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The Reformist Ideology of Brahma Kumaris: An Islamic Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

The Research article highlights the issue of women and religious reforms and in contemporary Hinduism and focuses on one of the women dominated contemporary Hindu religious reform movements as a phenomenon of reviving the role of women as religious and spiritual leaders in Hinduism. The study is basically analytical in nature as the researchers have provided an analysis of the religious ideology and historical background of the leader of the 'Brahma Kumari organization' and then an Islamic appraisal for these ideas. The purpose of the research is to analyze the phenomena of contemporary socio religious reforms and the way these have upheld the status of Hindu women with an Islamic viewpoint. The article' starts with an introduction of the issue and provides a brief account of the life history of Dada Lekhraj the founder. Then there is a detailed analysis of his religious and reformist ideas and that how it presented its ideology in the light of religion and how this organization has interpreted some key concepts of Hinduism. Finally, it is concluded that the movement of Brahma Kumari is a religious, spiritual and social reform organization and is a living example of religious leadership of women in contemporary Hinduism. The reform that is triggered by this movement has also some connotation with the role of women and some Islamic social ideals while its own particular religious traits demark it from the contemporary feminist ideologies.

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Introduction

Status of women in Contemporary Hinduism has emerged as a crucial debate. There emerged various attempts at interpreting the religious texts and certain positions on women are vindicated in different ways. Several new religious and spiritual movements have appeared in India in the name of revivalism and reformation, in the contemporary period. Some of them are unique in a sense that they are being led by female religious leaders also claiming to be an Avatar for today's world. Some of these movements have established their centers in Western countries as well after India. Brahma Kumari organization is also one of these new religious movements that appeared in India in 20th century and then established itself in different parts of the world. It emphasizes upon an active participation of women in social, spiritual and religious activities along with presenting their religion in a new practical form.

This article not only focuses on the key concepts of one such reform organization but also explores its religious concepts from an Islamic perspective. The Brahma Kumari organization started with the slogan of bringing change in the society by giving a leading status to women, thus it is analyzed how and to what extent this reform has been successful in its claim? An attempt is made to highlight the relevance with other social and religious reform movements. The areas where Brahma Kumari has adopted a different way from the traditional religion and the proximity of their practices with the Islamic standards are also discussed here.

Literature Review:

The key theme of this research is the study of the religious and social reforms introduced by Brahma Kumaris with an Islam appraisal. As the issue is taken from a quite different viewpoint, no exactly related books and articles are there regarding the area of this research. That is why most relevant material in this literature review is the web sources and articles about Hindu religious reform movements of the contemporary period. There are writings about contemporary developments in Hindu Religion that also address the ideas of reform movements, but the Islamic appraisal is required for such a study.

Important among these is *Hinduism and Modernity* by David Smith. This book deals with the Hindu reforms and discusses Hindu Islamic inter-action during the modern period.¹

Female Ascetics in Hinduism jointly has been edited by two contemporary scholars Lyn Teskey and Wendy Doniger. The author discusses two aspects of a woman's life; spiritual and householder; based on the fieldwork conducted in *Varanasi* Banaras and explores into the social and personal backgrounds of these women, their institutions and their ways of life.²

The article *Women and Social Reform movements in modern India* by Prashar Pooja³ focuses on the social and religious background of the Indian society to various reform

movements. The writer talks about some controversial religious customs that have affected the lives of women negatively and the way the social and religious reformers in contemporary period have criticized such customs.⁴

The article *The Contemporary Hindu Women of India: An overview* by Dr. Tahira Basharat⁵ reflects on how women in Contemporary India are struggling for a better social status. The writer argues that women do not have a respectable place in Hinduism as a result even the literate women in big cities are not treated in a good manner and all these violations of women rights are committed in the name of Religion.⁶ Another article *Women's Issues: Contributions of The Reform and Reformers in Colonial India* focuses on the contribution of the reformers of the colonial period to improve the status of women.⁷

The tenets of Brahma Kumaris:

Brahma Kumari Organization is a popular women led religious and social reform organization that has introduced a new dimension to contemporary Hinduism in the light of their own interpretation from religious texts. The organization justifies its assertion on the religious and spiritual leadership of women through interpretation of religious texts. Before getting directly into the details of the ideology of Brahma Kumaris it is important to have an insight into the origin and historical background of the organization as well as a brief life history of its founder.

Origin of Brahma Kumari Organization:

The name *Brahma Kumari* is a purely Hindu name. Brahma is the Supreme Being and above all deities according to the Hindu belief. The word *Kumari* is used for young virgin females in Hindi language. The word is also used specifically for the beautiful and young embodiments of Hindu goddesses⁸. Thus, the name is applied in the meaning of 'Daughters of Brahma' or all those women who have devoted themselves in the service of God by adopting the way of Brahma Kumari organization. Another meaning is also explained by one of the members of the movement: 'They are those Brahmins, who are born of *Brahma's* Lotus like mouth, through which they receive knowledge about God.'⁹ The movement is well-known for its emphasis upon the role of women as spiritual leaders. Brahma Baba believed that women can be more influential as religious leaders as he believed that the values necessary for a caring society such as patience, tolerance, sacrifice, kindness and love are more prominent in the female nature as compared to males. The name Brahma Kumari was first used by the founder Dada Lekhraj himself.

Dada Lekhraj Kripalani or Lekhraj Khubchand Kripalani was born in 1884 and was the founder of this reform organization. He belonged to a traditional Hindu religious family and known for their strict observance of religious practices from Hyderabad Sindh, located in present day Pakistan. After completing his early education, he started his business as a wheat merchant but soon changed it and started working as a jeweler in the city. Being a devotee of Lord *Vishnu*, he recited Gita regularly¹⁰ and

was inclined towards spirituality. He is reported to have experienced the visions of Lord *Shiva* when he was 60 and devoted rest of his life to serve religion and providing spiritual guidance to the people. After certain religious experiences he is said to have left all his activities as a businessman in 1936, and had established of a trust, under the leadership of managing committee of a group of eight ladies. This was the initial form of what is known as 'Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University' today.¹¹ The trust was given the name of *Om-Mandali*¹² or *Om-Mandil* in the beginning. This trust worked initially according to the ideology of Dada Lekhraj, who also came to be known with the titles of 'Om Baba' or 'Brahma Baba' as it was believed that God speaks through him. The first woman to lead this committee was the eldest daughter of Dada Lekhraj, known with the title of 'Om Radha'. Then *Dadi Prakash Mani* as the second.¹³ Here it is important to note that leadership of the movement has remained with the women since the times of Dada Lekhraj and no male is appointed as the head. Interestingly Dada Lekhraj believed that women are more spiritual by nature than men and are more passionate and tolerant hence they are more eligible of leadership as compared to men. Initially this trust became very popular with its purpose of spiritual uplifting of the people especially the women. But the idea that women are religiously and spiritually closer to God and practice of celibacy made it vulnerable to severe criticism. As all young girls after joining the movement were taught to practice celibacy and those who were already married had to leave their husbands because having sexual relation was not allowed for Brahma Kumaris. Practicing sex was considered a poison, a criminal act and a door to hell according to the teachings of Dada Lekhraj.¹⁴ As a result of these teachings, the followers had to face an intense reaction from the public especially from those whose wives or daughters were influenced from the teachings of this movement. The males of the area established an anti-*Om Mandali* group to save their women from this movement. Due to strict public reaction in Hyderabad, the movement shifted to Karachi but here also, they had to face cases against them. Due to such issues the movement was officially banned by the local government in 1939 but it reemerged by changing its name from *Om Mandali* to 'Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University' which is still in use.¹⁵ At the time of partition of the Sub-Continent in 1947, Brahma Kumaris had their head office in Karachi, Pakistan that was shifted to Mount Abu in Rajasthan, India in 1950. After the death of Brahma Baba in 1969 the organization came under direct female religious leadership and Dadi Prakash maniji became the first female head of the community. After her death in 2007, three ladies are leading the organization, Dadi Jankiji, Dadi Hidayamohinji also known as Dadi Gulzar and Dadi Ratanmohinji while sister Shivani is also an important figure.¹⁶ 18th January is celebrated as the meditation day by all Brahma Kumaris around the world in the memory of Dada Lekhraj because he passed away on this date.¹⁷

Being an international social welfare organization, it is also working as a non-government institution with United Nations in the fields of education and child welfare specifically.¹⁸ It offers its welfare services under “The World Renewal Spiritual Trust” which is a public educational charitable Trust registered in Bombay, Maharashtra State, India under the Bombay public Trust Act of 1950.¹⁹ The organization has emerged as public welfare organization recently more than a religious one. Brahma Kumaris of New York talk about the four main tenets in the life of a follower, *gayan* (knowledge), *Yoga* (meditation), *Dharna* (To inculcate virtue in one’s inner self) and *Seva* (Service to mankind).²⁰ It also offers its services as a spiritually healing for mental treatments. It is working with Indian Psychiatrist Society Task Force (2008-2009). The Society has published a detailed book with the name of “*Spirituality and Mental Health: Reflections of the Past, Applications in the present and projections for the Future*” in collaboration with the Medical wing of Raj Yoga education and Research Foundation Mount Abu.²¹ The book is published at Om Shanti Press Mount Abu as mentioned on its title page. It focuses upon facilitating the local community by arranging seminars and workshops in jails, hospitals, old-houses, drug rehabilitation centers, schools and business communities for their spiritual uplift. It also provides support to women for their social and economic empowerment. Though men are also working members of this organization, but the administrative and decision-making positions are reserved only for women.

Religious beliefs of Brahma Kumaris:

The Hindi name for the institution is Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, but it became famous as Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University all over the world with 4000 branches in 70 countries. It offers a variety of spiritual courses, educational programs, Seminars and workshops to its followers. The focus of this organization is to provide welfare support to the local communities, especially women to establish themselves as important members of society.²² Although the movement has its origins in Hinduism, but it differs a lot from the traditional religion in its basic beliefs and that is why it is considered as distinct from Hinduism by majority of the scholars. According to many scholars, it is among the new religious trends that have appeared in Hinduism in the twentieth century. Some basic religious beliefs of Brahma Kumaris are discussed below:

i. Brahma Kumaris and the concept of God:

Brahma Kumaris consider that having belief in the existence of a Supreme God, the creator of all is not necessary as they think that human beings are not able to produce any proof for His existence. However, they do not deny God at all, according to them God doesn’t have any shape or a physical body. They also hold that God did not create the whole world and everything inside it directly rather He is the source of each and everything inside it. He is not created neither has any end. Thus, they talk about a Supreme Soul that is different from the souls of human beings. It has all perfect

attributes in their perfect form such as the Supreme Father, the Supreme Mother the Supreme Teacher, the perfect peace and perfect knowledge etc.²³ Different names are used for this Supreme Soul as: God Father, Shiva, Brahma, Baba, Ocean of Bliss, Ocean of Love, Ocean of virtues, the Liberator and the Guide.²⁴ One cannot tell exactly where this Supreme Soul lives but they hold that it is beyond the physical world and does not appear here with the help of matter.²⁵ The worship of God in all religions is considered by Brahma Kumaris as just different paths to reach to that Supreme Soul. Thus, every religion is just a way to find that Supreme Soul. Brahma Kumaris don't build temples with iconographical images of gods and goddesses neither worship the traditional gods of Hinduism which is something different from the traditional Hindu religion. They also give a new interpretation to the concept of *trimurti*²⁶ in Hinduism. Traditional Religion explains it with *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* while according to Brahma Kumaris, they are *Brahma Shiva* and *Shankar*.²⁷ He is the person about whom it is believed that through him the Supreme Soul transmitted its light after the death of Dada Lekhraj.²⁸ That is why belief in *Shankar* is an important part of Brahma Kumari's faith in God.²⁹

ii. **Brahma Kumaris and Human beings:**

Brahma Kumaris believe that the souls of all Human Beings are eternal. It is because of the law of *karma* that the souls come to the physical world in the form of human beings. Thus, they believe that human body is necessary for the soul to express its characteristics in the material world and because of this attachment with the body the soul loses the higher level of its attributes and matter overcomes. There are three necessary elements of a soul intellect, conscious and unconscious mind, intellect is there to preserve the mind from influences of the external factors. Brahma kumaris believe that if the mind is influenced by the external factors then the human soul becomes spiritually darkened. The lesser the influence is, the closer the mind to the original condition of purification of the soul. This is the condition of a conscious mind. The unconscious mind is where all life experiences are recorded with soul's relation to matter. The thoughts and ideas generated in human mind are also recorded in this unconscious mind.³⁰ Brahma Kumaris hold a different position than the traditional Hindu view on *karma* that every soul is reincarnated according to the type of its *karma* matter into different forms of life, but Brahma Kumaris believe that souls are reincarnated into human bodies only, whatever type of *karma* it has generated in the previous birth. The reincarnated human beings act to the ideas generated by mind. This *karma* can be good or bad. Thus, the soul gets involved in the cycle of birth and rebirth until the mind is purified. For this purpose, Brahma kumaris offer the practice of *raja yoga*. As the level of consciousness of a mind arises with this meditation, the person becomes a righteous one and when the level decreases, the person becomes sinful.³¹

iii. Brahma Kumaris and Creation:

Brahma Kumaris hold a view closer to *sankhiya yoga* on creation.³² It believes in the presence of duality in the form of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*.³³ According to their approach, God is not the direct creator for every creation in this world rather just a supreme mover. According to their view the matter is eternal and inside this matter there are eternal elements, it is the evolution and dissolution of these elements that things are created and come to their end and this process continues without any end. The world goes into a process of transformation after every five thousand years,³⁴ thus one world cycle that itself consists of six *yogas* is completed in five thousand years³⁵ and is followed by another cycle and so on.

iv. Brahma Kumaris on Death and Salvation:

As discussed earlier, Brahma Kumaris believe in the eternity of souls. Death occurs only to physical bodies, not to souls. When a soul takes out its energy back from all body organs, no connection is left between body and soul, death occurs at this moment. Soul carries the burden of deeds and actions performed in this life in the form of *karma* with it in the next life. The status of new birth is decided on the type of *karma* matter accumulated, because of these deeds and actions. According to their understanding, the soul enters a woman's womb when she conceives. With the development of the mind, it forgets the memories of its previous life. After the child takes birth and starts a new life, his mind and soul adjust with the new circumstances. Through this process every soul has to pass through a number of births until it gets salvation.³⁶ Salvation, for Brahma Kumaris means returning of the soul back to that original condition of purification in which once it was, before coming to this world. Each soul, whether good or bad, has to come to this world to perform his role in each world cycle. Even the highest soul has to appear once in a world cycle to perform its role in the revival of righteousness. When the soul is in the material world it desires to go back to *Brahmaloka*.³⁷ But after spending a specific period of time in this world, it desires to go to the material world to start its life here. In this way the cycle of every soul continues.³⁸

v. Brahma Kumaris and Meditation Practices (Raja Yoga):

Raja yoga holds an important place among the beliefs of Brahma Kumaris. Special classes are arranged, and courses are offered at Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University, to teach about *raja yoga* and practicing it. But it is also important to know that *raja yoga* is not a new type of yoga practice or worship introduced by Brahma Kumaris in 20th century rather it has adopted the same ancient techniques of *raja yoga* and it is also interesting to note that both the *raja yoga* and *sankhiya* are deeply related to each other in ancient *Sanskrit* texts where it was also known as *hatha yoga*.³⁹

"Raja Yoga is popularly known as Ashtanga Yoga or "the eight-fold path" that leads to spiritual liberation".⁴⁰ Literally "Raja" means king in Sanskrit and as such, *raja yoga* considered the king of all yoga types and "the royal path". The earliest records show

that it was introduced by the sage *Patanjali*⁴¹ in 2nd century ce.⁴² The *raja yoga* was considered as the highest level of *yoga* path attained by a *yogi*, rather than a way of getting ultimate salvation. *Raja yoga* is considered as “the ultimate highest level of *yoga* practices and *Hatha Yoga* is said to be the way of achieving this level.”⁴³

Whenever Brahma Kumaris talk about worship, they talk about *raja yoga* meditation. That is why the study of spirituality of Brahma Kumaris is not completed until *raja yoga* is not studied. Those who are taking courses of meditation at BKWSU or full-time members of the movement, must meditate on daily basis. A complete system of meditation is necessary to attain a higher level of consciousness. A complete method of practicing *raja yoga* is described by BKWSU, in a booklet published by Mount Abu publishing center *Raja Yoga meditation step-by-step Teachers-Guide 1994*. Online material is also available for the beginners. “*A Handy Book of Meditation*” is a famous online book published by *Brahma Kumaris Australia*.

vi. Murli: The Holy text of Brahma Kumaris:

The Holy Scripture of Brahma Kumaris is *Murli*. This word *Murli* is also used for a popular traditional musical instrument, flute, in Hindi. According to Brahma Kumaris *Murli* is not something new but as ancient as *Vedas* in Hinduism. One of the scholars of *Brahma Kumaris* who writes with the name of *Pari*,⁴⁴ claims that *Murli* belongs to the second group of Sacred Texts *Smriti*⁴⁵ as its texts were also compiled initially by Baba Lekhraj.⁴⁶ They are still editable by the religious leaders of Brahma Kumaris. There are two types of *Murli*, *Sakar Murli* and *Avyakt Murli*.⁴⁷ They are also known as ‘*Vanis*’.

vii. Brahma Kumaris and women:

As mentioned earlier, the organization is women specific. Men can also be the member of it, but leading positions are given to women only. Providing women, a better social and religious status is the basic concern of the movement. Along with this aim it also participates in other women related welfare works and is known as a worldwide female led religious and spiritual organization that emerged within Hinduism with a belief in women religious leadership and its practical implementation in the society. Brahma Baba focused upon the spiritual element in womanhood with a belief that women have a potential of becoming a better spiritual leader. Through promoting the notion of equality and respect for everyone, he taught that all are equal in the sight of Divine. Three members of the organization sister *BK Binny*, sister *BK Urmil* and *BK Sudesh* attended an inauguration ceremony of the project on women empowerment along with a summit during February 2019 with the theme ‘*She is the solution*’. Sister *BK Urmil* talked about gender equality and changing the trends from grass root level at the event. *Brahma Kumari’s* booklet about gender equality was also distributed at the end.⁴⁸ A special model is designed to show the way of women progress. It is published online in a book form with the name ‘*The Four Faces of Woman*’. It shows four faces of women which carry different aspects of woman’s life. The first one is the

'Eternal Face' which means the inner innocence present in every woman. Second is the 'Traditional Face' which protects a woman's boundaries and limits. The influences which she receives from her surroundings also come under this category. At third level there is 'Modern Face' when a woman resists against the traditional settings, breaks the boundaries, gets freedom and sets her life according to her wishes. This is the reaction which comes out of her being as the result of what she faces around her. The last and fourth face is 'Shakti Face' which is the face of a powerful woman. She knows the limitations of traditions but seeks internal contentment and ultimate beauty. She becomes a responsible person of the society through awakening her eternal powers.⁴⁹

At the moment the movement is working on different women empowerment programs in many areas of the world. In Chile and USA their theme is 'My courage, Your courage'. Here they are working with the aim of making women brave. In Costa Rica their slogan is 'Holistic balance and Self Care'. Through this project they are working against domestic violence. They are also working on grooming women as professionals in healthcare, judiciary and as primary school teachers. In Russia their slogan is 'A Treasure deep in the Soul'. It is to enhance the inner deeper qualities of love, peace, wisdom, purity and happiness. They promote the idea that empowering a woman means to empower the whole family. Dialogues are arranged for women in metropolitan societies to bring them closer and to understand the problems of each other. It also teaches respecting other's faith. Brahma Kumaris also arrange weekly workshops for women related to issues like moral values, family health and teaching meditation. The director of the Brahma Kumari centre in Trinidad received National Gold Award in 2014 for her community services for women and women development. A dialogue was arranged in Ukrain about three secrets of beauty. They are good relationships, expressing inner qualities and taking a well-balanced vegetarian diet.⁵⁰ In 2007 a delegation of young girls and women from Brahma kumaris of India, Mexico, South Africa and other parts of Asia and Africa participated in 'Annual Commission on status of women' at United Nation's Head quarter. These women were inspired to arrange workshops in their regions for other women with three themes: Exploring our inner resources, promoting gender equality and empowering women and young girls.⁵¹

The movement declares in its vision that it will take initiatives for women equality, restoring dignity, self-respect and creating for them an environment where they could feel safe and protected.⁵² The movement also arranges certain activities related with women health and education.⁵³

Along with these projects of their own, the organization also works in collaboration with the government and other women welfare associations to resolve women related issues. Because of these services, it is known as one of the leading female dominated movements in India and other parts of the world.⁵⁴

viii. Reforms of Brahma Kumaris: an Islamic appraisal:

Women's role and status is also one of the key issues that have always been important in the teachings of Islam. After the detailed analysis of this women lead Hindu reform movement it seems necessary to have an Islamic viewpoint towards those areas that are focused a lot by Brahma Kumari organization.

i- Social status of women:

It is the characteristic of Islam that it focuses upon providing a respectable status to women in society. Their rights and responsibilities regarding social and family life are clearly mentioned in Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Islam gives rights to every woman to take decision about her life according to her liking and disliking. The equal status of women has been mentioned in Qur'an in different ways such as:

'Indeed the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so-for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.'⁵⁵

Islam has set an example of bringing reforms in women's plight in Arab society shortly after its advent. Even at a time when Islam was not a ruling power in Arab, it talked about the inhuman Arab practices against women and condemned them strictly. Islam does not discriminate against the women in their spiritual, religious and social rights

ii- Denial of Gender discrimination:

Islam stands for equality and justice in human societies. It has always denied the classification of humanity based on race, religion and gender. All are equal in the sight of Allah as it is said in Qur'an:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاٖۗٔلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْۤا اِنَّ
اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

'O mankind! We have created you from one man and woman and made you in the form of nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily the most respectable amongst you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most pious amongst you'.⁵⁶

According to a tradition of the Holy Prophet ﷺ the best among the believers is he who is good with his family and of course wife is the key figure in one's family.

Brahma Kumari organization has also gone against the traditional practices of Hindu society by denying this discrimination. It opened its spiritual sessions, worship places

and circle of devotees for everyone whether men or women. It talks about equality, justice and religion for all. This is also different from the traditional Brahmanism where women are still not allowed at some places to enter the temples and to read from certain sacred books. This is also a prominent feature of Islam that it talks about everyone's status in religion and no any class of the society is banned from participating in religious and spiritual activities. But it is also important to note that as contrast to the practice of celibacy by Brahma kumaris, Islam teaches a model of social and family life for both men and women.

iii- Worship:

Islamic worships are the symbols of complete submission and total devotion to Allah Almighty. A Muslim gives the sign of submission to Allah physically and mentally with fulfilling the required conditions. This physical submission becomes a source of spiritual elevation for the worshipper. According to the Islamic viewpoint worships in Islam are also related to the social and practical lives of the believers. For instance, *salāt* (prayer) when offered at collective level becomes a source of developing relation with other Muslims of one locality. It is the symbol of equality among Muslims. Fasting symbolizes that Allah is the foremost priority of the Muslims and His commandments are above all for him. It teaches sacrificing for Allah and for other fellow Muslims. The worship of *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) reflects unity and equality among Muslims belonging to different parts of the world. *hajj* and *zakāt* (Alms taxes) teach sacrificing and spending in the way of Allah.⁵⁷

It is well known that worship in Hinduism is performed in temples with images of gods and goddesses in front of the worshippers, but Brahma Kumaris do not consider it necessary. Islam condemns the iconographical images of God and *Salāt* can be offered anywhere if the conditions are fulfilled.⁵⁸ Brahma Kumari organization also encourages its followers to practice meditation anywhere if they are not able to come to the specific place. They also seem closer to Islamic practice of offering prayer when they sing their sacred songs five times a day almost at the same timings in which Muslims offer their prayers five times in twenty-four hours.⁵⁹

iv- Service to Humanity:

Islam gives great respect to humanity. Everything and all creations in this world are created according to the physical and mental requirements of human beings. How humans are using several living and non-living things, present on the planet Earth for his benefit, clearly shows that man has been given an upper hand in this creation. This concept is presented in Qur'ān in clear words when Allah says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ
فِيهَا مَنْ يَفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ
قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

'And when your lord said to the angels; No doubt I'm going to create a caliph on Earth.....'.⁶⁰

The five objectives of Shari'ah: *hifz-ud-Din* (protection of religion), *hifz-un-Nafs* (protection of life), *hifz-un-Nasl* (protection of lineage), *hifz-ul-'Aql* (protection of intellect) and *hifz-ul-Māl* (protection of property) gives a clear picture of how much respect Shari'ah has given to human life.

It is only the teachings of Islam that presented the concept of spending money for the welfare of society. It is made compulsory for wealthy Muslims to give a specific amount of money to the poor of the society in the form of alms taxes *zakāt*. Commandments of its obligation are there in Qur'an and the traditions of Holy Prophet ﷺ at several places.⁶¹ Its purpose is to make the people familiar with the problems of others and that wealth should not be limited in a few hands. It should circulate in the society. Same is the purpose of Brahma Kumari organization when they ask for donations from their followers. They seem closer to Islamic teachings when they demand from their members to give their wealth and properties for public welfare. Although they are not following this concept in the same way as in Islam, but this is something understood that it is not a Hindu practice.

v- Promoting Morality:

Islam emphasizes a lot upon promoting moral and ethical values in human societies. Qur'an and Hadith provide a rich material regarding the importance of moral and ethical values. There are clear commandments about respecting humanity, rights of women, slaves, parents, prisoners of war and even non-Muslims. The subject of *sūrah Al-Hujrāt* is morality only. The criteria for getting higher status in the sight of Allah is to be morally good. According to a famous saying of Prophet ﷺ the best amongst the Muslims is he who is good with his wife and family. His companions are also known for preaching high moral values, practicing them between themselves and implementing them everywhere they went. So much so that moral and ethical values became a necessary part of Islamic society. Islamic history is full of such incidents when Muslim rulers respected the non-Muslim community and their worship places after conquering their lands. Notable among these are the conduct of Caliph *Hadrat Umar رضي الله عنه* at the time of the conquest of *Bait-ul-Maqdas*, how *Salah-ud-Din Ayyubi* treated Christians during crusades, how Muslim rulers of Spain treated their non-Muslim public and many more are a part of the history of Muslim morality. Due to this level of morality even non-Muslim public trusted Muslim rulers more than their

own. Muslim invasion of Sindh is important in this respect. The Hindus of Sindh welcomed and loved *Muhammad bin Qasim* due to that respect which he gave to every person in the areas which he conquered. No temple was destroyed, no women and children were taken as prisoners, no houses were looted or burnt. In short, religion and morality go hand in hand in an Islamic state. Brahma Kumari organization also focuses upon character building through proper education and inculcating moral and ethical values among their followers. These teachings have always been a part of Islamic traditions.

Role of worship places in welfare activities:

Islam is a practical religion and practical aspect of social life is very important according to Islamic *shari'ah*. Since its beginning Islam had started guiding its followers to think about their proper religious, social, educational as well as collective grooming so that they could find a proper platform to share their problems and finding their solutions in the light of their religion. Worship places have always been significant in this respect in Islamic societies that they played a role as community centers and social platforms where Muslims not only worshiped five times a day but knew about the problems of others along with finding their solutions. History of Islam tells that initially, when Muslims were not in a strong position in Makkah, they used to sit in the house of Arqam for religious education and worship. Then, shortly after migration, very first step taken by the Prophet ﷺ was building a mosque, *Masjid-e-Nabwi*, which not only served as a worship place but also as an early school and a community center for Muslims where Prophet ﷺ sit and talked to His ﷺ companions over different issues along with discussions about the problems of Muslims and newly established state of Madina.

It is also observed while studying the practices of Brahma Kumari organization that their worship places also serve as community centers and sometimes educational institutes. Their worship place is an open center for everyone where devotees offer prayers five times a day and read from *Murlis*. Problems of members are discussed; issues of the organization are also settled here which is quite a different practice from traditional Hindu religion.

Conclusion:

To conclude it can be said that Brahma Kumari organization is a social reform movement working in the name of religion. They never talked about Islam but surprisingly they are closer to Islam in many of their practices when studied by an Islamic viewpoint. The contemporary Hindu social reform movements are working to improve the status of women in their society and are trying to give those rights to their women which have already been given by Islam to the Muslim women, centuries ago. They are now trying to inculcate those values in their society which have always been a part of Muslim society. When leaders of Brahma Kumari organization justify their

concepts in the light of religion, it also supports the Islamic stance of importance of religion in human society.

The researcher concludes that Brahma Kumari organization can be a good example of new religious movement in contemporary Hinduism which is trying to present Hinduism in the form of a progressive worldview in front of the world. They are trying to relate Hinduism with the changing religious trends of Western world as well where women are coming forward as religious leaders. Although Brahma Kumari organization never spoke about the issues like globalization or global religion but its approach of presenting God's message for everyone, whether male or female or whatever religion he follows, seems getting closer to the idea of global message. Finally, it is also concluded that this organization has emerged as a women centered organization and since its establishment it has been working in the name of women, but it does not have any relation with feminism as it has preceded the phenomenon of feminism. Moreover, it does not interpret its religious concepts and texts in the way the feminists have been approaching different religious traditions including Hinduism.



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- ⁵ Dr. Tahira Basharat is the Head of the Department of Islamic Studies UMT Lahore. She is the first one among the ladies to get PhD degree in Islamic Studies in Pakistan. She is known for her valuable research work in Hindu philosophy and women related issues in the Sub-Continent.
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²⁶ The triad of three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

²⁷ Shankar is the name of a person who appeared after Dada Lekhraj. He preached the Brahma Kumaris beliefs and the practice of Raja Yoga in a different and simple way. Due to his teachings many of the Brahma Kumaris are joining the Adhyatmik Ishwariya Vishva Vidyalaya of Bholenath Shev Shankar, situated in Kampil, (UP). The group has become a challenging one for the original movement and that is why authorities in Mount Abu don't accept *Shankar* as the new mean to convey the message of *Shiva*.

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³² Sankhiya/Samkhiya or Samakhiya Yoga is one of the six philosophical systems belonging to astika group in Indian philosophy.

³³ Purusha is the eternal male element present in the matter while Prakriti is the female energy necessary for creation. Both are the necessary parts of the eternal matter.

³⁴ Bed Singh., *The Teachings of the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Movements*. IJT 44/1&2 (2002), PP. 94-106. https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/44_094.pdf.

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³⁶ Why believe in reincarnation?

www.brahmakumaris.org/japan/whatwedo/courses/fciryim/topics.htm/reincarnation.htm. Retrieved on June 7, 2018

³⁷ The world of souls according to Brahma Kumaris. A soul can go back to it after getting purification and practicing Raja Yoga.

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³⁹ www.hinduism.co.za/rajayoga.htm. Retrieved on June 11, 2018

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⁴¹ Patanjali is said to be a great Hindu saint and the writer of many Sanskrit texts especially yoga sutras

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/5338/raja.yoga>. Retrieved on June 11, 2018

⁴⁴ Pari is a Malaysian writer, with a degree in Law but greatly influenced with the meditation techniques of Brahma Kumaris and meditates regularly at one of the Brahma Kumari centers in Malaysia. She claims to have certain unusual spiritual experiences since 1996 and started writing articles explaining the things depending upon her experiences, with the name of "Brahma Kumari Pari". In 2015 she started writing books instead of articles in different cosmological issues, explaining what she had already written in her articles.

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⁴⁷ *Sakar* is a famous term in Hindi language which is used in different meanings. One of its meanings is 'personification' as well. The word is also used for monocrpous plants in Hindi. These meanings might be the reason behind applying the name *Sakar* to first type of *Murli* because they are those parts of sacred texts which were delivered by the Divine to Lekhraj Kripalani. Whatever religious instructions or sayings are given by Brahma Baba are known as *Sakar Murli*. The other type is *Avyakt Murli*. *Avyakt* means 'angelic'. They are that portion of the sacred texts about which it is believed that they were delivered after when Baba Lekhraj moved to the world of souls. He joined the highest soul and transformed into the most perfect Being just like an angel. He kept sending messages to humanity through religious personalities of Brahma Kumaris. It is said that it was Dadi Gulzar who is receiving the messages since 1969, the year of death of Dada Lekhraj.

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