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ABSTRACT

The status of women anywhere in the world is changing regardless of the opportunities their environment is providing for them. Gender studies, with special emphasis on women's issues, challenges and failures are receiving attention in research across disciplines. The stories of success and empowerment are also coming in their way out to the world. Moves and movements broadcasted through different platforms provide strength to the fellow women to expose their efforts and get the desired result through support and cooperation. So is the case with Muslim women across the world. They are demanding what they were denied for years. They are grabbing their rights. They are at the forefront to uphold equality. However certain lives are not recorded, certain achievements are not given enough attention. Certain lives are

still broadcasted as backward, certain communities are still labeled as static cultures without any progress.

The case of Muslim women in India, especially of Kerala is one such category, wherein the group is dynamic, yet the stories are not coming out. Research is stagnant, not the group. In the past Muslim women in Kerala were described as the victims of Polygamy and patriarchy, they were not educated, never employed, and they were also the victims of early marriage. The research was true in finding the causes of their backwardness and research was the tool to inform us what causes the psycho-social fragility of these women. However, time demands a revisit to the status of these women. Research into the status of these women, how do they fight this victimization? In the periphery, a lot of modern Muslim women seem educated, employed, empowered, and constantly in battle with patriarchy and unjust life circumstances. Unfortunately, we lack research evidence; we also lack research material of the present-day Muslim women.

Muslim women in Kerala needs to be researched in terms of their life circumstances, their status, the changes in their gender roles, and the influences of modern higher education if they have access to it. The geo-political peculiarities of the state of Kerala, provides us with a hopeful revisit of this population considering the parameters of education and the standard of living. This re-reading is necessary to update our understanding of a group of women who are always looked at from a victim's perspective. The current study is set in the backdrop of this argument that the demarcation of Muslim women of the past and the present, and the availability, accessibility, and utilization of higher education as a tool for empowerment and a sociological recording of this status shift. The purpose of this study is to understand the Muslim women of Kerala and the influence of modern higher education in their day-to-day life from these women's perspective.

The following research questions guided the study to extract the desired data from the field.

1. What is the socio-religious background of Muslim women in Kerala?
2. What is the educational profile of Muslim women?
3. How does higher education affect the lifestyle of Muslim women? (Perception on Dressing, traveling, and leisure, etc.)
4. How does Muslim women respond to the choices on marriage, education, career, and other major decisions?
5. What is the perceived role of social spaces like campus or universities in the lives of

educated Muslim women?

6. Which are the agencies of power engaging with them?

7. How do Muslim women consider the prevailing social and religious norms regarding education?

KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

For the narrative thematic analysis, the transcripts were reviewed and re-read multiple times and then the coding process happened. Themes and sub-themes were clustered into groups and three broad clusters emerged from the data, which are;

Common Sense and Perception of Muslim Women

Perception on Exercise of Power and Agency

Resistance and reclaiming narratives of Muslim women

These broad clusters formed the three chapters in the thesis which represents chapter 4,5, and 6 in the thesis. Below is the summary of the three chapters.

Common Sense and Perception of Muslim Women

This chapter encompasses a range of themes which are primarily revealing the role of gender in the everyday life of Muslim women as perceived by the participants. The chapter gives a detailed background of the theoretical framework, that is common sense and how it relates to the narratives shared by the Muslim women. The narratives not only give the individual life experiences, but also speaks in relation to the societal norms wherein they live in. The interviews explicitly reveal gender, its relation to the educational opportunities of Muslim women and how the existing patriarchal structures are identified by the women in the process. The women in the study were trying to understand how 'doing gender' in their personal and public life spaces in the interview process. Each narrative is followed by the context building and appropriate theoretical argument in support of the excerpt.

Perception on Exercise of Power and Agency

This chapter presents the data which includes themes that come under the cluster of power and agency in the lives of Muslim Women. The participant women shared their experiences which is rooted in their everyday transactions with their family, and society in general. This

chapter presented the perceptions of power and agency in the daily life of Muslim Women participants. The narratives of the participants revealed the gendered common-sense practiced by the different social institutions engaging with their life. Here we can also understand that educated Muslim women in Kerala can spot the gender inequalities with their learned sensitivity and feminist consciousness. The chapter, using the theoretical framework of common sense, analyses the perception on power and agency, the narrations of Muslim women regarding their perceptions of power and agency and the implications of higher education in their decision-making process as women.

Resistance and reclaiming narratives of Muslim women

This chapter concludes the responds of Muslim women through the narrated explanations from their daily life experiences. Muslim women's reactions against the patriarchal power practices or common-sense change from woman to woman. The participant accounts of resistance are heavily leaning on the subjective experiences and the self-reflection of their lives within the socio-religious circumstances. Self-reflection practice, which becomes the very root for an individual's decision to exercise everyday resistance. Muslim women's self-reflections, moral and ethical reflections in respect to these discourses, should be interpreted as the starting point for challenging woman's own 'doings' with gender. Each woman heading their life against that power structure with different ways of attitudes and actions. The women not only understand the existence of such power structures, but they also resist in their own way to make changes in the individual and societal life.

The study findings reveal the socio-cultural experiences of Muslim Women in the process of attaining higher education. Looking through the theoretical lens of Common Sense, the Muslim women in the study could explain the cognitive pathway to resistance as a response to developing feminist consciousness. Moving away from the general imagination of Muslim Women, the study also reveals the narrations of resistance and the extremities prevalent in the community regarding the educational choices of women. The study summarises the distinctive experiences of Muslim women in India, where Muslims being a dominant minority community demands the attention of sociologists and future researchers. Reformations driven by organizations combined with the individual efforts of resistance and transformation from these women summarises the educational movements happening within the community.