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Research Topic: “Muslim Women’s Movement in Post-Independent India: Evolution and Changing Contours, Possibilities and Challenges”.

Findings

In the **first chapter** I write about the colonial context and the rise of Muslim women’s issues. The colonial encounter was the most transformative moment in Indian History with far-reaching social and cultural consequences. For Muslim elite, after the loss of power to British brought in self-introspection and then initiatives to face the challenges posed by new realities. In this chapter I focus on two interrelated themes of how these Muslim elite tried to fit into new realities. First, they embarked on educational reforms and cultural renewal with individual as well as collective initiatives. These educational reforms and cultural renewal initiatives in the context of modern India, inevitably spurred them to turn their attention to the conditions of women. In the process of self-definition, they delineated norms and roles for women, passed legislations concerning Muslim women in order to safeguard a particular notion of family and community. Second, their efforts resulted in bringing a section of Muslim women in the public arena who became a voice themselves in determining their own status in religion and community. Now on the issues of Muslim women’s rights began to be discussed by ulemas, nationalists and Muslim women themselves touching on specific issues such as purdah, personal law and sharia.

2nd Chapter: The contemporary politics of identity constructions and its projections have roots in the colonialism. Once colonialism became the de-facto power in India it proceeded to solidify and consolidate hitherto complex and fluid lives and networked mode of beings along the monochromatic identities such as “Hindus” and “Muslims” and political categories called “majority” and “minority”. Colonialism in this sense was a huge rupture from the past, almost a paradigm shift in India’s sense making of self. In the contemporary politics of identity construction especially concerning Muslim community, Muslim women are new players. These women activists interrogate the existing template of discourse that has led to their historical and politico-legal marginalisation. They are exposing the fallacy propagated by Mullahs and acquiesced in by Feminists and the state that ‘Shariah’ is divinely mandated and the very stuffs that guarantee Muslims their religious and cultural identity and as such Shariah should be protected.

3rd Chapter: According to Muslims, Islam is the revealed Religion and Quran, the book of universal guidance. Islam addresses all humanities without making any arbitrary distinctions based

on, least of all, any ascriptive markers. Yet the arbitrary distinctions, hierarchy and differential power relations between men and women abound in the lives of Muslims and are justified in the name of Islam. I intend to reason out explanations by arguing first, that it has to do with the traditional predominance of the male *mufasssiran* who interpreted from the location of their own *prior text*. Another related reason is the ascendance of *literalist* schools that read the texts literally and thus limited the full scope of what was meant by the texts. These, *projections* and *reductions*, together has defined Islam ever since. So, there is no *quintessential* Islam but who for and how it is *interpreted*. In the first part I give an overview of what Islam as a religion is and what it did to elevate the conditions of women in the first Islamic community. Later in the chapter I discuss the fine issues involved in the progressive rereading of Islam. How Quran is being reread, most predominantly by women themselves to retrieve the women-inclusive character of Quran and Islam. These women scholars insist for going back to the original sources of Islam and reread Quran and Hadeeth in the spirit of its message relocating the text in the context and time.

4th Chapter: In India the opportune moment for the new wave of Muslim women activism of sorts came as a consequence of the crisis in the wake of (in)famous Shah Bano Case judgment and the regressive Muslim Women Bill that was passed by the Parliament. This particular background exposed the whole spectrum of voices- liberals, women's movements, Muslim 'clergy' and the state- as none could satisfactorily respond to the crisis brought forth by the Shah Bano case. This necessitated radical initiative on the part of Muslim women. Beginning with the formation of Awaz-e-Niswan (AeN) in the year 1987 in Mumbai, a number of NGOs, organisations and networks, biggest of which is the Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) and which form case study of this research, exist today which are actively mobilising against the continuing invisibility and marginalisation of Muslim women by religious establishment in cohort with the state and dominant public opinion. The BMMA employs both the discourse of modernity and liberal democracy on the one hand, and the Quranic framework, on the other, to champion the cause of Muslim women's rights in India.

To finally sum up, we can argue that Muslim women are no longer mute spectators awaiting their fate written from the misogynistic conservative leadership or the double standard of either the state or progressive civil society. They have taken the reign in their hands and become autonomous actors in their own and have begun directly speaking to the State and public at large.

