

Unearthing Gender and Sexual Identity through Intersectionality: A Critical Study of *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir*

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Abstract

This research attends to the complicated aspects of queer women's identities, which comprises a distinctive analysis to interrogate systemic understandings of multiple layers of oppression. It investigates both internal and external societal systems and glides through Eastern and Western cultures to bring out marginalisation through structural inequalities such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and religious institutions. We attempt to bring out the prejudices and oppressions experienced by Samra Habib as a queer Muslim woman by drawing on the structural inequality in the sociocultural context of Pakistan by analysing her poignant memoir *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir*. The study uses intersectionality as the theoretical framework by combining gender and queer theory to bring out the multi-dimensionality of interdependent identities of gender, sexuality, and religion. Hegemonic institutions such as patriarchy, orthodox religious doctrines and heteronormativity cause unprecedented oppression that may fragment one's identity. Individuals also face marginalisation by family, within their community and society in a larger context. Yet reconciling with multiple identities supports assertiveness and self-empowerment.

Keywords: *Heteronormativity, Intersectionality, Oppression, Patriarchy, Queer.*

Introduction

Social identities and societal inequalities are based on ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality/sexual orientation and many more multifarious identities. Even though these identities may seem independent, they are interdependent, mutually constructed and thus intersect (Crenshaw 1989). When identities, especially gender identity, intersect, they face discrimination, which

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may also be related to ethnic and sexual minority statuses due to hegemonic societal and structural inequalities (Greene 1994). The system of heteronormativity and patriarchy is almost impossible to unwind since such beliefs are entrenched deeply in the social psyche. The heteronormative and patriarchal society combines the gender-typical and normative expectations of sexuality to regulate individuals to perform and maintain identities according to the pre-scripted ideals. Forming an authentic and resilient identity becomes a herculean task when multiple structural issues arise out of heteronormativity, patriarchy and religion.

Additionally, being a Muslim and a queer is challenging since individuals have to embrace their non-normative sexuality in a strictly religious context and come out to their family and society. Queer Muslims, especially women who attempt to empower themselves by resisting patriarchal and gender binary institutions, are oppressed and shunned from their families and community. Yet the process of getting away from such shackling beliefs and embracing a capable, strong female-queer identity is brutal and traumatic.

This paper attempts to bring out the prejudices and oppressions experienced by Samra Habib as a queer Muslim woman by drawing on the structural inequality in the sociocultural context of Pakistan by analysing her poignant memoir *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* (2019). It uses intersectionality theory by fusing gender theory and queer theory to bring out the multi-dimensionality of interdependent identities of gender, sexuality, and religious identity. Even though religion is less commonly connected to intersectionality theory, this study attempts to include and briefly consider religion to get a wholesome picture of the protagonist's experiences which is by far experienced by many ethnic queer individuals.

Theoretical Background

Human beings are shaped by their multiple and parallel social identities, such as sexuality, gender, race, and religion. But when individuals are understood as “inferior” or “unnatural” compared with the larger context of society, conflict arises between the inferior and dominant group. Additionally, their inferior identities directly contradict the age-old institutional practices and systems. Atewologun (2018, 224) maintains that “ideologies, structures, institutions and experiences interact to sustain societal inequalities and power relations.”

Intersectionality, the idea that subjectivity comprises mutually reinforcing dimensions such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, has emerged as the key theoretical instrument for challenging feminist hierarchy, supremacy, and exclusivity. Leslie McCall emphasises the significance of intersectionality by claiming that “...the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall 2005, 1771). This major theoretical contribution has developed into the ‘gold standard’ multidisciplinary technique for understanding the experiences of identity and oppression. Kimberle Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and*

Violence Against Women of Color (1994) is a pioneering work where she coined the word intersectionality to emphasise the ‘multi-dimensionality’ of the lived experiences of marginalised individuals (Crenshaw, 1994). Intersectionality developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s through critical race studies, a legal academy-born academic movement dedicated to challenging the law’s alleged colourblindness, impartiality, and objectivity. Since the beginning, intersectionality has been fascinated by one specific intersection: the junction of race and gender. To that purpose, intersectionality opposes the “single-axis framework” commonly advocated by feminist and antiracist thinkers to understand “the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences” (Crenshaw, 1994). Crenshaw posits how intersectionality attempts to expose the different layers of identities that produce stigmatization and opposition in society and attempts to bring out the neglected representation of black women through the lens of gender, sexuality, and race (Anzaldúa 1987; Collins 2021; Crenshaw 1994; Lorde 1984). Some of the main philosophical aspects of intersectionality help to comprehend through a historical point of view to examine the contextual, political, social, and power structures of inequality and injustice faced by multiple stigmatised marginalised communities (Carastathis 2016; Cho 2013). Intersectionality also illuminates how women of colour experience a lack of acceptance and marginalisation within their own communities and outside the communities through societal structures (Crenshaw 1994). Through the conceptualisations of plural identities, non-normative identities, and heterosexual relationships, intersectionality deconstructs the hegemonic scripts of domination and normalcy (Collins 2021).

Intersectionality sustains itself through multidimensional or multi-paradigmatic identities and interdisciplinarity by combining various overlapping factors of oppression to seek a systematic analysis of individual lived experiences (Smooth 2013). In order to consider the various forms of oppression, intersectionality utilises multiple paradigms of identity categories such as ability or disability, religion, sexuality, gender, race, and ethnicity (Cor and Chan 2017; Smooth 2013). Thus, “Interdependence, multi-dimensionality and mutually constitutive relationships form the core of intersectionality” and not through a single-dimensional and autonomous point of view (Bowleg 2008, 317).

Intersectionality is an analytical conceptualisation that enables the attitude and language to investigate the linkages and interrelation of social categories and structures. An intersection signifies the bridging, juxtaposition, or central hub of two or more social identities or dimensions. These identities become a source of oppression and marginalisation due to hegemonic regimes. These regimes may include sociodemographic categories, social institutions and processes, and societal identities (Collins 2021; Dhamoon 2011).

Intersectional theory also attempts to bring forth how the hegemonic power structures play a significant role in structuring an individual and society’s psychological thought, experience, practices, and knowledge. It exposes how individuals may suffer discrimination as a result of

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their inferior positioning in society in opposition to the normative institutional structures (de Vries 2015). Also, since social identities are interrelated, intersectionality brings out the multiple minority stress of individuals. Therefore, intersectionality theory reveals the traumatising and discriminatory lived experiences by providing prominence to the disadvantages of individuals who struggle in the workings of hegemonic power structures and privileged positions of specific individuals or communities (Brewer, Conrad & King 2002). Additionally, intersectionality investigates “how inequalities span and transform structures and activities at all levels and in all situational contexts” (Choo and Ferree 2010, 135). Intersectionality taps into how individuals are othered, or difference is cultivated by the dominant structures of society by attempting to emphasise the “inclusive normative solutions to problems of social inequality” (Clarke and McCall 2013, 361). Also, an intersectional strategy will help to comprehend the flexibility within, across, and between social identities.

Intersectionality and Gender

The intersectionality approach demonstrates that a person’s social identity significantly impacts one’s perceptions towards gender. Consequently, feminists propound that an individual’s social location mirrors overlapping identities, which must be at the centre of any gender analysis. Intersectionality recognises women’s experiences of structural inequality through sources such as patriarchy and gender binary structures based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (Reid and Comas-Diaz 1990). Gender, in particular, must be viewed within the framework of power dynamics ingrained in social identities (Collins 2021). Since gender identities are already defined and idealised, gender identities and performances are naturalised. Due to such normative systems, individuals internalise such belief systems and are forced to perform according to gender. The central argument is directed at patriarchy’s unidimensional notion of gender, its categorisation of gender into men and women, and its disregard for distinctions and power dynamics within each category. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013) opines that such hegemonic structures problematise women’s status since they become sexual and political subjects. In other words, patriarchy becomes a justification for gendered power structures (Pollert 1996).

The concept of patriarchy is paramount in theorising gender discrimination since it deals with gender relations (Walby 1989). It discusses gender inequality and differences between men and women, where women are inferiorly treated against the backdrop of male superiority. Gender inequality is also intermingled with concepts of race, class, and identity. The denial of the physical and mental autonomy of women has often led to prostitution, rape, assault, harassment, hate crimes and torture. Women’s subordination and experiences are socially, politically, and economically embedded. Since women were confined only to household duties, women were deemed to be unfit for education, work, and representation both as consumers and creators, placing men as the frontrunners of society.

Queer Theory

The term “queer” houses alternate sexualities that may include gays, lesbians, transgenders, intersex and remaining alternate sexualities. Queer theory attempts to encompass communities that include various gender and sexual identities by comprehending temporal, political, historical, traditional, and cultural aspects of the society that maintains and regulates heteronormative and gender binary structures. Due to the unprecedented prominence subjected towards gender binary structure, heterosexual sexuality and heterosexual practices, queer individuals face oppression in multiple forms that may include marginalisation, psychological and physical abuse, hate crimes, persecution, and societal and familial rejection. Foucault posits the ever-changing and ever-fluid dynamics of sexuality that operate in the historical and societal background become political and cultural structures. Rubin (1999) further discusses how non-normative sexualities become problematic since sexual orientation, queer expression, and sexuality are opposing heteronormative and patriarchal practices. As a result, sexuality is transformed into a political matter that is within the purview of identity politics. Queer theory also attempts to reject heteronormative and patriarchal paradigms, thereby refusing to follow the socio-structural, institutional and normative sexual and gender scripts. Queer theory deconstructs “the stability and fundamentalist grounds of categories like masculinity, femininity, sexuality, citizenship, nation, culture, literacy, consent, legality, and so forth” (Britzman 1995, 152). Queer theory also demonstrates societal action and voicing to receive acceptable and equal status in society (Mayo 2007).

Queering Intersectional Theory

Intersectionality uncovers the normalised and hegemonic social divisions that may be injuring queer sexualities using queer perspective (Massaquoi 2015). Intersectionality uses ‘multi-dimensionality’ to investigate the affiliation between privilege and subordination (Hutchinson 2001). “Queer analysis as a method ... can be used to explore the intersecting formulations of norms and transgressions through the matrix of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, and (dis)ability” (Hutchinson 2001, 18). Thus, intersectionality exposes and destabilises the binary systems such as rural/urban, black/white, man/woman, and normative/deviant. Intersectionality also brings in the anti-queer/homophobic violence from the dominant white communities (Meyer 2010). Intersectionality attempts to include different identities in complex ways. As a result, multiple interconnected identities are brought to analyse pluralistically layered identities such as religious identity, nationalist identity, gender identity and queer identity (Henne and Troshynski 2013). Since identities are diverse in nature, intersectionality can bring about queer identity interspersed with related identities in different social contexts.

Additionally, intersectionality and queer theory can be combined to investigate experiences of lived realities in various socio-economic and cultural settings, thereby voicing and

representing the victimisation, oppression, and violence faced within and outside the community. Due to the ongoing Islamophobia, queer Muslims are subjugated in multiple stages. Also, they face religious persecution by their own community as queer status is rejected. Additionally, intersectionality also plays a vital role in bringing out oppression faced by individuals relating to their gender and queer identity.

Introducing *We Have Been Always Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir*

We Have Been Always Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir is an autobiography written by Samra Habib (2019). Samra narrates her struggles in accepting her femininity and coming out as queer in a Muslim and heteronormative community. Samra's Pakistani upbringing describes the gender discrimination she and other female members of her community faced due to the patriarchal system. Ahmadiyya's intolerance forces Samra's family and Nassir (Samra's first cousin) to flee to Canada. Her arranged marriage leads to the divorce of Nassir and the abandonment of her family due to continuous policing. Her second marriage to Peter forces her to become aware of queer sexual orientation. As she begins to explore her identity, she begins to accept her identity. She reconnects with a modernised queer version of Islam in Canada and becomes a queer activist supporting queer and queer Muslim individuals. She also reconnects with her transformed parents and comes out to them.

Am I only a Woman? An Explication of Gender Oppression

We Have Been Always Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir features the crossings of gender segregation, gender oppression, sexuality, religion, and family. Samra experiences several challenges which are based on intersections of identity. Her multiple identities, such as her gender identity, queer identity and Muslim identity, undergo numerous tug-of-war-like situations in attempting to achieve wholeness. Samra experiences oppression and rejection due to Pakistan's dominant hegemonic heteropatriarchy¹. Although structural inequalities and discrimination pose to dismantle her, she attains self-empowerment and independence.

Habib discusses the unprecedented discrimination she faced at her home and her society. Samra discusses how her mother's name was changed before her marriage without her consent. After marriage, her mother was forced to cultivate and practice the roles of "a pious wife and an attentive mother" (Habib 2019, 09). Pakistani women had to perform dualistic functions where individualistic rights, emotions, or happiness were not considered (Rabia et al., 2019). Habib states how her mother's "identity was disposable" and "her free will was up for grabs" (Habib 2019, 19). This is because women's lack of autonomy towards their identities allowed the male figures to decide their free will where their rights, behaviours, beliefs, likes and dislikes were strictly regulated. As a result, women were expected to be obedient and fulfil domestic and spousal duties, appeasing the men and maintaining male authority. al-Hibri (2000) posits that this is because Muslim societies have been committing

atrocities against women by honouring Islam. Women were manipulated to believe that they deserved Jannat (heaven) only if they behaved as per the gender-typical roles. This is because gender disparity is recognised and justified in religious terms. After all, God created men and women “essentially” distinct to distribute supplementary familial roles, rights, and responsibilities. Complementarity is critical to the unity and stability of the family and society (Hajjar 2004).

The female members of Samra’s family were prohibited from dancing, laughing, and raising their voices since these were considered negative traits and indicated male jurisdiction (Brohi 2006). The compulsion to care for her sister showed the training for developing a gendered self. When Samra narrowly avoids being molested, her mother checks her meticulously to see whether her hymen is intact. Her mother’s relief that her daughter is still a virgin makes Samra realise that her mental well-being was never a matter of concern for anybody. This incident is also indicative of the patriarchal system that considered women to be sexual objects since they were constantly subjected to molestation, rape, domestic abuse, and murder (Karmaliani 2012; Khattak 2014). “Fertility, purity, and beauty” that ensured their survival in a male-dominated society were feminine traits that portrayed how various intersections of gender, gendered body and reproduction victimised women (Habib 2019, 16).

Habib (2019) explains how dead women were strewn across streets as they were killed and then discarded because they were unable to birth male offspring. Furthermore, women were also slaughtered for honour killing, spousal abuse, and sexual assault (Khattak 2014). Habib (2019) notes newspaper columns and religious doctrines preached to pray and forgive their male counterparts for mistreatment or manhandling. She also observes that applying cosmetics was prohibited since cosmetics were considered “too wild”. Furthermore, any individualistic or autonomous behaviour resulted in demoralising and demoting a woman’s integrity as they were slut-shamed and verbally or physically abused and was considered as dishonouring male authority and familial values and prioritising individualistic desires (Habib 2019, 44).

Samra discusses how women refrained from talking in public and were forced to cover their bodies. Since the female body was sexualised, it was a cause of alarm that excited men, which may lead to sexual violence and abuse. Women deal with gender disparity in domestic and public settings by avoiding cities, donning, concealing themselves in hijab, conversing silently, suppressing thoughts, and practising non-aggravating behaviour (Anwar, Sarwat, and Daanish 2018). They could only access the public space for religious activities since this catered to being good Muslim women. Gender segregation was also experienced in mosques since the prayer zones for women were separate and dingy, while men had “airier and more welcoming spaces” (Habib 2019, 96). Male elders discussed Quran passages, whereas women were not permitted to voice their ideas or the materialisation of Quran teachings. Clearly, Samra’s experiences display the conflicting gender identity and religious and cultural identity that controlled and subjugated women.

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Betrothal to Nassir, who is her first cousin, results in conforming to Pakistan's gender stereotypes and surrendering her ambitions and dreams. Siddiqui (2007) posits that over 50% of weddings are between first and second cousins because these marriages ensure a certain level of clan cohesion, stability in marriage, and closeness with future spouses in a rigorously sex-segregated society. Her autonomy would be rendered insignificant since societal and familial acceptance was seen to be more crucial than individual choices (Jilani 2000). Also, Pakistani women are manipulated by domestic, cultural, and religious considerations, as well as gender expectations for marriage, which are the core tenets of intersectionality. Furthermore, resistance to such hegemonic institutions would lead to disownment from their family and community (Critelli 2012).

Yet at sixteen, Samra chooses marriage to avoid dishonour from family, relatives and the Muslim community. Chamberlayne (1968) posits that commitment to the family was considered vital, elders to be respected, and the family was regarded as the core of Islamic social life. Yet Samra is policed by her husband since reading books/education was considered to promote becoming a disbeliever in faith and disrupt marital equilibrium. At the same time, literature was particularly associated with notions of independence and revolt. Cognitive abilities were seen to be contradictory with the assigned gender norms (Eccles 2007). As a consequence, reading books behind closed doors, attending parties, cropping and colouring her hair, wearing Western attire and cosmetics, and removing her hijab are Samra's attempts at contradictorily cultivating Western cultural practices in opposition to Pakistani and Eastern cultures.

Her husband's belief that practising domestic violence is a necessity, spousal policing, and unwillingness to conform to gender stereotypes leads her to want a divorce. Pakistani men consider domestic violence, which includes beatings, imprisonment, harassment, and ridicule, as "discipline" or "punishment" instead of "abuse" or "battery" to disguise and justify such heinous activities (Hajjar 2004). Here, men are considered to have the right to chastise and discipline the female spouses/family members (which is even lauded by the other male members) to maintain harmony at their home and in society. However, Samra's immense pressure caused depression since women were forced to become the representatives of the family and repositories of family honour. Due to this, any failure (Samra's divorce and gender atypical expectations) was considered as face loss or dishonour for the entire family. Also, the families of women seeking divorce neglect and invalidate their arguments and purposefully fail to enforce various Shari'ah (Islamic law) provisions for women in the event of a dreadful marriage, divorce, or custody (al-Hibri 2000). This maintains patriarchal hegemony by allowing intrafamilial violence. Her suicidal ideation is due to the influence of the Islamic community and culture, which refers to marital and gender stereotypical practices as customary norms and established social practices that are presented to women as "law" and sanctioned by religion (Critelli 2012).

Furthermore, Samra experiences isolation and placelessness since the patrilineal and patrilocal environment in Pakistan evinces that access given to a woman is only through associations with male figures from her father's house to her spouse's house (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987). However, Samra's resistance and rebellion result in divorce, rejection and refusal of hijab and abandonment of her family. Also, removing her hijab becomes a sign of assertion to become independent and self-empowered, which opposes the gender expectation of Pakistani principles.

Intersectionality brings out how gender is disassembled and controlled using the hegemonic power structures to maintain male domination. By bringing such interlinking identities that create conflicts within themselves, intersectionality attempts to provide a voice to the harrowing conditions of women. Additionally, an intersectional theory also brings out how gender is discriminated within the community, as in the case of Samra. The intersectional paradigm stresses decentering problematic social systems that give birth to and preserve social injustices. It also magnifies the multiplicity of identities and brings forth conflicting intersections. Islam's centrality towards family, upholding family honour, positive reputation from Muslim communities, and traits of being a good or bad woman and good or bad Muslim are some of the aspects within her society that problematise Samra from achieving freedom from gender stereotypes.

Enforced Heterosexuality and Emerging Queer Identity

Samra's marriage to Peter engenders confusion regarding her sexuality. As a result, this leads to marital conflicts since she is not physically attracted to her husband, leading to divorce. Buxton (1994) posits that many queer individuals separate from their straight spouses due to changing sexual orientation and lack of physical intimacy. Her rejection of wearing a hijab and getting a tattoo, which is against the doctrines of Islam, is Samra's attempt to resist the domineering religious and cultural practices, although her mother calls her a "punk" (Habib 2019, 72).

Samra's sexual maturation causes excessive confusion about her sexual identity. Samra's infatuation with her female boss (Abi) reveals the deprivation of freedom to understand her sexual and gender identity. Further, she reveals how gender identity was enforced to the positionality of disempowerment, victimisation, and docility, as a result of which Samra could not be dependant, fierce, strong and opinionated. Abi's lesbian sexuality and Abi's committed relationship with her partner force her to view the heterosexual matrix through a queer lens that does not conform or adhere to gender binary structures.

Additionally, Samra's childhood also indicated homosexual inclinations as she was attracted towards her close friend Sonia and Samra's increased interest in peaking at female classmates' dressing and bathing. Samra and Sonia's intimacy leads to horrified reactions

from the neighbourhood since such expressions were considered inappropriate and gender-non-conforming behaviours. Mohammedali et al. (2022) deem that this is because investigations of the Qur'an and Hadith rarely addressed the multifaceted identities of non-hetero- and non-cisgender Muslims, while the space for queer Muslims was hijacked by religious and patriarchal conservatives who were intent on degrading those who were inconsistent with the heteronormative representation of gender, Islam and Muslims, even if it entailed rejecting God's own creation.

Although Samra becomes aware of her increasing attraction to women, Samra's internalised homophobia obstructs identity formation, as a result of which queer Muslims like Samra conceal many aspects of their intersectional identities. The continued relationships with men indicate internalised heterosexism and fear of societal, familial and disapproval and is an act of protection from further marginalisation. Furthermore, this also portrays heterosexual imagery that adheres to the dominant hegemonic gender and sexuality scripts that allow inclusion in mainstream culture (Alvi and Zaidi. 2021). However, Samra understands that she is queer (inclined towards both multiple fluid genders, including trans and non-binary gendered individuals), leading her to explore her queer identity and communities. Samra's journey across many cultures and countries implies feelings of displacement, non-belonging and a persistent need to find and learn about her identity. Her journey brings her oppositional identities and gender constructions as she compares the deviation of gender and sexuality scripts between the men performing "drag on screen, with a blond wig and smudged red lipstick" with the aggressive, misogynistic, and conservative male figures of Pakistan (Habib 2019, 89). Clearly, queer individuals were not only tolerant and progressive but challenged gender models of Pakistani hypermasculinity (Salam 2021).

Her substantial acceptance of her identity is consequential to joining a modernised queer version of a mosque. Samra observes that the LGBTQ community sought an updated version of a mosque to embrace and conjoin Muslim identity and queer identity. The mosque included individuals of different orientations previously shunned by their country and religion. This spatiality becomes a haven where queer Muslims, including Samra, whose queer, gender and Muslim components of their identities are not separated but are an essential part of the broader construction of identity, which in turn helps her to view and connect with the wholesome experience of a humble world.

I hadn't set foot inside a mosque since my late teens when I broke my nikah and dissolved my marriage to Nasir. I'd been swiftly shunned by the mosque aunties, who, taking on the role of spokespersons for Islam, ruled that my actions made me a Bad Muslim. Suddenly there was no place for me in that sacred place of worship that had once been a source of comfort and stability. Worried I'd be a bad influence on their daughters, the aunties watched my friends like hawks to ensure that none of them would so much as respond to my "Assalam-o-Alaikum" greeting. Worst of all,

they made my mother feel as though she'd done a bad job raising me. My rebellion had been a direct challenge to that central tenet of Muslim households: parents and elders know best. (Habib 2019, 96)

Clearly, Samra is discriminated against within her community for prioritising individual autonomy and disregarding familial, societal and religious doctrines. Such discrimination leads to shunning her and humiliating her for her disadvantaged identity. Additionally, she remains in the closet since queer identity in the South Asian context, especially in Islamic countries, is treated with hatred and repulsion. Since she was brought up in a culture that revered heterosexuality, she detaches herself from her Muslim community as the knowledge of added discrimination alarms her. Kugle (2014) suggests that Muslims in the West face a variety of challenges, together with dealing with family and the larger Islamic communities, religious and nonreligious politics, social alienation, and the fluidities affiliated with establishing and recreating one's identity. Shannahan (2009) observes that Islam has long celebrated the centrality and divine nature of the family. Due to this, the pressure of preserving family honour and credibility in terms of the Muslim community is especially pressing in traditional Muslim households, owing to the belief that being queer is not only a failing ideal of an individual but also signifies familial dysfunction.

Furthermore, traditional Muslim families are closely knit; however, sustaining this status is usually challenging for Muslim families residing in non-Muslim nations due to external influences of secular society and the declining viability of the extended family (Carolan et al. 2000). As a result, the rampant marginalisation is apparent. It thus is linked with Samra's interlocking and synthesised gender, queer and religious identity. This also indicates how her personhood is denied since these are integral to her identity.

Yet as she further learns to accept her identity and intermingles her queer identity with all the conflicting identities to form a wholistic identity. Samra observes, "But for most of my twenties, Islam felt like a parent dishing out conditional love: I had no right to call myself Muslim because I'm queer and don't wear the hijab.... Although I maintained a private relationship with Allah, I longed for a nonjudgmental spiritual community where I could meet others like myself" (Habib 2019, 97). "The heady realization that I could still have a place in a faith that had previously rejected me felt shocking. I was witnessing that which I had only ever imagined: a queer utopia of sorts. A fantasy of being accepted and being seen" (Habib 2019, 99).

She observes the limited number of queer individuals of colour present in queer parties or gatherings and the absence of queer Muslims, which makes her feel invisible. She attempts to understand how oppressed queer Muslims felt by their own community and family, and the society.

Yet we had come together because we were unhappy with how queer Muslims are made to feel in mainstream mosques—as though we were all sinners who were

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going to hell. Many of us had been made to feel rejected by Allah at times when we needed him most. I loved that we were questioning and reimagining not just what it means to be Muslim in the twenty first century but how to apply Islamic teachings to our present-day lives. I looked to these peers to see how they dealt with rejection from their families and with Islamophobia from non-Muslims. (Habib 2019, 100)

Since “queer” is a mainstream category in Western nations, queer Muslim identity was a minority identity. This is because the representation of LGBTIQ+ Muslims as abnormalities is more connected with Western principles and is reasoned to require ‘saving’ from their Islamic communities and families. The use of intersectionality reveals Samra challenging the Western cultures, which also marginalises queer Muslims. Queer Muslims face “intersectional invisibility” since these individuals belong to multiple subordinate – group identity (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008). They do not correspond to the schematics of their respective identity groups, “queer” or “Muslim” identity category, due to their ethnic, religious, gender and sexual identity. Samra is not only discriminated against for being a woman but undergoes ethnic, religious, and sexual subordination.

Additionally, she goes through discrimination in her community and outside her community. This is how the individual experiences, within-group and outside-group differences, are intertwined with systematic dynamics of power relations. This indicates Samra’s fight for social justice since Samra undergoes social inequality through the societal, cultural, heteronormative and patriarchal structures. A focus on social inequality and social networks, which is brought about by intersectionality, showcases the degrading lived experiences of queer Muslims like Samra.

She becomes a photographer to articulate and represent the experiences of individuals belonging to the queer community. She attempts to epitomise queer Muslims who were being ignored by the mainstream queer community and society at large. Even though the queer community was treated with respect in Canada, queer Muslims were still struggling to come out publicly while still affiliating with their religion. Photography becomes a medium to bring out the experiences of queer Muslims who could not reconcile with their Muslim identity or be accepted by mainstream society because of their religious identity. Her subjects were Queer individuals and queer Muslims who were invisible to mainstream society. According to Brah and Phoenix (2004), articulating such subjective sorrow is vital because the perpetrators of such atrocities and inequalities who are directly (and indirectly) responsible do not acknowledge their actions.

Furthermore, Samra’s subjective narrative (coming out publicly, giving speeches, photography, and creating awareness through newspaper articles) serves as a foundation to acquire political consciousness and voice the oppressed experiences. Samra’s narratives call for the representation and the development of new subjectivities against the established identity

categories. As a result, the intersectionality theory unravels Samra's identity, which is born out of differences within both mainstream and minority identity, which further demands thinking about how identities are constituted across myriad social realms.

She also comes out publicly in the magazine *The Guardian* and comes out to both of her parents, who accept her. Clearly, the claiming of queer identification by queer Muslims is an act of resistance against orthodox branches of Islam that would label these communities as heretical. Furthermore, Samra's acts of resistance, such as photography, speeches, public disclosure and the positionality of her multiple identities, are profoundly political (Rahman 2010). This is because claiming the existence of queer Muslims within both the Western or Muslim dominant cultures poses a fundamental challenge to the dualistic cultural opposition, which also invalidates the mutual exclusivity of their identities. Therefore, intersectionality theory calls for attention to the oppressed, mainly because it recognises that authoritative knowledge (by hegemonic institutions) frequently excludes marginalised communities. This autonomous established knowledge can pose a fundamental opposition to established paradigms and establishing subordinate groups.

Her life transgresses the culture and tradition of Pakistan to integrate a life of autonomy and control. She also uses queer sexuality, which is comprised of non-heterosexual sexualities, to challenge heteronormative explanations, structures, and practices (Luibheid 2004). Thus, Samra reshapes her life, recreating older spaces. This illustrates that cultures and identities are not singular and mutually incompatible but are plural and imbricated.

Samra finally finds her home in Canada. After years of harrowing search for identity and belonging, she finds herself at home in Canada. Her transformed parents, the modernised queer mosque and her siblings provide her with a stable environment that is a safe haven. This space allows her to be individualistic and empower herself. Her past, which is comprised of trauma and gender role regulation, is replaced by an inclusive society. She strives to support queer community and queer Muslims who have had similar backgrounds. Thus, by embracing her identity fully, her search for her belonging ends.

Conclusion

The paper employs Intersectionality theory to show how specific individuals experience several levels of marginality. Having multiple minority identities is challenging since forming a solid identity requires reconciliation with all the identities. Conflicting identities and intersectional marginalised social positions pertaining to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion dismantle an individual as they are constantly facing challenges from multiple institutional structures such as patriarchal structures and heteronormative structures. Additionally, individuals are marginalised from within the confines of family, community, and the larger

context of society. Disregarding commitment to the family, respecting elders and performing gender-appropriate roles, which are the core of Islamic social life, results in multiple layers of discrimination. Intersectionality also brings out how individuals can empower themselves and stay resilient even when they experience rejection and marginality by structural inequalities while individuals suffer identity crisis shame, depression, and identity crisis. Intersectionality theory attempts to bring visibility to the otherwise invisible subordinate identity by peeling multiple layers of oppression, thereby rendering visibility that was denied. Queer Muslims, especially women, immensely suffer as they are constantly fighting to gain an individualistic gender identity. Their religious identity plays a vital role as women are unable to accept their subservient positionality.

Furthermore, when Muslim women realise they are queer, they suffer a lot as they have to deal with religious doctrines, heteronormativity, and marginalisation by their family and community. Also, queer Muslims are side-lined since queer Muslim identity is a minority identity in comparison with the queer mainstream identity. Thus, intersectionality attempts to expose the intersections between women's experiences of institutional inequalities that are based on gender, religion, race, and sexual orientation. Also, since intersectionality brings out the oppression faced by minority identities, it attempts to support and voice their challenges and difficulties. Additionally, such exposure helps to form independent, self-empowering identities. Moving from place to place to find people and a queer community allows her to seek a queer world she can call home. Samra experiences a sense of belonging in Canada since it helps her explore her gender and sexual identity. Western space allows her to assimilate her gender and sexual identity, which would be nearly impossible in Pakistani/South Asian spaces.

Notes

1. Heteropatriarchy is a combined institution that deems heterosexuality and patriarchy to be normal and natural

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