

Multiplicity of Socio-Religious Perspectives among Young Educated Females at Al Huda International Foundation, Lahore

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INTRODUCTION:

The multiplicity of socio-religious perspectives among educated Muslim females are explored through the research. It has focused on those females who were engaged in the detail study of the Holy Quran and Sunnah(1) at Al Huda International Foundation(2).

Many studies have been conducted on the subject of religiosity in the past but the focus of the previous researches was only to measure the level of religiosity among youth. In Pakistan, the focus of research studies on the subject of religiosity was limited to the terrorism and suicide attacks only. However, not even a single study was conducted to explore the notion of religiosity among young females in Pakistan, in particular, with the motivation of females to study the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

Before discussing the detail of present research, it is important to know the real meaning of religiosity. According to Hernandez (2011), researchers have not reached a consensus regarding definition of religiosity. Many researchers have defined religiosity as both beliefs and practices relating to an organized religious affiliation or a specified divine power. However, Kwon (2003) has defined the term of religiosity as the extent to which believers think of everyday matters in a uniquely religious way and apply religious beliefs into their daily life situations. Religiosity is defined in a similar way by Alicia and Torres (2007), Darder (1995), Yoo and Chung (2008), Roof (1979) and Andersen and Taylor (2008). Hence, it can be stated that religiosity deals with individual's faith, his beliefs and behavior, religious involvement and religious activities.

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Although, religiosity depends on the level of individual faith but it may be strongly develop due to the contribution of many other factors. In the past empirical studies, researchers have identified several factors of religiosity like globalization, information and communication technology, terrorism and blasphemous incidences. These factors played a significant role in the motivation of youngsters towards their religion. For instance, globalization has made it easy to establish networks of Islamic movements all across the world. According to Horstmann (2009) and Ali (2010), the globalized Islamic movements like TablighiJamaat and Hizbut-Tahrir has a strong effect on the young generation. These movements have established their networks in many continents like Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Thus, these movements have organized a globalized Islamic community which ultimately built a global identity among Muslims. It has strongly affected on their religiosity. However, this globalized community was emerged by the effective use of information and communication technology.

In fact, the communication technology is another major factor of religiosity. The research studies conducted by Bell (2006), Ho et al (2008), Roman (2006) and Echchaibi (2009) depicted that information and communication technology like internet and mobile phone has strongly affected the religiosity trend among youth. There are many religious websites, Islamic channels and religious texting services available to the people. It has raised the awareness about religion. It also developed an interest for religion among youth. According to Bell (2006), 64% of online American used internet for religious or spiritual purpose. Similarly, Karim and Hazmi (2005) mentioned that 90% of post graduates students and faculty members of International Islamic University in Malaysia used internet to get authentic Islamic articles and knowledge about Hadith(3).

Besides globalization and communication technology, terrorism is another factor that has increased religiosity among Muslims. Peek (2005) and Bendixsen(2009) stated that incidence of 9/11 has increased the quest of authenticity about Islam. It has stimulated them to learn more about their religion. Moreover, the Muslim has considered the war on terror as a war against Islam. In this context, McCauley and Stellar (2009) stated that the perception of war on terrorism as a war on Islam increased from 18% in 2001 to 55% in 2007. Consequently, Muslims tried to strengthen their religious beliefs to save their identity and culture.

It can be assumed from the above mentioned research studies that religion might be use to save and strengthen the cultural identity of people. It may be used to unite and connect the people. This function of religion is quite similar to ideology of Emile Durkheim. Infact, Durkheim has

suggested that religion increases the social solidarity in the society. According to Andersen and Taylor (2008), Durkheim believed that religion binds the individuals and gives them sense of belonging with each other. Similarly, many Muslim philosophers like Al Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun and Shah Waliullah has also considered religion as a unifying force in the society. Ibn-i-Khaldun (1967) stated that religion is a significant factor of mutual cooperation and support among people. However, Shah Waliullah considered another aspect of religion besides its unifying function. He believed that religion can be used to save the identity of people. According to Shahed (2004), Shah Waliullah suggested that Muslims can save their identity if they purify Islam from un-Islamic practices and take their guidance from the Holy Quran only.

Thus, it can be stated that religiosity would be strongly developed when people want to save or strengthen their religious identities.

METHODOLOGY:

This qualitative study involved in-depth interviews which were audio recorded with the consent of participants. Exhaustive notes were taken by the interviewer for the purpose of documenting as much detail as possible. The study has focused on detailed narrative of the participants as well as their words, phrases, expressions and nonverbal cues.

The universe of this study consisted of educated females studying at the three branches of Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation that were operational in Lahore. The fifteen participants were selected through purposive and theoretical sampling technique. The age group of the participants was 17-26. The identity of the participants was kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality, given the sensitivity of the research topic.

Furthermore, the data is analyzed in the form of themes and narratives. Translation and Transliteration was done to get honest picture of the response as most of the participants used Urdu as a medium of communication. The themes were formed through the concept formation and coding process. The data was coded into three steps as suggested by Neuman (1997). It involved open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The role of media in generating religiosity emerged as an important theme during open coding. The axial coding signified awareness, curiosity, inspiration, realization about death and diminishing spirit of Islam generated by Media as allied themes. The selective coding entailed the insignificant role of formal education system, family and incompetent religious clerics in motivating students to join organizations like Al Huda. At the end, a grounded theory is formulated with the help of emerging themes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

The research explored numerous themes and sub themes during the data analysis. Below, some of the key findings like role of mass media, formal education system, family and religious foundations have been discussed.

Role of Mass Media:

The role of media in the context of feminine religious configuration is manifold. Different religious discourses highlight varied socio-religious perspectives. They try to empower young females through attainment of correct religious knowledge. They redress the case of religion clearing all ambiguities and doubts. Moreover, they draw a link between knowledge appropriation and transformation of religious authority.

The participants mentioned different religious scholars who signify the aforementioned authority. They are Dr. Zakir Naik, Yusuf Estes, Ahmed Deedat, Bilal Philips, Yusuf Islam, Farhat Hashmi and Nauman Ali Khan during their discussion. These scholars have inspired the educated females and motivated them to learn more about the Islam. They provided a logical explanation for every aspect of religion. The logical explanation is helpful in the understanding of Islamic principles. This logical underpinning has fortified the position of religion and the religious authority itself amongst the hearts of the participants ultimately strengthening their faith.

The misconception and the negative portrayal of Islam have made the participants question and investigate about Islamic value system. It has stimulated them to get involved in the detailed and intricate study of Islamic principles.

The temptation of secular values that are contradictory to the religion, the social evils prevalent in our society and the detachment from religious knowledge have unleashed a pedagogical and emotional turmoil in participants to move towards religiosity. The incidence of sudden deaths as portrayed on media have been instrumental in the evolution of young minds to think about death and life hereafter.

All of the above mentioned aspects depict that media has strong influence on the religiosity of young educated females. It has developed a need among them to know more about their religion. It has also influenced them to practice Islam in their daily life.

Role of Formal Education System :

Formal educational institutions have failed to impart religious education as it contradicts with the materialistic values of the contemporary society. A unified system of formal education along with Islamic values and teachings based on the Holy Quran and Ahadis should be the part of the curriculum. Islamic knowledge should immerse the believer in a permanent

atmosphere filled with divine presence, which the females experience as mostly nonexistent in secularized societies.

Although the formal education system offers a compulsory subject of Islamic Studies but it is based on theoretical concepts only. The formal educational set up did not provide any guidance to the participants about the practical implementation of Islamic principles. Therefore, it was difficult for the young females to practice Islam in their daily life.

It is quite evident from above mentioned narrative that formal education system did not provide sufficient knowledge and guidance as the requirement of young females. Therefore, they moved towards alternative resources like Al-Huda to accomplish their need.

Role of Family:

Family plays a significant role to motivate young females towards religion. Parents want to motivate their children to move towards religion to abstain from social evils in the society. Family does not provide sufficient and authentic knowledge about Islam. Therefore, to gain an in-depth knowledge of Islam in the light of Quran and Ahadis, the young females join religious institutions.

Role of Muslim Clerics:

Similar to the institution of family and formal education, Muslim clerics did not provide sufficient knowledge about Islam. According to the participants, there is no credibility of clerics because they are not competent enough. They memorize few principles only in spite of getting detailed and comprehensive knowledge of Islam. Therefore, they cannot deliberately explain the religious issues according to the requirement of the current age.

It is clear from the above mentioned response that young educated females did not consider clerics as the reliable religious authority. Therefore, they did not want to depend on clerics to study about the religious matters. In this scenario, young females preferred to study Islam by themselves with the help of competent and qualified religious scholars.

Role of Religious Institutes:

Above all, the religious institutes like Al Huda have played a major role in the religiosity of young educated females. This institute was inspiring for the participants because it was based on highly qualified religious scholars. Al Huda offers an engagement in the acquisition and circulation of religious knowledge and for the processes of incorporating piety and self-reformation, which the women deem central for their self-understanding as Muslims. It provides an opportunity to young females to learn about Islam through modern techniques and technology like multimedia and internet.

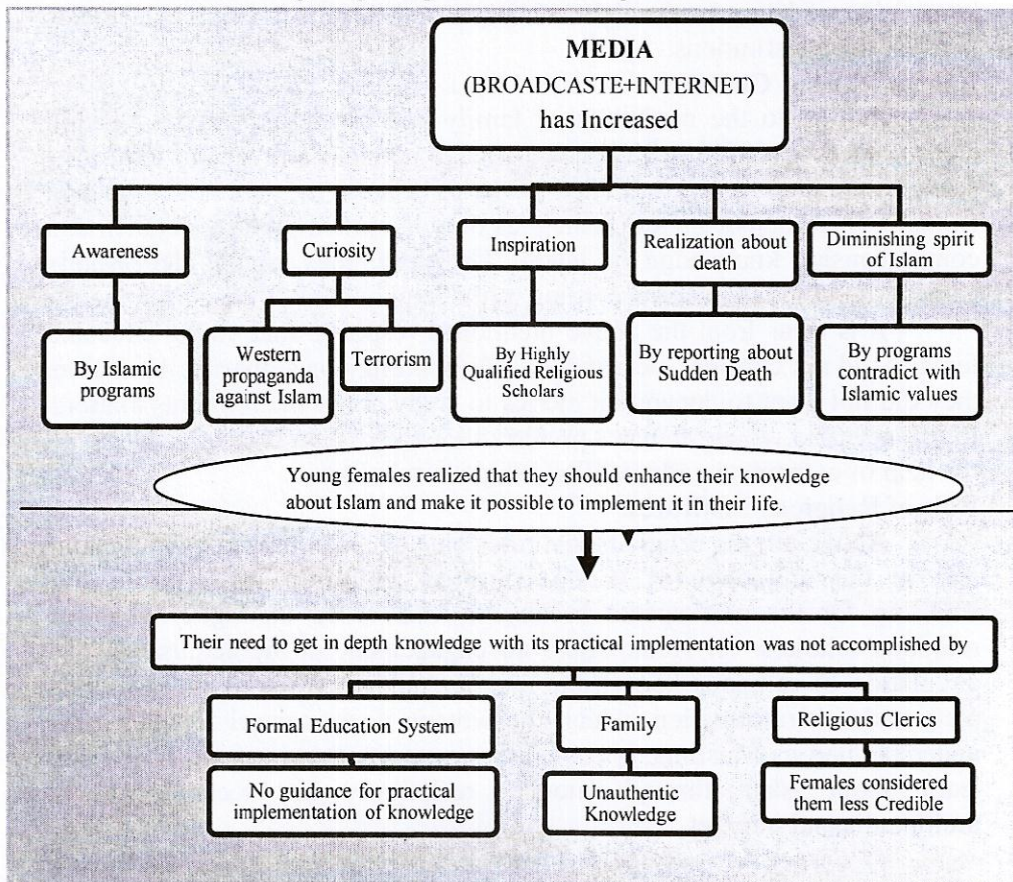
Furthermore, the participants also stated that the religious scholars at Al-Huda tried to explain every Islamic concept with logic. They had adopted an effective teaching methodology. They were soft spoken and did not force students to practice Islam in their daily life.

Thus, this institute has provided a great opportunity to females to study Islam according to the requirements of this modern age.

GROUNDING THEORY:

All of the above mentioned factors contributed in the formulation of a new grounded theory. It is quite evident from above mentioned factors that young females realized through media that they have to increase their knowledge about Islam. The respondents felt that the formal education system, family and religious clerics had not provided sufficient knowledge about their religion. This gap was filled by religious foundations based on highly qualified religious scholars. Therefore, young females joined these religious institutes to get authentic and adequate knowledge about Islam.

The following diagram presents a clear picture of this scenario.



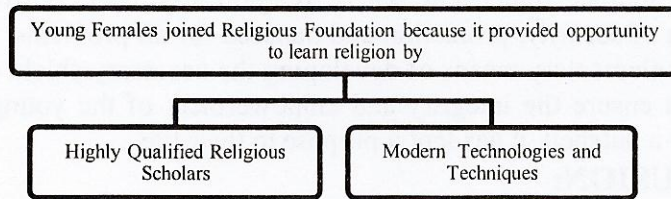


Figure1: Grounded Theory: Factors of Religiosity among young educated females

Grounded Theory: Need and Opportunity Theory of Religiosity

From the above mentioned factors, it can be stated that Media has developed a need among young females to enhance their knowledge about Islam with its practical implementation. This need was accomplished by religious institute or foundation because it has provided an opportunity to young educated females to learn in-depth knowledge of Islam.

Thus, data analysis in the present study has explored the need and opportunity theory of religiosity. In short, it is based on two important findings:

- i. Need developed by Media
- ii. Opportunity provided by religious foundation

It is the viewpoint of researchers that media has developed a need to study Islam among young females by increasing their awareness, curiosity and inspiration. It has also realized them about life after death as well as diminishing spirit of Islam. This need of young females was accomplished by religious foundations. The religious foundation has provided an opportunity to study Islam by highly qualified scholars with modern techniques and technology.

Thus, media and modern religious foundation both has played a crucial role in the religiosity of young educated females.

DISCUSSION:

In the course of this article, the focus was drawn on a quite diverse scope of aspects surrounding the relationship of young educated females with religiosity. It was assessed that media plays a significant role to educate and to motivate young females about Islam in the true letter and spirits. The act of instilling desire and curiosity, socio-religious awareness, stoic realization of death, exposure to religious authority and religious discourses has been facilitated by media. The insufficiency of religious knowledge, the gradual detachment from religious authorities and the stereotypical association of Islam with fundamentalism have facilitated the

acquisition of religious knowledge in females. The research article has elucidated another dimension where religion has been portrayed as a mechanism of security, protection and panacea for all problems. Therefore, it offers an elementary means of developing the necessary shield of cardinal virtues that ensure the integrity and empowerment of the young educated females. In a nutshell, it has lent a purpose to their life.

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that several social institutions like mass media, formal education system and family has played a significant role in the motivation of young females towards the study of Islam. Media has increased awareness and curiosity about Islam. It has stimulated young females to study Islam in detail. There was a dearth of Islamic knowledge in the institutions of family and formal education system. In fact, the participants were inspired by educated people in the field of religion who had a sense of religious authority. So, they joined Islamic foundation because it had provided them an opportunity to study Islam by highly qualified religious scholars. This organization offered a chance to collaborate with publicly committed Muslims who are engaged with Islam on a collective, institutionalized level. Hence, all of above mentioned social institutions are important in inculcating religiosity among young educated females.

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- ¹ Sunnah denotes the practices of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which he taught and practically instituted as a teacher. (retrieve from Wikipedia)
 - ² Al Huda International is an Islamic institute. It provides Islamic education which based on Quran and Sunnah. It has many campuses in Pakistan, Canada and USA.
 - ³ Hadith is is a saying or an act or tacit approval or disapproval ascribed either validly or invalidly to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. (Retrieved by Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith>)