

TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND ISLAM'S PEACE: THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL CLASHES AND ECONOMIC SUFFERINGS

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this qualitative study is the interplay between Islamic teachings, cultural norms, and the lives of transgender persons in Pakistan, with reference to the province of the Punjab. The research, with the help of deep conversation and interaction with six transgender participants, scrutinizes the tensions in the Islamic doctrine of peace, justice, and equality vis-à-vis transgender individuals' exclusion within the community. What is determined through thematic analysis is that different cultural pressures have distinct impact regarding establishing gender norms, social rejection, economic marginalization and the significant role of religious leaders in shaping community attitudes. The insights from the study show the complexity involved in balancing religious identity under pressure from broader societal norms, which points to the need for Islam to be understood inclusively and community structures that can offer the necessary support for the presence of equality and dignity across all individuals.

Keywords: Transgender, Cultural norms, Discrimination, Gender identity, Islamic societies, Economic Hardships.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is a religion followed by over a billion people around the world and is commonly reported as a religion of peace, justice, and equality. The key teachings of Islam, which are conveyed in the Quran and the Hadiths, prioritize love, respect, and the protection of human dignity. These principles are not only the core of the faith but also are the moral and ethical foundation of Muslim communities worldwide. In spite of the above teachings, a harsh truth prevails; the life of many transgender individuals is filled with discrimination, marginalization, and violence in societies with Muslim majorities. This gap between religious teaching and the lived experience of the people raises fundamental questions about the role of cultural influences in shaping the understanding and behavior of members of these communities.

The intersection of religion and culture is one of the major valid points that need to be taken into account, especially in the case of gender and sexual orientation.

Despite the fact that Islamic texts provide guides to the real-life situations, the cultural interpretations and practices often act as mediators to their implementation. As the force that nowadays represents the understanding of the Islamic religion, the mediation of cultural values in this way has brought about very striking deviations. This is so because of the logical necessity of resolution of issues of the changing men-women relationship, widening of dialogue and tolerance. Other areas which are of utmost importance include tolerance of deviant sexualities and hormones to change one's sex. In this way, some transgender people are invariably confronted with fierce cultural opposition,

which is wrongly justified through distortions and partial readings of sacred texts.

The central point of this research is trying to understand the cultural reasons that cause the differences transgender individuals in Muslim communities face to be treated as discriminated against. Religion teachings and cultural norms are found at the junction and this study pursues to reveal the causes of this discrimination and to suggest some ways to establish a more inclusive and equal understanding of Islam. Additionally, it is necessary to recognize that the discord between the orthodox teachings and the non-conforming gender identity has its own originator in the blame for such discord in the educational environment typically led by those who believe that fundamentalist religions are the only source of truth. Moreover, it is not enough merely to criticize the religious systems that discriminate against this group it is necessary to develop religious systems that will be able to offer redress to the injustice instead through which transgender people are discriminated.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the discrepancy between Islamic teachings and cultural practices
2. To demonstrate how cultural reinforcement of binary gender norms affects the lives and identities of transgender individuals.
3. To probe into the social and economic marginalization of transgender
4. To scrutinize the impact of religious leaders on community attitudes towards transgender individuals.
5. To understand the internal conflict and identity struggles faced by transgender individuals as they reconcile their gender identity with their religious beliefs.

Review of Literature

Islamic Teachings on Peace and Equality

(Quran 49:13, Sahih International) This verse stresses the natural equality of all persons, be it man or woman and not according to his or her social rank. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad's teachings promote the well-being of the oppressed and the just treatment of the others. For example, the Hadiths are in favor of the expected kindness and clemency in people, and the Prophet said, "He who does not show mercy to others will not be shown mercy" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 73, Hadith 42).

Cultural Influences on Gender Norms

The practices and norms that are justified in the culture produce the gender identities and give the guidelines for both males and females in Muslim societies. These cultural impacts frequently brush up on faith issues, thus, consequently, create complicated dynamics, which affect the treatment of transgender persons. Conventional gender norms that are deeply rooted in cultures of numerous Muslim-majority countries define strict binaries and gender behavior and expression for both men and women. For this reason, people who are not binaries and strive to follow social prejudices and discrimination (Siraj, 2011) by the contrary.

The effects of the pre-Islamic cultural norms of today's Muslim societies cannot be overthrown. Various traditional practices are incorporated into the societies of the communities during the pre-Islamic period that sometimes cover the principles of the religion that show men and women are equal to each other as the social life develops. Integration sometimes results into the blending of cultural prejudices with religious doctrine, which in turn strengthens unfair attitudes towards transgender individuals (Yip, 2004).

Transgender Discrimination in Muslim Societies

Transgender individuals within Muslim-majority regions constantly struggle against discrimination in multiple ways such as social alienation, being unable to properly earn a living, and physical abuse. This kind of discrimination is quite often supported by cultural and religious beliefs and is found to be quite entrenched even though there is no explicit mention of transgender identities in the Islamic texts. According to some studies, for instance, transgender are segregated from their families and social networks, kicked out of schools and jobs, and victimized by physical and verbal attacks (Kugle, 2010).

The study of the experiences of transgender Muslims emphasizes the considerable discrepancy between the peaceful and inclusive teachings of Islam and the practical tough situations they have to deal with daily. On the other hand, a study conducted by Swanson (2013) unveils the truth that transgender Muslims are often in a continuous struggle with their gender identity and faith as a result of societal pressures and misinterpretations of religious texts. These problems are then added due to a lack of concerned and supportive congregational or

denominational leadership and the absence of community resources, also, thus, many transgender inequality how their faith alienated from.

Despite the strong role of religious leaders in promoting or not promoting discrimination, it is the most significant of its kind. Notwithstanding some religious leaders in Portugal calling for a more extensive recognition and development of the Islamic Tradition of A religião Islâmica in Portugal, others perpetuate regressive attitudes totally excluding transgender community further. The fact that there are diametrically opposite leadership roles emerges as a strong indication for the necessity of well-informed and empathic attributions of Islamic

texts in the approach to discrimination, violence, and abuse of the human rights of transgender people as per (Ahmed, 1992).

Methodology

This qualitative study is the use of a phenomenological approach to know the lives of transgender individuals in Muslim communities, especially the Punjab region of Pakistan. Researcher used purposive sampling as a technique for data collection. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with six transgender respondents. The ages of the contributors to the study (20-40).

Thematic Frames

| Thematic Frame | Description | Representative Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Discrepancy Between Religion and Culture | The conflict between the Islamic teaching of peace and equality and the customs and traditions that support discrimination is significant | "Islam teaches us to respect everyone, but in our culture, people don't accept us." |
| Cultural Reinforcement of Gender Norms | . In general, society's insistence on individuals' adherence to binary gender norms. | "My family always tells me to behave like a man, but I am not comfortable with that. They don't understand that gender is more than just appearance." |
| Social and Economic Marginalization | The discrimination and similarity (Tone related). | "I lost my job when they found out I was transgender. Now, I can't find work anywhere, and people avoid me." |
| Role of Religious Leaders | The role of "pious" people in influencing the opinions of the people in the community about transgender individuals has been observed | "Some religious leaders support us and say we deserve respect, but many others preach against us and say we are sinners." |
| Internal Conflict and Identity Struggle | . The feelings of internal conflict experienced by transgender persons are on account of the question of their gender identity and faith. | "I believe in Islam and want to practice my faith, but the way people treat me makes it hard. It's like they are pushing me away from my religion." |

Interpretation of Thematic Frames

1. Discrepancy Between Religion and Culture

This theme underlines the aforementioned contrast of transcendent and conflicting natures of Islam as concerned with of alone peace, love and equality and the social-living malpractices to which certain

transgender individuals are subjected by the society. Participants unanimously put forward the view that although the Islamic creed upholds love and kindness for all human beings, the cultural traditions within their communities more often than not given

creatures are those who are marginalized and mistreated.

Islamic Teachings: Participants admitted that on the whole, Islam preaches the non-violation of the human rights of all men, focusing on the principles of justice and equality as the issues in primary importance.

Cultural Practices: In spite of such lessons, certain cultural practices in their societies are opposite to Islamic values. The participants think that the social beliefs override the faith laws.

Representative Quotes: "Islam teaches us to respect everyone, but in our culture, people don't accept us." "Our religion is about peace and justice, but what we face is discrimination because of cultural norms."

2. Cultural Reinforcement of Gender Norms

This theme explores how the traditional Pakistani culture's prevailing gender roles adversely affect the transgender individuals who are willing to conform to the binary gender norms. The normative pressure of the society is entrenched and secured not only by the family and education but also through media.

Binary Gender Roles: The study participants explained their communities as being very focused on the binary gender norms and not giving any space to those who are nonconforming of the identities.

Pressure to Conform: This is reality that many of the transgender ones are forced to conform to their traditional roles by their families and communities which can be a reason for their internal struggles.

Representative Quotes: "I am always advised by my family to be a man. However, it is something that I am not at ease with, you see that in me. They do not realize that man-woman relationships don't just depend on the way one looks and behaves. Too early for them to understand though". "From a young age, I was expected to act like a girl, but that was never who I truly was".

3. Social and Economic Marginalization

Dealt with in this passage is the issue of exclusion of transgender people from the social, educational, and economic system and the way in which the community is presented. One of the things to be pointed out here is that the social discrimination they face leads to the most serious economic disadvantages to them, like the lack of jobs and the scarcity of education and health services.

Employment Discrimination: The majority of participants in various focus groups reported cases of being laid off or not being able to get a job because of their gender identity.

Educational Barriers: Education is a privilege that can sometimes be unaffordable for transgenders and because others harass or exclude them, schools don't even take them in.

Representative Quotes: "I lost my job when they found out I was transgender. Now, I can't find work anywhere, and people avoid me." "I had to drop out of school because of the bullying. No one stood up for me."

4. Role of Religious Leaders

The importance of the emulation of the authority of religious leaders in influencing the thinking of the society towards transgender people is the core of this topic. The authority that religious leaders possess as a means to interpret Islamic doctrines is also an important factor that can lead to discrimination or inclusivity of transgender individuals.

Different Stances: Mainly, some religious leaders are supportive of transgenders, and they stand for their rights, whereas others express prejudiced ideas.

Impact on the Community: The position of religious leaders is the decisive factor reinforcing the community's attitude that is either standoffish or welcoming to transgender people.

Highlighted Quotes: "Some religious leaders support us and say we deserve respect, but many others preach against us and say we are sinners." "When a religious leader speaks out for us, it makes a big difference. People start to see us as human beings."

5. Internal Conflict and Identity Struggle

This article presents a critical look into the struggles of the soul and conflict that arises in transgender people who are still finding their genders within their faiths. Most of the time these participants find it hard to bring together their Islamic spirituality with the fact that they are discriminated by their fellow believers.

Faith and Identity: Islam is very much ingrained in the lives of many transgender individuals and they do their best to adhere to its commandments.

Alienation: Loss of religious identification and social marginalization are the main culprits that force transgender people to face the challenge of retaining a religious identity.

Representative Quotes: "There are a few people who support me and understand my struggle, but most of my community sees me as an outcast. It's a constant battle for acceptance." "My friends have stood by me, but my family refuses to accept me. It's painful to be rejected by those you love."

Detailed Discussion on Thematic Interpretation

1. Discrepancy Between Religion and Culture

The theme of the contradiction between Islamic beliefs and customary behaviors is the main cause of the life of transgender people in Muslim societies. The basic values of Islam place an equal and

independent status for everyone who is irrespective of their gender identity (Qur'an 49:13). In spite of the fact, cultural norms are frequently the reason transgender individuals are being discriminated against, making a very wide gap between the religious and social dimension (Ahmed, 1992). As reported by Siraj (2011) cultural practices in Muslim communities are all too often expressed as a conformity to traditional gender roles which in turn can be the reason for a high degree of marginalization of transgender individuals who are out of the norm. The situation, where religious teachings of compassion and inclusivity are relegated to the background due to cultural prejudices and biases (Yip, 2004), results from this misalignment.

2. Cultural Reinforcement of Gender Norms

The emphasis on the traditional male-female model through a Pakistani lifestyle builds a huge amount of pressure for transgender people to somehow fit into the expectations of the society. The survey respondents, in particular, stated that they were given tough tasks by the family and the local community which many times did not conform to their gender identities (Swanson, 2013). The study of Swanson (2013) about transgender identity and Islamic law shows the cultural principles that limit the expression and acceptance of different gender identities in the form of strict gender roles. The cultural reinforcement of the gender stereotypes leads to the social marginalization and exclusion that transgender people in the Muslim-majority are going through.

3. Social and Economic Marginalization

Kugle (2010) the greater dysfunction about transgender people in Pakistan is social and economic marginalization. Transgender people in the country are still at the bottom of the barrel. Discrimination in employment, education, and healthcare drives their vulnerability and of course deprives them of essential services. The intersection of Islam and homosexuality, in particular, the cultural and religious stigmatization of these people, is the usual cause of their social and economic marginalization. This marginalization not only violates their rights but also underpins the societal stereotyping that restricts their full participation in public life.

4. Role of Religious Leaders

One of the most important jobs of religious leaders is their effect on the way the community views the transgender individuals. In the past, some of the religious leaders that present and propagate the softer and more humane interpretation of the Islamic religion that suggests inclusivity and respect for the rights of every individual, on the other hand, the rest of them preach this viewpoint that is offensive and discriminatory through the selective use of religious texts (Ahmed, 1992). According to Ahmed (1992), the religious talk in the Muslim societies is most of the time is the reflection of cultural biases rather than Islamic inclusive principles. Religious leadership is the primary issue that resulted in different forms of attitudes towards gender transitions among them, which are either positive or negative, ensuring the influence on transgender people's social acceptance and allowing them to participate in religious activities.

5. Internal Conflict and Identity Struggle

That transgender people wrestle with who they are when faced with their faith is a fascinating demonstration of the interaction of people's personal beliefs and the pressure people experience (external and internal). They articulated the desire to comply with their faith and, at the same time, the difficulties they faced by living in a society that condemns and discriminates them (Yip, 2004). Yip's (2004) study of how non-straight British Muslims were identifying themselves also points out to the role of community alongside the religious dimension and it talks about those who refer to them. It is notable that this conflict is also reflected in the lack of spaces for the affirmation of diverse genders in religion and culture, which the society struggles through dealing with.

Conclusion:

This research points out the complicated manner in which religious precepts, cultural traditions, and the specific circumstances of transgender individuals form the Muslim majority societies, particularly in Punjab Pakistan. Notwithstanding that Islam is based on the core virtues such as being compassionate and having respect for human dignity, cultural norms often make it difficult for transgender individuals who are the targets of prejudice, to be socially included and economically stable. The analysis of the theme of the study reveals that some religious leaders

advocate for the realization of more inclusive paradigms of Islamic teachings, on the other hand, the others are the agents of discriminatory practices leading thus to social marginalization.

Moving ahead, overpassing these problems comprises a well-rounded regime. In-depth education plans underlying the Islamic/Shari'ah moral teachings on gender diversity and the principles of social justice will be a society's strength. Speaking out with the neighborhood can be a suitable means to have a talk and create a conducive ambiance for eradicating the bad cultural practices and embracing people. In addition, the difficulties can be addressed by policy changes that give legal protection to the transgender community and also offer them healthcare, education, and workplace opportunities are the most important.

Achieving the ideal space between religious principles and social customs can lead us to the full breakthrough of Islam as peace and equality religion. The drab and dreary surroundings of the mosques became alive and vivid, and the inimitable colors and shades of the ladies' drapes contrasted with various tones and ranges of the loose men. The communities of the world will gain a lot by opening themselves to different views on spiritual beliefs and living their lives in various acceptable ways, which sometimes do not completely correspond to their official religious dress.

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