feminism. He points out four feminist trends in Islamic countries: Atheist feminism, Secular feminism, Muslim feminism, Islamic feminism.

Atheist feminism proposes that religion is anti-women. They believe that women’s movement could develop only by challenging the influence of religion in society.

Secular feminism has a neutral view about religion. Secular feminists argue that the relationship between Islam and feminism depends first and foremost on whether a liberal or patriarchal view of Islam is dominant in the society. They also hold that under a theocratic government or a religious movement, woman’s emancipation is impossible. But they do not think that feminist movements essentially have to confront religious beliefs.

Muslim feminism has liberal view of Islam and tries to adapt it to modern time. Muslims feminism argues that for a long time, our imagination about Islam was dominated by a patriarchal vision of Islam, but that this is not necessarily an authentic Islam. They argue that we should primarily focus on the teachings of the Qur’an because much of hadith and shari’ah is a patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

Islamic feminism is clearly state feminism, or a part of fundamentalist and religious movement, and according to this trend, women’s identification with religious movements help Muslim women’s emancipation. For example, Nesta Ramazani, an Iranian scholar (1993), points out that women’s gathering in

religious mourning, their presence in Friday prayers, and their participation in revolution and war eventually will lead to their liberation.

In his book, radical reform Professor Tariq Ramadan writes in his case study ‘Women: Traditions and Liberation seeking justice’, we must look both to scripture, and studies carried out later on, by Muslims and non-Muslims, western feminists included, to get a clear perspective of the underlying causes of suppression of the freedom of women. It would be appropriate to mention that Ramadan has previously come under attack by some Muslim women who ridiculed his idea of “Islamic feminism”, which he defended as “Islamic feminism is to struggle for the rights of women in the name of Islam against two kinds of discrimination: cultural discrimination, and the literalist approach to the text.”

In many ways, Radical Reform provided insights for my research theme and objectives which is focused on ‘Women and Muslim Marriage practices in Mawanella’.

Feminism has been normally referred to for a group of “man-haters” in the patriarchal society, even though it is not essentially so. In our society, many of the systems that are prevalent are not identified but are virtual practices. As we investigated the society further, we clearly saw some exceptional and new behaviors among women which are being built up as practices even though those women do not intend to declare it in public in a collective manner like the feminist movements or that they do not actually know that they are carrying such ideas that are useful to be built up as a social theory. As we all know, Islam has given comprehensive rights to women which are not identical but are similar to the ones of men according to

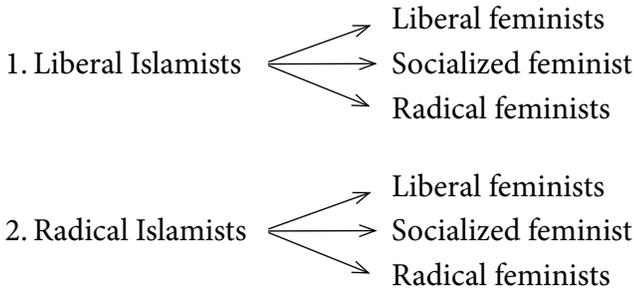
the biological characteristics of women. These comprehensive rights are inseparable and inviolate according to the Islamic as well as the researcher's perspective.

Unfortunately as our society relies so much on the power and strength of the authority of men, there has been continuous struggle by women for their authoritative rights enshrined in the Qur'an and authentic hadiths. This is always so in our Islamic society not only in the ancient era but also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the cases of seeking education, higher education prospects, choosing their partner and even child marriages. The researcher feels that it is important to identify these type of common problems and dilemmas that a Muslim woman must face due to the un-authoritative customs and beliefs of the Sri Lankan Muslim society and to try to bring out the 'voice of the voiceless' by trying to figure out how they feel towards the capitalization of men in the forefront even when some women are more than capable of discharging the same duties without any disruption to her chastity and Islamic modesty. When the researchers carried out the field studies, it was apparent that there were some sort of feminist behaviors (not as the conventional feminism but theories that are yet to be formed), which should have erupted in the struggle for their rights for women, even without the knowledge of the same women.

In this tremendous venture, the researcher seeks to explain two types of new and virtual feminist practices among which, each has three sub categories identified. The researcher does not take any account or intend to spread the idea but tries only to expose the situation to the academics for the common good of the Muslim society and create awareness of the radicalization towards a prospective and wholesome change where the true Islamic rights of women are recognized (than granted, as if

someone is giving it out of their pockets) which are already given by Allah SWT.

In this venture, the researcher identified the following four types of women.



### **Liberal Islamists**

Liberal Islamists are identified as those who are born Muslim or among Muslims who are influenced by the traditional practices, customs and beliefs which they believe to be real and follow those principles in a liberal manner - not strictly - but as customary and are not very cognitive about their practices. These people are mostly either freelance-followers of Islam by their names and some specific rituals or some who believe they are fully practicing the faith but are not comprehensive followers of the teachings of Islam. These are the traditional and large number of followers of Islam in Sri Lanka as well as many Islamic and non-Islamic countries, who are either able to identify a small amount of these qualities or on a larger scale. Many of their ideas about Islam may be concocted by the manipulation of beliefs of other faiths or by their own customs. Their values are mostly of traditional nature than those of authority.

### **Radical Islamists**

Radical Islamists are a group in the Islamic world who are common comprehensive followers of Islam who try and learn the true Islamic beliefs in comprehensive form and take extra effort and burden to practice what they had learnt. They are commonly known as “fundamentalists” by their appearances and practices, even though there are many of the 1<sup>st</sup> kind in the same costume and appearance who are yet deduced to be radical Islamists. Radical Islamists are not terrifying as they are thought to be, but they just try hard to measure every aspect of their lives according to the Islamic ‘Ruler’. They try to seek the truth and authority about the things they follow by referring to authentic sources than merely relying on the customary information society provides.

### ***Liberal Islamist Liberal Feminists***

These people are those who follow the traditional way of Islam as they are told rather than checking the authenticity of its sources and are the ones who believe that they already have their rights granted in the existing legal and societal framework. They do not care much about Islam nor about women and their rights. They do not oppose the existing system but tend to believe that “this is who we are and this is what we ought to do”. Whatever they are told from their superiors, i.e. parents, spouse, society, siblings etc., they follow them and obey to what they are told without any question. They do not participate in radicalization of women’s rights or in social change. They believe that the existing system is eternal and it is the natural order and natural expectation of God for women. Conventional Muslim women of rural Sri Lanka and India are examples for this kind.

***Liberal Islamist Socialized Feminists***

These are the people who are in the threshold of liberal Islamist radicalization but yet have not passed the total framework of liberal Islamist liberalism. They are quite independent in society to do their day to day work, such as going to the market, pursuing education, higher studies and even a job. But they think they are still under the control of men and still significantly dependent on men. They do not disobey what they are told by their so-called superiors yet, they are free thinkers who, with a minimum of conventional practice of Islam, try diplomatically to handle situations regarding their rights. They too do not intend to take part in the radicalization of women's rights or social change but they quietly continue to get their things done. Most of the urban Sri Lankan women such as Colombo and Kandy are examples of this kind.

***Liberal Islamist Radical Feminists***

These people are typical feminists with a Muslim tag. They think that women should be totally free from interference of men in taking decisions about their affairs, no matter whether it is their father, brother or husband. They believe or practice total control in their household over their husbands in matters relating to management, finance and even administration and decision making. They believe that Islam has put too much restrictions over women or they are hard to follow and impractical for their life style, though it may be possible for some women to follow them. They think that it is wrong for the Islamists to say that mingling of men and women freely is prohibited. They always intend to say that they move "socially" with people regardless of their gender. They are commonly criticized as being unethical and un-Islamic. They believe in the liberalization of women

from the 'pathetic' condition of household slavery. They are either actively changing their lifestyle to be more liberal or they already belong to such a lifestyle. Some women who claim to follow the true form of Islam and wear Islamic dress code too are of this nature. They believe in radicalization of women's rights and freedom despite the intervention of religion and social sentiments.

### ***Radical Islamist Liberal Feminists***

These are the ones who try to learn and follow the Islamic principles with authentic sources and make every effort to stick to those principles. They think that Islam has provided for women's rights and try to live in that framework. They do fear to resist when there is a threat to their rights and freedom. But they believe and try to establish that women's rights are inherent in Islam and they should be recognized in a tacit understanding manner, rather than trying to enforce their rights authoritatively. Many of these women are deprived of their rights such as education, job and freedom of choosing their spouse sooner or later in their life. But they believe that through the existing system, the next generation will get the preferred rights which were deprived for them. All three of the Radical Islamist feminists believe that the Islamic texts were interpreted in a patriarchal society when the hadiths were compiled and that knowingly or unknowingly, most of the actual rights given to Muslim women are suppressed due to these interpretations. They believe that radicalization of women's rights should happen in a strict Islamic system and total freedom for women will spoil their moral conduct and social etiquette emphasized in Islam, but do not accept control over women by men. They seem to rely on the control of religious teachings over men and women

than one gender's upper hand over the other. Many new Islamic women thinkers hold this view.

### ***Radical Islamist Socialized Feminists***

These Islamists learn and know Islam in its purest form and try to practice them to a greater extent. They intend to neglect some of the Islamic fundamental teaching regarding women for their own ease by simple excuses such as “you can't expect to follow these in a multi-cultural society”, “good intention pays you credit even when there is some rule that is opted out for ease” or “Islam is moderate in certain circumstances”. They will follow Islam in a strict sense among public but will opt out certain principles of Islam which are meant to be strict among Islamists when circumstances arise. For example, not following a strict dress-code at their wedding and preferring to be fashionable instead. They want more liberalization when circumstances arise and do not entertain too much interference of men over their religious, social and family behavior. They think that women are entitled to some rights in Islam and they do not fear to resist and retaliate to situations of imminent infringement or manipulation of rights over them by men. They seem more flexible Islamists than total feminists. They too believe in radicalization of women's rights in a broader sense than the Radical Islamist liberal feminists but they still believe in some control of religious teachings over both men and women. Most women in Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Jordan etc., are good examples for this kind.

### ***Radical Islamist Radical Feminists***

These are women who know much of Islam and practice the fundamental rituals of Islam perfectly, such as 5 time prayers and fasting. They do know all about the Islamic dress code and their effects. They have strictly studied the power conferring rules

of Islam and will produce authentic proof for their stance on requirement. They may wear strict Islamic dress and will know and follow certain principles of Islam very strictly. However, they will retaliate and revolt against any interference over their rights or interests by any men or contemporary view holders. Islamic principles will change according to their norms and they will always try to justify their stance by authentic proof over their conduct and change in behavior. They will enjoy complete freedom over their life in their pre-marital period and will expect their spouse to give the same freedom in the aftermath of marriage, even though they would expect an equally pure man to be their future spouse. They will want their guardian, i.e., spouse, parents or siblings etc., to accept that they too can go and enjoy freedom as a man. They would presume that they are automatically conferred with every right and freedom that a man has in every manner and even in religious context. This group expects radicalization of women's rights in the Islamic system itself, where they believe that they are correct in the way they are or the way they want to be and would want other women of Islam to enjoy the same freedom and share their same thoughts. Most women of Iran, turkey and Egypt are of this kind.

It should be noted there can be people in a gene pool where there are overlaps in these categories of one group on another or influence of some group for certain extent on another. But it is undeniable that these types of people with these qualities exist.

## 4

**Methodology**

Mawanella maintains its own unique identity and a distinctive culture and has a different social life pattern from Muslims in other areas. This study was carried out at Mahawaththe GN division which consists of three villages known as Nungamua, Mahawaththe and Nayawala. Mahawaththe GN division represents a diverse Muslim population of 598 families. Nungamuawa is a Sinhalese majority village while villages Nayawala and Mahawaththe are of Muslim majority. Primary data was collected using Questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews with key informants and case studies. The structured questionnaire survey was conducted with 50 respondents. The sample for questionnaire survey was selected through the simple random method based on gender, socio-economic background, education level and affiliation to religious organizations. The purposive sampling was used for in-depth interviews that provided qualitative data regarding the prevailing marriage practices and status of women. The case studies were done using snowball sampling in order to obtain more subjective aspects of the status of women in marriage practices. The secondary data was obtained from the reports from GS of Mahawaththe Division and Quazi of the area. The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

## Data Collection

### *Primary Data*

Questionnaire survey	50 respondents	Simple random sampling.
key informants' interview	Quazi & Mosque Committee head	
Case studies	9 Respondents	Snow ball sampling

### *Secondary Data*

Reports from Quazi

## Data Analysis

- Qualitative analysis
- Quantitative analysis using Micro soft Excel

## **Discussions**

### **5.1 General Status of Women**

Sri Lankan women enjoy a prudently better status than their counterparts in other countries in the South Asian region. The Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to equality before the law and a right to freedom from discrimination. Sri Lanka's Constitution guarantees equal rights without discrimination on grounds of sex and provides for affirmative action to ensure equal rights. Sri Lanka takes great pride in the fact of its adaptation to "WOMEN'S CHARTER" way back in 1993 to give local expression to the goals visualized in the CEDAW to which Sri Lanka is a party and as a measure to provide greater policy consistency on women's issues.

Mawanella is an important place when it comes to the Muslim population of Sri Lanka. A Muslim woman in Mawanella differs from other women of her caliber in other Muslim villages by several distinguishing features. Interest towards seeking education is definitely an attribute which sets Mawanella apart. Most of the women are clad in long overcoats and a head cover despite their economic and educational levels. A clear seclusion of males and females can be observed in almost all the phases of life from primary school class rooms to marriage ceremonies.

A typical unmarried woman in Mawanella would be under the strict protection of her family. She would be accompanied by her father, brother or in certain occasions by mother to places such as tuition classes, shops and relatives places. Unmarried women are allowed to attend school even after attaining puberty, except in few rare cases. While most of the boys run after employment opportunities right after the Ordinary level exams, girls would continue with their studies.

Unmarried women would remain within the boundaries their homes. In Mawanella it is considered a taboo for an unmarried woman to talk to a male except under the supervision by her close relatives. There is no limitation for a girl to enjoy herself with her female friends or relatives.

A night spent in a female friend's house is understood to be for study purposes.

Young women do not go shopping within Mawanella unless they are accompanied by a male guardian or an elderly female. At the same time, it is observable that girls who go to university or colleges of education or such institutions often get to gather and go shopping outside Mawanella, places such as Kandy and Peradeniya.

After marriage a woman comes under the protection of her husband and in some instances the husband's family. If a married woman wishes to visit a place, often the permission of the husband should be obtained. If the husband works abroad or in cities far away from Mawanella, the approval of the in-laws is needed and mostly it comes from the mother-in-law.

Married women are accompanied by their husbands or children for the purpose of shopping and visiting relatives.

Married women who have small children attending pre-schools and primary school are often seen accompanying the children and attending parents meetings.

It is very rare to see Mawanella women travelling by herself either in a threewheeler or a bus.

The revival and boom of Islamic movements has made a clear impact on women's social behavior. More women go out in groups to participate in activities of the Islamic movements. Women taking part in weekly Qur'an and hadith classes, usra (small study circles) is a common sight. A decade ago the scenario was different. Women were not allowed to go out and participate in the activities of Islamic movements.

Women attending marriage ceremonies and funeral houses in groups are also a common thing here. Few women study even after the marriage.

It should also be noted that women who are financially not well off seem to travel alone. Elite women seldom seen on the roads and they adhere to the strict unsaid rules set for them.

Most women are bilingual in Mawanella as they live closely knitted with the Sinhalese community. English speaking women are less in number even in the elite class.

## **5.2 Concept of Marriage**

Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two people establish a family. It involves not only the right to conceive and rear children, but also the accommodation of other commitments and privileges affecting a good many people.

The real meaning of marriage is the endorsement of a new status, with a new set of privileges and obligations, and the recognition of this new status by others. A legal marriage legitimizes a social status and creates a set of legally recognized rights and duties.

Marriage is one of the oldest socially recognized institutions and crucial for the procreation of children and gratification of the sexual urges of mankind. In different societies there are different methods and customs of marriage are prevailing.

The functions of marriage can be defined as below.

**Social Recognition:** Marriage gives social recognition to all sexual relationships, which otherwise would have many social problems. Marriage alone makes the society accept the relationship of boy and girl, as husband and wife.

**Procreation of Children:** Another function of the marriage is to have legitimate children; the children born as a result of socially recognized marriage are accepted by the society as legitimate and legal heirs to the property and other assets of the family.

**Sense of Sympathy:** After the marriage alone the husband and wife and their children develop a sense of sympathy for each other and they begin to share each other's joys and sorrows. They make sacrifices for the sake of each other.

**Basis of Family:** Another function of marriage is that it is the basis of family life. As we all know that after marriage family comes into being and with that the virtues of all the family life emerge in the society.

**Stability in Relationship:** After marriage alone relationships come into being e.g. the relationship of husband and wife, son or daughter, father-in-law and mother-in-law or that of grandfather and grandmother etc. these relations get stabilized with the passage of time, but only after marriage.

**Perpetuation of Lineage:** It is after marriage that there is desire to perpetuate the name of the family. The children perpetuate the names of their parents by having grandchildren, who in turn have great grandchildren etc. After some time there is a desire to perpetuate the lineage of the family and if at any stage in the family there are no offshoots, then every effort is made to have them, so that the name of the family continues.

( Cited )

### **5.3 Marriage & Status of Women in Islam**

The religion of Islam is a strong advocate of marriage. Islam views marriage as a strong union, a challenging vow in the fullest sense of the word. It is the kind of commitment in which man and wife find mutual fulfillment and self- recognition, love and harmony, compassion and tranquility, security and faith.

Marriage is a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. Islam does not encourage celibacy. The prophet has also said, "Marriage is my tradition, whosoever keeps away there from is not from amongst me". Marriage acts as a channel for sexual needs and regulates it so one does not become a slave to one's desires. It is a social requisite because through marriage, families are established and the family is the elemental unit of any society. Furthermore, marriage is the only legitimate way for intimacy to exist between a man and a woman. Marriage is a sincere agreement and it is

not a matter which can be taken lightly. It should be entered into with total commitment and full knowledge of what it involves. Choosing a partner should be one's choice for life. One should be mature enough to understand the demands of marriage so that the union can be a lasting one. For a marriage to be valid certain conditions must be met.

#### Consent

Both the groom and the bride must consent to the marriage, verbally and in writing. This is done through a formal proposal of marriage and acceptance of the proposal. A first-time bride is usually represented in the contract negotiations by her Wali, a male guardian who looks out for her best interests. Even so, the bride must also express her willingness to enter into marriage.

#### Mahr – bridal gift

The bride has a right to receive a gift from the groom which remains her own property as security in the marriage. The gift is payable directly to the bride and remains her sole property, even in case of later divorce. The Mahr can be cash, jewelry, property, or any other valuable asset. Either full payment or an agreed-upon payment schedule is required at the time of contract signature.

Witnesses – Two adult witnesses are required to verify the marriage contract.

The marriage should be publicized, it should never be kept secret as it leads to suspicion and troubles within the community.

The contract of marriage creates new roles for the parties concerned. Each role is a set of equitable, proportionate rights and responsibilities. The role of the husband grows around the

moral principle that it is his solemn duty of God to treat his wife with kindness, and patience; and to cause her no harm or grief (Qur'an, 2:229-232; 4:19). The role of the wife is summarized in the verse that women have rights even as they have duties, according to what is equitable; (2:228).

1. A woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of humankind. He is the father; she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is no less vital than his. By this partnership she has an equal share in every aspect; she is entitled to equal rights; she undertakes equal responsibilities, and in her there are as many qualities and as much humanity as there are in her partner.
2. She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an independent personality. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Both are members of one another. God says:

And their Lord has accepted (their prayers) and answered them (saying): 'Never will I cause to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female; you are members, one of another .... (3:195; cf. 9:71; 33:35-36; 66:19-21).

3. She is entitled to freedom of expression as much as a man is. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration and cannot be disregarded. It is reported in the Qur'an and history that women not only expressed their opinions freely but also argued and participated in serious discussions with the Prophet himself as well as with other Muslim leaders (Qur'an, 58:1-4; 60:10-12).

4. Islam grants woman equal rights to contract, to enterprise, to earn and possess independently. Her life, her property, her honor are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offense, her penalty is no less or more than a man's in a similar case. If she is wronged or harmed, she gets due compensations equal to what man in her position would get (2:178; 4:45, 92-93).
5. Time and again, the Qur'an reproaches those who used to believe woman to be inferior to man (16:57-59, 62; 42:47-50; 43:15-19; 53:21-23).
6. A woman enjoys certain privileges of which a man is deprived. She is exempt from some religious duties, i.e., prayers and fasting, in her regular periods and at times of confinement. She is exempt from attending the obligatory congregation of Fridays. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honor in the sight of God (31:14-15; 46:15). The Prophet acknowledged this honor when he declared that Paradise is under the feet of the mothers. She is entitled to three-fourths of the son's love and kindness with one-fourth left for the father. As a wife she is entitled to demand of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister she is entitled to security and provision by the father and brother respectively. That is her privilege. If she wishes to work or be self-supporting and participate in handling the family responsibilities, she

is quite free to do so, provided her integrity and honor are safeguarded.

And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage as in some cases of inheritance) over them (2:228). This degree is NOT a title of supremacy or an authorization of dominance over her. It is to correspond with the extra financial responsibilities of man and give him some compensation for his unlimited liabilities. The above-mentioned verse is always interpreted in the light of another (4:34). It is not a higher degree in humanity or in character. Nor is it a dominance of one over the other or suppression of one by the other.

\*( Citation)

#### **5.4 Marriage Practices**

From Europe to South Asia, Islam stretches across a diverse terrain of colourful culture with customs and practices as varied as the countries from which they hail. Marriage in Islam is viewed as a religious obligation, a contract between the couple and Allah.

The only requirement for Muslim weddings is the signing of a marriage contract. Marriage traditions differ depending on culture, Islamic sect, and adherence of gender separation rules. Most marriages are not held in mosques, and men and women remain separate during the ceremony and reception. Since Islam sanctions no official clergy, any Muslim who understands Islamic tradition can officiate a wedding.

### 5.4.1 Selection of a partner

It refers to the finding of spouse by man and woman. There are two methods given as Exogamy: When a person marries outside one's group, caste, religion, class or race. It is attributed as exogamy. In the modern times this marriage is mostly in practice.

Endogamy: When a person marries inside one's group, caste, religion, class or race. It is known as endogamy. This kind of marriage is practiced in within the Muslims from eastern region and some areas in the central part of the island as well.

The choice of a partner should be the one with virtues. The Prophet recommended the suitors see each other before going through with marriage. It is unreasonable for two people to be thrown together and be expected to relate and be intimate when they know nothing of each other. The couple are permitted to look at each other with a critical eye and not a lustful one.

In Muslim Marriages of Mawanella, the proposal mostly comes from the groom's side to the bride's family through a Marriage broker or a well-wisher. In some instances the proposal is forwarded through the social network to the bride's family. It is interesting to note that if a girl passes the age 25, then the bride's family has to forward the proposal to the groom's family, yet exceptions are there where the bride is sought-after for her physical appearance or wealth.

Love marriages mostly turn as arranged marriages with the agreement of the both or one of the families. Mawanella people prefer to marry within Mawanella or villages of close proximities. According to Quazi of the area, the majority of divorces occur in the unions where the spouses are from outside Mawanella

#### **5.4.2 Consent of the Families**

Islam is in accordance with arranged marriages by suggestion and recommendation as long as the bride and the groom and their respective families agree. But Islam is against forced alliances in the name of arranged marriage where the parents choose the future spouse and the couple concerned are forced or have no choice in the matter.

One of the conditions of a valid marriage is consent of the couple. Marriage by definition is a voluntary union of two people. The choice of a partner by a Muslim virgin girl is subject to the approval of the father or guardian. This is to safeguard her welfare and interests. The Prophet said “the widow and the divorced woman shall not be married until she has consented and the virgin shall not be married until her consent is obtained. The Prophet did revoke the marriage of a girl who complained to him that her father had married her against her wishes.

In Mawanella, during the interviews with the respondents of the case studies and questionnaire survey, it was revealed that a significant percentage of women were forced to seek partners chosen by their parents against the interest of women involved.

It is astonishing to know that out of all the marriages for women 40% are arranged marriages while 28% are forced marriages.

#### **5.4.3 Marriage Transactions**

Mahr is known as the bridal money. The wife is entitled to a marriage gift that is her own. This may be prompt or deferred depending on the agreement between the parties. A marriage is not valid without Mahr. It does not have to be money or gold. It can be non-material like teaching her to read the Qur’an. “Mahr”

is a gift from the groom to the bride. There is no specification in the Qur'an as to what or how much the Mahr has to be. But women can demand Mahr amount according to their status, education and physical appearance.

Dowry cannot be requested by groom or his family in Islamic teachings. This is the Islamic law. But in some parts of the Muslim regions of Sri Lanka such as Eastern coast, the culture whereby the bride's parents pay the future husband to marry the daughter is prevalent even today. This practice degrades women and is contrary to the spirit of Islam.

In Mawanella Mahr is widely practiced after the emergence of Islamic movements and general awareness of the global Muslim society and worldwide marriage practices (especially in the Middle East), through various media and technology. Direct Dowry exists in the area but mostly among a small group of people while indirect dowry practices are common.

#### **5.4.4 Engagement**

It is important to clarify that engagement in Islam is just a promise of marriage. It does not entitle fiancés to any special rights over one another, other than publicly declaring serious interest in a life-long commitment to each other under Allah's law.

Consequently, Muslim fiancés are expected to be sensible of that fact while dealing with each other during the engagement period, the same rules of decent conduct apply that they would normally follow while dealing with a member of the opposite sex. That could change only after they have been formally declared husband and wife. So while an engaged couple may freely discuss their values and ethics, plan for their future

life together, they are expected to be careful to avoid privacy together. An engagement is just an announcement of intent to get married, and only if and when both sides feel absolutely certain of that decision. In Mawanella, couples who are engaged are allowed to communicate with each other in many occasions. Some of the strict followers of certain Islamic movements do not approve of the couple going out together and it is strictly prohibited within the community. Sometimes an engagement function is arranged and as a symbol of the engagement of the couple, the groom's family presents the bride-to-be with gold jewelry; either a ring or a necklace.

#### **5.4.5 Henna Ceremony**

The Henna ceremony is held at the home of the bride on the eve of the wedding ceremony or a couple of days before it. The female friend or an expert applies grounded paste of henna leaves on the hands and feet of the bride. The event has a festive feel to it with the family gathering for a feast in the evening. The bride wears a special dress on the occasion. The Henna ceremony is not mentioned in the Islamic scriptures yet it is a customary exercise practiced in many Muslim countries all over the world.

#### **5.4.6 Nikah and Registration**

The marriage contract is signed in a Nikah ceremony, in which the groom or his representative proposes to the bride in front of at least two witnesses, stating the details of the Mahr. The bride and groom demonstrate their free will by repeating the word 'Qabul' ("I accept," in Arabic) three times. Then the couple and two male witnesses sign the contract, making the marriage legal according to civil and religious law. Following traditional Islamic values, the bride and groom may share a piece of sweet

fruit, such as a date. If men and women are separated for the ceremony, a male representative called a Wali acts in the bride's behalf during the Nikah. Nikahs are held in mosques mostly and women do not take part.

As the Mawanella Muslims maintain strict seclusion between the genders, bride or women would not be present in a Nikah ceremony or at the time of signing the contract of marriage. Bride would express her consent through signing a form in the privacy of her home. Sometimes she her consent is forced, but these cases are kept hidden.

#### **5.4.7 Waleema - Marriage Banquet**

The wedding banquet (Waleema) is traditionally held by the groom after the Nikah has taken place. It may take place immediately following the Nikah, on the following day, the following week or at a future date, but the purpose of the banquet is for family and friends to share in the groom's happiness on the occasion of his marriage and to give thanks to God. The Waleema need not be wildly expensive. Islam emphasizes moderation. It is an occasion to celebrate the happiness of the newlyweds. The Waleema gives family members and friends the opportunity to congratulate the happy couple: the bride is congratulated by the women around her and by her family and friends; the groom receives the congratulations of men. The newlyweds are also presented with gifts. Nowadays the Waleema ceremony is held in Wedding halls and segregation between males and females is practiced. Though the Waleema feast should be exclusively borne by the groom, in many cases there are Waleema functions held jointly both the bride's family and groom's family. Unlike brides in the past, most of the brides opt for covered wedding outfit to be worn on that special day.

### 5.5 Marriage Practices & Domination of Groom's Family

There is a gap between the true Islamic teachings and popular practice of the religion with regard to Muslim marriage customs of Mawanella.

Mahr decided	Groom	Bride	Groom's family	Bride's family
<b>Participants</b>	<b>32(64%)</b>	<b>2(4%)</b>	<b>12 (24%)</b>	<b>0</b>

Mahr is widely practiced widely across Mawanella. Contributory factors to this can be two key points. Emergence of Islamic movements such as Thableeq Jamath, Jamath-e Islami and Thowheed Jamath, within Mawanella and their continuous awareness campaigns exceeding five decades is one important trigger in extensive practice of Mahr. With more and more men migrating to Middle Eastern countries for employment and later family emigrations have contributed a great deal to the growth and expansion of Mahr practice. During the questionnaire survey 62% of the participants had given or received while dowry on request was only 22%.

According to Islam, the bride has the privilege to demand Mahr and decide the monetary value.

But in practice, 64% of the cases Mahr is decided by the groom and 12% by groom's family. In only 4% of the cases Mahr was decided by the bride.

In Saudi Arabia, Mahr range from 50,000 – 150,000 Saudi Arabian Riyals, equivalent to roughly 17, 50000 – 52, 50000 Sri Lankan rupees, depending upon the family, their social status and ability to provide. Again, this is in reference to new “virgin” brides who are marrying for the first time. However in some areas in Southern K.S.A it is traditional for the groom's family



In Mawanella, though the Mahr is given prior to marriage and the freedom to use the Mahr as the women wish, is ensured in 94% of the cases. There lies a gray area, however. When Mahr is given to a woman, she and her family are expected to obey the other demands of the groom and groom's family. Unlike the Middle Eastern bride, the bride in Mawanella loses her power within the marriage union when she is given Mahr. This may be due to the reason that the Muslim society in Mawanella thinks that by providing Mahr, the groom is giving an extra privilege and benefit, which makes the groom superior to the bride. But according to true Islamic teaching this is not so. It should also be noted that in marriage practices in Mawanella, the amount of Mahr has no correlation with the bride's status, family or appearance.

Marriage is a union where the distribution of power should be unbiased. But what the researcher can observe here is the power and dominance of the female has a positive correlation with Dowry while power and dominance of males over females has a positive correlation with Mahr.

There are different practices among Muslims of Sri Lanka regarding where the married couple should reside once they are married. In Eastern and Western parts of the country a dowry house is a mandatory requirement for a union of marriage. But in Mawanella it is not so and the society expects the married women to live in their in-laws house while they build a house of their own to move into at a later date.

	Nuclear family	Joint family	Single parent family
Respondents 50 (100%)	20 (40%)	28(56%)	2(4%)

Regarding types of families in Mawanella, the nuclear family takes second place while priority goes to joint family. In most cases of Mahr given marriages, the bride is expected to live in her husband's paternal joint family. Eventually living in joint families can lead to problems which even result in divorces. Parental influence is identified as the main possible reason for a divorce, this can be due to majority of the people live in parental joint families. Especially as more men live with their parental joint family. 54% of the population thinks that parental influence is the main possible reason for a divorce.

When signing the marriage contract the woman is not present in the picture in Mawanella. The consent of the bride is a pre-requisite for a marriage in Islam and it is permissible that a Wali a representative can appear on behalf of the bride in the place where marriage contract is signed.

This sometimes paves way for forced marriages where the consent of the bride is not sought, but the consent is expressed through the guardian of the woman even when the bride is not ready to agree.

Prevailing marriage practices in Mawenella give ample room for groom and his family to dominate the bride and her family.

Though Islamic pure Islamic teachings recognize woman as an individual of self-worth, and has offered honour and privileges, society does not seem to recognize it.

## 6

### **Social Mobility of Women**

#### **6.1 Women and Individual Choices**

Each person is born an original and one of a kind. We each have our own desires, ambitions and visions for the future. Individuality has a lot to do with freedom and building capacity to choose and direct one's life.

According to the Encarta dictionary; a specific personality, character, or characteristic that distinguishes one person or thing from another can be collectively called as individuality.

Betty Friedan, one of the most influential liberal feminists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century explores the unhappiness of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century women in her book 'Feminine mystique'. She describes women's unhappiness as "the problem that has no name" Women felt this sense of depression because they were forced to be obedient to men financially, mentally physically and intellectually. The feminine "mystique" was the idealized image to which women tried to conform despite their lack of fulfillment.

An independent male can choose his career, choose his future partner and choose to follow his heart. He is given an opportunity of freedom to follow his desires which would lead

to an honest attempt at happiness and contentment from his side.

Would a female be given the same chance? The question remains unanswered.

When a woman is of marriageable age, she should be allowed to choose her life partner yet in some cases this does not occur.

According to the study, in Mawanella alone among all the marriages of females 28% of the marriages are forced. As a daughter, a woman is always expected to obey the interests of her parents.

	<b>Love marriage</b>	<b>Arranged marriage</b>	<b>Forced marriage</b>
<b>Male 100%</b>	<b>6 (24%)</b>	<b>19 (76%)</b>	<b>0 (%)</b>
<b>Female 100%</b>	<b>9 (36%)</b>	<b>10 (40%)</b>	<b>07(28%)</b>

Ambitions and the desire for achievement are not limited to a gender but it is common to all the human beings.

Even in successful marriages women often lose their identity. Women once were achievers with brimming ambitions are lost within the marriages. These are not necessarily bad marriages, but are marriages where the concern of the needs of others given way for them to forget who they are. Many women who are asked by family to give up their jobs or studies after marriage experience a sense of identity loss.

Most married women the researcher interviewed were in a continuous struggle between their identities and their assigned roles. It makes women frustrated when there is always someone else's needs put before their own. On the other hand women

who are capable of moving forward with their goals, are found happy and contented.

*'I wanted to study further and I had passed AL's. But my family wanted to give me in a marriage at the age of 20. I protested, cried but eventually they got me convinced by a lady who is attached to a religious movement. The person I married promised that he would allow me to study but that never happened. But for my brother who is 34 years of age, he was allowed to study and he is still not married because he did not locate the right person.'*

----- Farween- case study

*"I was a good performing student at O/L s and got very good results. When I was in A/L, my family married me off to a person from a wealthy family and now I have everything. I did not have a choice. But I feel an emptiness in me. I regret not completing my A/Ls. What blocked me from education is my family and I did not go against their wishes. My brothers could have studied but they chose business instead. But today, I and my husband have vowed to educate my daughter to become someone big."*

----- Rusaida - case study

Regarding marriage, education and crucial life events women are not allowed to make choices as individuals. They always have to stand in their roles society had assigned for them. Most women feel a vacuum in their life even after achieving good social status.

*"8 years ago, my husband who was the breadwinner was paralyzed after a stroke attack and I was totally depended upon him. I had to rent my one portion of the house to run the family. The community criticizes me for going out, but I cannot depend upon anyone. I went to the market to purchase goods and I start*

*dealing with all the outside work. Today we lead a happy life and I always encourage my daughters to be educated and empowered, they should be able do their work and lead their life in their own legs”*

----- *Fazana- case study*

What Betty Friedan argued in the sixties in the case of women in the U.S. and which is probably applicable even today for Muslim women in Mawanella, is that they be allowed to pursue activities that enhance their identity. Islam sees woman as an individual before fitting her into the roles of a wife or a mother. The notions created by the society that women should sacrifice everything and be happy in her roles assigned for them would probably lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment at the end. A woman, like any human being, is an original being. Often, in the name of ‘femininity’ women’s creative side is suppressed. Women are more than just mothers and wives. For many women, pursuing higher education and a working career would give a sense of being and purpose, an identity that is exciting.

We cannot generalize the point that every woman should follow her goals and career. But by allowing women to experiment with the channels that lead to their sense of achievement should be considered. A society which orients women to think of themselves only as beings of procreation would only create unsatisfied complaining individuals who had lost their identities within their marital lives.

## **6.2 Women and financial independence**

In South Asia, more and more women are becoming wage earners. But their contribution to the economy is seldom

recognized. Regardless of the how hard they work, they continue to be paid less in most instances.

In Sri Lanka, Women comprise 50.8 per cent of the country's total population of 21.3 million and have been part of the workforce for decades. Today, they continue to contribute to the national economy, which accounts for 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's exports. There are women working in traditional sectors, like in the tea and rubber plantations, and in non-traditional sectors like garments and domestic work, according to the Shadow Report prepared by the Centre for Women's Research in 2001.

“A woman who has some financial independence is free to state her mind, disagree, ask for what she wants, and a woman who doesn't is not. Financial independence is important in a marriage because it can also mean ‘independence of thought,’” says Tina B. Tessina, PhD, a psychotherapist in Long Beach, California and author of *How to Be a Couple and Still Be Free* (New Page Books, 2002).

	Employed in government sector	Employed in private sector	Self employed	Business	Employed in abroad	unemployed
<b>Male</b> 25(100%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	12 (48%)	3(12%)	0 (0 %)
<b>Female</b> 25(100%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	5 (20%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	10 (40%)

Financial independence plays a crucial role in decision the making process over one's life. In the study researcher conducted in Mawanella, 60% of the married women are employed which is a very positive sign. When analyzed further, it came to light that that of the 12%

government employed women, all worked as teachers. The 24% women who are employed in the private sector work in pre-schools and small private schools where they get mean salaries. Some women complained of heavy workload and lowly day payments. All these 60 % women compared to the unemployed 40% women stated that they enjoy a privilege of spending on their own and freedom within the decision making process in the family. Especially the 4% women who are engaged in business and women who are engaged in teaching profession seem to have more power over their family matters than their unemployed counterparts. It should be noted that these 40% unemployed women are willing to earn money either full time or part time basis.

90% of females agree that women should be financially independent and remaining 10% were not sure about it. It may be interesting to know that 80% of the men Mawanella disagree that women should be financially independent.

*“Women should be financially independent. I have 2 kids and my Husband earns a handsome amount of money. We live in his paternal joint family and he refuses to spend on me or my kids anymore and my parents who are not well off have to spend on me and my kids. When I wanted to work in a preschool he did not allow me and I tried to do stitching to earn some money and he screamed at me. I always feel that if I have freedom to earn and keep money for myself and kids, my life would have been much better.”*

----- *Farween case study.*

*‘I truly feel that women should not be given the opportunity to work, why they should work when we men are strong enough to provide them whatever they need. My wife spends the money I*

*provide her for household expenditure. If she needs something she should ask me. That's love. Her role is to stay at home and look after my children.'*

*- Fariz case study*

Reasons of persons who are against the idea of women being financially independent.

1. According to Islam, men are the providers and women should be looked after by their fathers, husbands or their sons.
2. If women go out and work, their role as wife and mother would be neglected.
3. Women would have to encounter problems and harassments in their working places.
4. If women have money on their own, they would not respect husbands or family values.

Reasons of persons who believe that women should be given financial freedom.

1. In reality when women are divorced or if they are widowed there are no means to support themselves or the family. There are many instances where women are deserted by their husbands for no apparent reason. Women who are totally depended upon the income of the husbands become left alone with no or little means of income. A small amount of money from the mosque or donor organizations would not be providing them with a long term option. Even when the women have the ability to earn money, if the skills go without practice for a long time it is difficult to start all over.

2. Even though the husband may be well-off women prefer to have their own money to spend on the things they like. Charity, kids etc.
3. Financial independence gives women recognition within the family and it gives her more importance when making decisions over family.
4. When a woman has an ability or the potential for skilled labour and if she does not use it is wasted. Why can't women use their skills to earn?

*'I am divorced now, mine was a love marriage and I could not complete my O/L s as my husband's family insisted on an early marriage. Now I am 24 years and mother of three children. I do not get anything from my husband. He has gone abroad with another woman. The youngest child has a physical disability and I have to spend a lot of money for his medical expenses. My parents are looking after me and my children, they are not that well off and I feel guilty. If I had studied something and if I could earn a little money I could have contributed at least a small amount to my parents, I am worried now'*

*Case study*

*----- Hamziya*

Divorce or separation can happen to absolutely anyone. A woman should not become too comfortable or assure herself that she will live happily ever after. Marriage and associated bonds are unpredictable. Women feel that it is important to maintain financial independence in case the relationship should fall apart and also to prove themselves in the fields where they excel.

### 6.3 Women and Social Participation

Women's social participation and mobility is more difficult to measure for it is dependent on a range of variables. But the choices and decisions that a woman may make when she is skilled, confident and financially independent combined with an awareness of her contribution to and role in the community to which she belongs, must surely add in no small measure to her own sense of value.

Sehba Hussein (2007) observes that the common picture of a Muslim woman is the stereotype of a woman hidden behind a veil, a voiceless, silent figure, bereft of rights. It is a picture familiar to all of us, in large part because this is invariably how the media portrays women in Islam. However, Islam worked so much to protect human rights, especially women's, with such integrity, strength, strategic genius, beauty and divinity, or to honour humanity, by freeing it from the chains of prejudice, manipulations, personal and social injustice. The Prophet's teachings regarding education, social and political rights, property rights, and ultimately human rights, are among the most valuable chapter in the book of civilization.

Mosques and Islamic movements as the powerful faculties of social control are vital determinants of status of women, as they influence the social norms and patterns of social behaviour. Moreover, the lack of participation of Muslim women in diverse domains such as politics and policy making within the social institutions is felt immensely.

Mainstream Islam allows women to share the same prayer hall with men, as long as they pray in separate rows behind, or next to men, but not in front of them – this was the way Muslims prayed behind Prophet Muhammad in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Scholars and historians describe that in many instances the Prophet stressed that women should not be banned from visiting mosques.

In the Grand Mosque in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, women and men perform all the rituals without segregation. Practices vary widely across the Muslim world, however. Conservative cultures and traditions, predominantly in Western and Southern Asia, require women to pray in secluded rooms in mosques and women are not allowed to be a part on the activities or the management of the Mosques.

Mawanella Mosques like all the mosques in Sri Lanka remain strictly as places for men except for the occasional festival prayer where women are allowed to take part. The mosque deals with issues such as disputes arising within marriages and problematic social behavior of individuals or groups. As this society is not all male, female representation is vital to come into certain verdicts and to facilitate the carrying out of the judgments.

*'Women in Mosques would be the last thing on my mind. If they start to come there, there would be problems and we already have enough problems in our society'*

*Case study*

*---Shakir*

In the mosque inquiry committee and Quazi court there is no representation of women which has led to prejudices in certain cases. The women the researcher interviewed strongly feel that there should be some kind of representation of women in the above all male committees.

*“My husband does not care for me or my baby. We have been married for 2 years now. He always act according to what his family says and he does not spend on me. He does not respond to Quazi or mosque committee requests to pay me the due amount for the expense of the child. I am nowhere, because I cannot go for a divorce as Quazi always advises me to rethink about it. and I cannot live with him too. There are certain times where you need a female there to express some private things.”*

-----Rizmina –

Influential Islamic movements have been working for more than 5 years in Mawanella,

<b>Islamic movements</b>	<b>Jamath e Islami</b>	<b>Thawheed Jamath</b>	<b>Thableeq Jamath</b>	<b>other</b>
Male 25 (50%)	7 (14%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	11 (22%)
Female 25 (50%)	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	11( 22%)

Out of females 44% belong to Jamath e Islami while 8% belong to Tawheed, and 4% belong to Tableeq and 44% do not belong to any of the religious organizations. Jamath e Islami seems to accommodate more women in their work than any other religious organization, but here what they mean by working with the particular Jamath is mostly restricted to certain activities such as attending weekly study circles and awareness programmes. The males, on the other hand, are involved in more diverse activities which involve social participation such as meetings with politicians and anti-drugs campaigns etc., within the movement and outside. 60% of the respondents of the questionnaire survey agree that room for women’s participation in Islamic movements is limited. Reasons why people are against

women going out for social contribution, is that mingling with men can lead to unnecessary problems. And also the males and even some females perceive that women are weak and they cannot withstand the barriers and complications of the outside world.

Professor Tariq Ramadan, states in his book ‘What I believe’

“It is therefore important to carry out in-depth critical work and encourage women to become involved and acquire the religious learning necessary to develop new feminine readings. Women must be present in the religious community’s decision circles, in organisations, in mosque managing bodies, and other places. Things should be shaken up so that women can recover their proper place, but women themselves must also get organised: they will achieve nothing if they retain a victim mind-set. It is obvious today that wherever women have had access to schooling, have received Islamic education, or have become involved at the community or social level, they perform better than men: they achieve better results, they are more committed, more rigorous, and more earnest. Facts and figures speak for themselves. This process must go on and offer women full access to civil society and to employment with demands that should be taken for granted: similar training, similar qualification mean getting the same salary, and job discrimination (because a woman is too young and will probably have a child, or because she is too old and does not fit with the youthful “image”) must be rejected and fought against. Whether or not one calls it feminist (I do not mind), this commitment for women’s legitimate rights can and must take place from within.”

## Conclusion

While not all Muslims consider women to be inferior, this is unfortunately true in some sections of the Muslim world and this treatment is hypothetically justified by the religion. However, when we look at the basis of the religion, the Qur'an, we see a very different picture. In the Qur'an, God makes it very clear that men and women are equal. "I shall not lose sight of the labour of any of you who labours in My way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other (3:195)"

Spiritual equality, responsibility and accountability for both men and women are well-developed themes in the Qur'an. Spiritual equality between men and women in the sight of God is not limited to purely spiritual, religious issues, but is the basis for equality in all temporal aspects of human endeavor.

Although the Qur'an views women and men to be equal in human dignity, this spiritual or ethical equality has not been reflected in most Muslim customary practices. For example, women do not have equal rights to make independent decisions about their choice of partner, getting a divorce and custody of their children. Reformists and feminists have challenged women's lack of rights and lack of control over their own lives within Muslim laws and practices.

Although the pure Islamic teachings recognize women whether married or unmarried as individuals of self-worth, the popular Muslim culture in Mawanella does not allow women to enjoy that properly.

The measures to minimize the blockades for women moving forward should seriously be taken into consideration. Islamic movements must reconsider broadening of their vision and hierarchical structure accommodating more women's participation and on diverse fields.

As one half of the community women should not be deprived from the mosque nor in participating in activities of social interest. The researcher suggests that female representation in the form of an advisory committee in Quazi courts and mosques would be a good move towards enabling social mobility of women.

Researcher as a woman had to encounter certain limitations when collecting data as Mawanella Muslim community preserves its own set values for females and males. In certain occasions the researcher had to seek support from a male assistant especially during the interviews with the males for the case studies.