

**RESEARCH PAPER****New Forms of Anti-Hindutva Resistance: Critical Feminist Struggle and Diaspora Activism against Hindutva in India and Abroad****Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid**

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**ABSTRACT**

India, a country that takes pride in its diversity has witnessed a growing trend of otherization of minorities since the ascension of Hindutva: a nationalist ideology that advocates Hindu hegemony, to the policy circles. There has been a sufficient scholarly endeavor to explain the emergence and transnational proliferation of Hindutva, and the ways it has transformed India's sociopolitical landscape. However, there is a little scholarship on the resistance against this exclusionist design, and even less on the feminist and particularly Muslim women led activism. The research delves into the emergent modalities of anti-Hindutva resistance through the dual praxes of critical feminist struggle and intersectionality by drawing exclusive focus on the resistance led by Muslim women. By employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines both qualitative and case-study based analysis of activist's practices, mobilization strategies and online engagement mechanisms, this research elucidates how feminist movements and organizations create counter narratives to Hindutva's exclusionary project. The findings reveal that feminist protests serve to subvert the patriarchal structures and create space for an inclusive form of citizenship. The research illustrates that Muslim women's activism is beyond the conventional practices of a protest movement, employing multifold strategies to contest Islamophobia, communal violence and patriarchal barriers. The research contributes to the global discourse on democratic values and social justice, thus illuminating the way forward for policymakers and activists against majoritarianism around the world.

**Keywords:**

Anti-Hindutva Resistance, Critical Feminist Struggle, Diaspora Led Activism, Intersectionality, Muslim Women's Activism

**Introduction**

This socio-political landscape of India has been significantly altered by the rise of Hindutva, an ideology that advocates for primacy of a Hindu nationalist identity and formation of a culturally uniform society built around BJP's radical interpretation of Hinduism (Sarkar, 2002). Among a myriad of academic, political, as well as social debates analyzing the implications of Hindutva, there is one that remains unattended, the Hindutva's effect on women, particularly Muslim woman (Bacchetta, 2004). Hindu nationalist identity tends to marginalize religious minorities and make them "Others," with Muslim communities facing a heightened effect of this marginalization (Nussbaum, 2007). Within such a charged and hostile environment, Muslim women contend with a double burden: in their religious and social context, they confront patriarchal structures, and face systemic discrimination in a society shaped by Hindutva's influence (Hasan, 2019).

Muslim women's activism against Hindutva is not separable from more general questions of identity, belonging and citizenship (Narayan, 1997). Their struggles are intersectional, structured by class, region, language, education, and other factors that complicate the reductive burden of a one dimensional 'Muslim women's victimhood'. Muslim women activists have become increasingly visible both locally and globally in recent

years as they speak out against Islamophobia, gender-based violence and systemic erasure of Muslim voices (Engineer, 2004).

This research examines how Indian Muslim women mobilize to resist the hegemony of Hindutva. Using a critical feminist framework, this research highlights the complexity, the multi-layered reality of Muslim women's lived experiences. By doing so, the article brings to light their variegated strategies — legal battles, street protests, community organizing, online campaigns, and alliances with broader civil society organizations — which constitute a collective defiance to religious nationalism (Shaikh, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Methodologically, the research uses secondary sources, media reports, and existing academic literature to map the historical and contemporary terrain of Muslim women's activism (Hasan, 2019; Nussbaum, 2007). Although a richer analysis may be obtained through primary interviews and ethnographic work, this paper's emphasis is on the synthesis of existing research and the exposition of key feminist insights related to the topic. This approach helps show Muslim women's ability to deny the role of passive recipients of the socio-political forces, rather, that they are active agents in the discourse of rights, identity, and gender justice.

The remainder of the paper will draw on the theoretical framework of critical feminism to explicate Hindutva's socio-political impact; contextualize the history and current forms of Muslim women's activism; and, conclude with recommendations for policy and future research.

### **Intersectionality and Transnational Feminist Perspectives:**

Critical feminism, positioned at the crossroads of critical theory and feminist discourse, focusses on the systems of power that create systematic gendered inequalities (Freedman, 2001). Critical feminism posits that oppression cannot be understood as only influenced by sexual orientation, but includes race, class, religion, caste, and other forms identity as intersecting axes of oppression through which complex hierarchies of domination are produced (Crenshaw, 1989; Mohanty, 2003). When considered within the framework of Muslim women's resistance to Hindutva, critical feminism can help us identify how patriarchy, religious discrimination and socio-economic stratification come together to shape women's experiences (Ahmed, et. al., 2015).

The principle of intersectionality is central to critical feminism and can be defined as the study of how different identities, including sexual identity, race, caste and class coalesce to create a unique experience of oppression and privilege (Kaifa, et. al. 2024; Crenshaw, 1989). For Muslim women living under Hindutva, this intersectionality means a 'double, or even triple, marginalization' (Sarkar, 2002). On the one hand they are met with islamophobia from external political forces, on the other hand, they experience patriarchal norms in their own communities. Critical feminism rejects the universalization of "women's experiences" by framing these experiences intersectionality that highlights the variability of contexts.

Furthermore, the significance of Muslim women's activism on a world scale is greatly enhanced by transnational feminist perspectives. Feminist scholars of local struggles assert that they are in solidarity with feminist movements globally while being sensitive to cultural and religious differences (Narayan, 1997). Critical feminism thus challenges Orientalist narratives which constructs Muslim women as powerless victims and repositions them in their struggles against multiple interlocking oppressions (Ahmed, 1992).

## **Power, Agency, and Resistance**

Critical feminism calls for a rejection of the idea that agency can only emerge from overt forms of liberation. It posits that resistance not only appears as a direct and collective response, but can also be manifested in everyday acts, subversive practices and strategic negotiations of cultural norms (Butler 1990; Mahmood 2005). Muslim women's agency in the context of Hindutva involves their mobilization as grassroots organization, their effective utilization of legal and constitutional framework, and their choice to selectively wield hijab or other religious symbols as political statements of identity (Hasan, 2019).

In addition, agency within critical feminism is analyzed in terms of relational and collective forms of action. Muslim women's activism that is essentially characterized by forging alliances with non-Muslims, secular women's groups, Dalit organizations and other marginalized communities often results in a collective pushback against the homogenizing tendencies of Hindutva. critical feminism, therefore, pushes for framing women's activism as a collective strategizing endeavor and therefore as a process emanating from collective solidarity (Mohanty, 2003).

## **Critiquing Essentialism and Cultural Relativism**

Critical feminism is also highly skeptical of any sort of essentialism. It posits that no religious or cultural identity remains static rather it undergoes a process of change across different localities and human personalities. Hindutva an ideology that essentially seeks to homogenize different identities also perceives Muslim identity as being homogenous and devoid of any sort of dynamism. Protagonists of Hindutva portray Muslims as a threat to the nation that needs a continued state surveillance. This stereotypical understanding of Muslim identity by followers of Hindutva makes life more challenging for Muslim women who are also struggling against a conservative understanding of Islamic theology by some segments of Muslim leadership that essentializes their confinement to house and other personal spaces consequently restricting their participation in public activism.

Critical feminism rejects both forms of essentialism. Culture and religion are treated by it as spaces that are dynamic, contestable, and there within women can negotiate their roles and exercise autonomy (Mahmood, 2005). The framework chastises cultural relativism that would allow patriarchal norms under the veil of tradition. Furthermore, it also argues for an ethical, justice oriented approach that recognizes difference on cultural terms along with a robust opposition to exploitation and oppression (Narayan, 1997).

To sum up it can be said that Critical Feminism provides enough tools to comprehensively elaborate that how Muslim women negotiate with patriarchy, religious discrimination and state-imposed nationalism. It foregrounds intersectionality, relational forms of agency, and a critique of essentialism, to prepare the ground for the analysis of Muslim women's activism against Hindutva as a multi-layered, dynamic and transformative process.

## **Background and Context: Hindutva and its Impact on Muslim Women**

### **Defining Hindutva**

Broadly interpreted, Hindutva means 'hindu-ness', an ideology professing to establish cultural and political hegemony through the assertion of Hindu identity (Savarkar, 1923/2003). From the early 20th century it took an organizational form in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and in time political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Bacchetta, 2004). Hindutva, once a fringe movement, has gradually made the mainstream, influencing public policy, social norms and electoral politics (Sarkar, 2002).

One of the major premises of Hindutva is that nationalism is to be equated with acceptance of Hindu practices and traditions (Nussbaum, 2007). An essentialist construction like this provides little space for religious diversity. Therefore, religious minorities, above all are classified as outsiders or anti nationals. Under the banner of Hindutva, frequent communal polarizations, hate speech, and even violence have justified Islamophobia (Engineer, 2004).

### **Gender and Hindutva**

The gender debate is very crucial to Hindutva discourse. Scholars argue that even though women are mobilized into Hindutva organizations, their roles tend to maintain traditional gender hierarchies (Bacchetta, 2004). In Hindutva discourse, the idealised Hindu woman is imagined as the guardian of cultural purity and as the trainer of the future generations (Sarkar, 2002). As a result, Muslim women then become the antithetical “other” represented as oppressed by an alien, patriarchal religion (Narayan, 1997).

This is rather a two purposed portrayal. First, this enables Hindutva proponents to take the moral high ground by characterizing Hindu society as intrinsically more equal as opposed to Muslim communities being regressive (Hasan, 2019). Second, it also rationalizes, at both state and societal levels, these supposed 'saving' interventions of Muslim women which violate their rights, which violate their agency. Debate on the illegal triple talaq ban in India was common fodder to question Muslim personal law while neglecting to consult with advocacy groups of Muslim women (Shaikh, 2020).

### **Socio-political Consequences for Muslim Women**

Muslim women, under Hindutva, are marginalized on multiple fronts. Engineer boasts that hate campaigns towards Muslims eventually result in ghettoization and precarious living conditions (2004: 96). Women’s mobility is also curtailed and economic vulnerabilities increased by this environmental insecurity. In addition, Muslim people are stigmatized socially on the basis of their faith, which translates into fewer employment opportunities for them leading to amplification of the impact of class dimension of marginalization (Hasan, 2019).

Similarly, scrutiny is placed on Muslim women's freedom of dress, freedom to practice their religion, and use of public spaces. For example, Muslim women wearing hijabs are objects of public debate that triggers wider dialect on national integration through uniformity in civil code that places these women at a conjunction between religious expression and nationalist rhetoric (Narayan, 1997). In some extreme cases communal animus was weaponised and sexual violence against women was used as a tool of suppression i.e. the 2002 Gujarat riots where Muslim women suffered sexual violence (Engineer, 2004).

These challenges are compounded by state policies which are the consequences of Hindutva’s ascension to the governmental spheres. “Love jihad” laws, for instance, which criminalize interfaith marriages by alleging that Muslim men are scheming to convert Hindu women, portraying women’s bodies as embodiments of community honor and purity (Sarkar, 2020). Such policies not only restrict women's freedom of choice in picking a husband but also cast down Muslim men and make inter communal tensions more intense (Nussbaum, 2007).

### **Resisting Islamophobia: The Broader Climate**

Despite the hostile climate, Muslim women’s resistance is not a new phenomenon. Indian history is replete with examples of women mobilizing for social justice, from the anti-colonial struggle to contemporary protests for gender equality (Hasan, 2019). Yet,

Hindutva's ascendance in recent decades has necessitated new forms of resistance that incorporate digital activism, legal interventions, and multi-faith alliances (Shaikh, 2020).

Social media platforms, for instance, have become a significant arena for mobilizing support, documenting human rights violations, and shaping public opinion. Muslim women, alongside their allies, use Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share testimonies and counter narratives that demonize their community (Zia, 2019). On the legal front, advocacy groups have leveraged constitutional guarantees—such as the right to freedom of religion and equality—to challenge discriminatory laws and practices (Engineer, 2004).

At the community level, grassroots organizations, often led by women, focus on economic empowerment, education, and local governance. These groups recognize that fostering women's socio-economic independence is crucial for building a resilient community capable of confronting Hindutva's exclusionary politics (Bhatti, 2001). Such efforts demonstrate that Muslim women's activism is not solely reactive but also generative, building new institutions, networks, and discourses that affirm their rights and identities.

### **Linking Context and Theory:**

The socio-political context outlined above sets the stage for understanding Muslim women's activism through the critical feminist lens. Given the overlapping forces of patriarchy, religious nationalism, and socio-economic exclusion, it becomes evident that a multifaceted theoretical approach is necessary to capture the full spectrum of their resistance (Crenshaw, 1989). Critical feminism's emphasis on intersectionality, power dynamics, and deconstructing essentialisms offers a compelling framework to examine how Muslim women resist both internal patriarchal constraints and external Islamophobic aggression under Hindutva.

By situating Muslim women's activism within this broader context, we can better grasp the complexity of their struggles and the diverse strategies they employ. The next sections delve deeper into the various expressions of activism, illuminating how Muslim women navigate these turbulent socio-political waters, assert their agency, and collaborate with others to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

### **Muslim Women Activism in India**

Muslim women's political and social mobilization in India has deep historical roots that stretch back to the anti-colonial movement (Hasan, 2019). During India's fight for independence, prominent Muslim women such as Bi Amma (the mother of Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali) played pivotal roles, addressing rallies, raising funds, and navigating societal taboos around women's public presence. Their participation challenged both colonial subjugation and conservative community norms that confined women to private spaces (Bhatti, 2001).

In the post-independence period, Muslim women continued to organize around issues of education, health, and political representation (Engineer, 2004). The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of feminist movements in India, some of which included Muslim women working in alliance with secular, left-leaning, and Dalit feminist groups (Narayan, 1997). Although these alliances were not without tensions—given the intersections of religion, caste, and class—they demonstrated early forms of intersectional feminism that recognized the multiple identities carried by Muslim women.

### **The Shah Bano Case and Its Aftermath**

A significant turning point in Muslim women's activism was the Shah Bano case of 1985, which brought issues of Muslim personal law and women's rights into the national

spotlight (Hasan, 2019). Shah Bano, a 62-year-old Muslim woman, sought maintenance from her husband under the Indian Criminal Procedure Code after he divorced her. The Supreme Court ruled in her favor, but the case ignited intense debates around the Uniform Civil Code, Muslim personal law, and women's rights (Engineer, 2004).

While conservative elements of the Muslim community saw the Supreme Court's decision as an infringement on religious autonomy, feminist groups (including Muslim women activists) argued that Muslim personal law needed reform to protect women's rights. The government's eventual decision to overturn the Supreme Court ruling through parliamentary legislation—under pressure from conservative Muslim clerics—reinforced a patriarchal interpretation of religious law (Hasan, 2019). This event galvanized Muslim women's groups to assert their voices on legal reforms, signaling a more organized and visible form of activism.

### **Shaheen Bagh (New Delhi)**

The sit in protest in Shaheen Bagh became known around the world by virtue of its magnitude, duration, and the leadership provided by Muslim women (Hussain, 2020). The protest also immediately became broad, encompassing a movement against Islamophobia and Hindutva, which was initiated in response to the CAA and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC). Women of various age groups who never took part in public demonstrations before, actually led the charge. At the protest site, they held debates, participated in cultural performances, and set up libraries and medical camps (Shaikh, 2020). The societal disruption caused by their presence collectively ordered the breaking down of gendered norms around public space. Many of these women defied family pressures, overcame domestic responsibilities, and endured harsh weather to continue their political work.

Importantly, the protest also garnered substantial support from crowd of non-Muslim communities, which as a result created an ambience of communal harmony. Muslim women left aside their political (and often downloading) differences to team up with Hindu and Sikh citizens to distribute food and blankets, presenting an alternative vision of India that is one of plurality and coexistence (Zia, 2019). Their continued standing in the shadow of police crackdowns, eviction orders and attempts to dislodge them, reflected a powerful critique of how a democratic space can be claimed by a minority community under authoritarian pressures.

### **Bilkis Bano's Legal Battle**

Bilkis Bano's pursuit of justice following the communal violence in Gujarat (2002) stands as a seminal example of Muslim women's resilience (Engineer, 2004). Pregnant at the time of the riots, Bilkis Bano was brutally attacked, and most of her family members were killed. Rather than succumbing to fear and silence, she undertook a legal battle that spanned nearly two decades (Nussbaum, 2007). The Supreme Court eventually awarded her significant monetary compensation and ordered action against the officers who tried to obstruct the investigation.

Bilkis Bano's struggle brought international attention to the sexual violence faced by Muslim women during communal riots (Engineer, 2004). Her case underscored the role of a biased legal and administrative system that often fails minority women. However, it also illustrated the potential of constitutional remedies and human rights advocacy to deliver justice, albeit belatedly. Bilkis Bano's courage inspired many other survivors to come forward, shedding light on the systemic failings that enable gendered violence in communal conflicts.

## **Soni Sori and Intersectional Activism**

While not Muslim herself, the case of Soni Sori—an Adivasi (indigenous) activist—provides insights into how alliances across religious lines can strengthen women's movements against state violence and religious nationalism (Roy, 2012). Sori has repeatedly expressed solidarity with marginalized communities, including Muslims facing Hindutva-driven discrimination. Her activism spans tribal rights, land dispossession, and police brutality, aligning with the broader intersectional ethos that resonates with Muslim women's struggles (Mohanty, 2003).

In this sense, Sori's collaborations with Muslim women's groups highlight the shared terrain of resistance. Both face the brunt of a state that criminalizes dissent, uses draconian laws to suppress opposition, and perpetuates a dominant nationalist narrative (Narayan, 1997). These cross-community partnerships exemplify how critical feminist alliances can transcend religious boundaries, forging common agendas for justice, dignity, and equality.

### **The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA):**

Founded in 2007, the BMMA is a prominent organization championing Muslim women's rights. Co-founded by Zakia Soman and Noorjehan Safia Niaz, the BMMA's initiatives span literacy drives, economic empowerment, and legal advocacy (Hasan, 2019). Their focus on reforming Muslim personal law is particularly noteworthy, as they argue that many patriarchal practices lack Quranic justification and violate India's constitutional guarantees. By interpreting Islamic law through a gender-just framework, the BMMA challenges the binary that pits religious identity against women's rights (Engineer, 2004).

A significant milestone in the BMMA's activism was the legal campaign against triple talaq. The organization gathered testimonies from Muslim women adversely affected by instant divorce, presented research to lawmakers, and engaged in public awareness campaigns (Shaikh, 2020). Their persistence played a critical role in shaping the national debate, culminating in the Supreme Court declaring triple talaq unconstitutional in 2017 and subsequent legislative reforms (Hasan, 2019). While debates continue regarding the criminalization of triple talaq, the BMMA's advocacy demonstrates the power of informed, grassroots mobilization.

### **Karnataka Hijab Ban**

More recent example of Muslim women's activism is with regards to hijab ban in Karnataka educational institutions that became a flashpoint in early 2022 (Dutta, 2022; Mirza, 2022). It all started at a government pre-university college in Udupi district where Muslim female students were not allowed to wear the hijab to classrooms. This local incident escalated quickly with Muskan Khan hitting the headlines of national media. Muskan, a second year B. Com student vehemently confronted a group of Hindu students who were forcing her to unveil her face by removing the Hijab as it was banned by the institution. This incident sparked a series of protests against many other institutions across Karnataka where such prohibitions were in force. Citing the need for uniformity in dress codes, the state government upheld these measures that resulted in affected students along with civil society group, going to the Karnataka High Court (Mirza, 2022). The Karnataka High Court upheld the ban with the argument that the hijab did not form an essential religious practice of Islam, an argument that the argument was widely contested by scholars and activists (Mirza, 2022). This latest verdict also stoked heated debate about the state's role in clarifying religious doctrine and the curbs on minority rights in India. Protestors after finding no relief from the Karnataka High Court knocked the doors of the Supreme Court of India wherein a decision with the split mandate was issued, so the ban still continues to affect the lives of Muslim women particularly students.

The hijab is much more than a mere piece of clothing for many Muslim women; it is a clear expression of their religious identity, and their personal conviction (Hasan 2019). Therefore, the ban was interpreted as another manifestation of Hindutva's Islamophobic campaign in which Muslim religious practices are always singled out for inspection and regulation (Nussbaum 2007). To shed light on how the ban violates constitutional guarantees around freedom of religion and the right to education, students and activists organized peaceful protests, online campaigns like #HijabMyRight, and open demonstrations (Dutta, 2022).

This episode succeeded in further mobilizing young Muslim women, who fired up new conversations about religious freedom and gender justice as it relates to educational access. The Karnataka hijab ban case shows in many ways how a localized policy can become a topic of national importance that helps shape national discourses about secularism, communal harmony, and women's agency in India.

### **Local Grassroot Initiatives**

Beyond these high-profile examples, countless local grassroots efforts drive Muslim women's activism in less-publicized contexts. In rural areas, self-help groups focus on microfinance to bolster women's economic independence, which in turn strengthens their negotiating power within both the household and the community (Bhatty, 2001). In urban ghettos, community-based educators run informal schools to counter high dropout rates among Muslim girls, who face both gender and religious discrimination in formal institutions (Hasan, 2019). These smaller-scale endeavors might lack the visibility of national protests, but they are no less transformative in challenging Hindutva's marginalization of Muslim communities from the ground up.

From high-profile protest sites like Shaheen Bagh to legal battles and grassroots organizing, Muslim women's activism in India manifests in a plethora of forms. Each case underscores a collective determination to resist Hindutva's homogenizing agenda while simultaneously striving to reform patriarchal norms within Muslim society. Viewed through the lens of critical feminism, these efforts illuminate the depth, diversity, and dynamism of Muslim women's resistance, paving the way for broader reflections on intersectional solidarity and transformative social change.

### **Challenges to Muslim Women's Activism**

Muslim women's activism against Hindutva operates in a hostile environment marked by rampant Islamophobia, patriarchal norms, and state surveillance (Nussbaum 2007). An immediate challenge is public protest's stigmatization wherein activists face a serious backlash in the form of smear campaigns that paints them as 'anti - national' or 'funded by foreign interests' discrediting them and as a result discouraging wider public backing (Zia 2019). There is also the specter of potential legal persecution, especially if laws are too strict and dissent can even be labeled sedition or terrorism.

Moreover, activism is further complicated by patriarchal and religious barriers within the community (Engineer, 2004). Women activists may be labelled too 'westernised' or their activities in opposition to Islamic teaching by conservative religious authorities who may be reluctant to implement reforms. Women are afraid of being socially ostracized by their own community, and not being allowed to speak freely to them when they need it, such as discussion of domestic violence or requiring more progressive interpretations of religious law (Hasan, 2019).

Economic constraints have also become an important obstacle. Muslim women come from families where the financial need to merely survive makes activism secondary to survival (Bhatty, 2001). Balancing domestic responsibilities, childcare, and economic

survival with sustained protest or organizational work is an enormous burden to carry that requires creative and innovative solutions like rotating protest shifts or shared childcare arrangements.

### **Possibilities for Strengthening Activism**

Amidst all these challenges, multiple measures can be adopted to fortify Muslim women's against any possible assault of Hindutva. First, a network of strategic alliances with other marginalized groups can be established in order to expand the scope and impact of such movements (Crenshaw, 1989). Collaboration with Dalit, Adivasi, and secular feminist organizations not only enhances numerical strength but also fosters an intersectional approach that addresses multiple axes of oppression.

Second, digital activism presents opportunities for real-time communication, global outreach, and knowledge-sharing (Zia, 2019). Online tools enable activists to document human rights abuses, crowdsource legal aid, and generate public pressure on political authorities. However, reliance on digital platforms must be balanced with offline strategies to avoid surveillance and ensure inclusivity for those with limited internet access.

Third, education and legal literacy can empower women to assert their constitutional rights. Initiatives that provide paralegal training, scholarships for higher education, and vocational skills can help Muslim women navigate bureaucratic obstacles and engage with policy-making processes (Hasan, 2019). Community-run schools or study circles, for instance, can transform traditional religious spaces into venues for critical thinking and dialogue on gender justice.

### **Relevance of Critical Feminism**

Applying critical feminism to Muslim women's activism against Hindutva yields several insights. Foremost is the recognition of intersectionality, which ensures that women's multiple identities—gender, religion, class, caste—are accounted for in both analysis and action (Crenshaw, 1989). By rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach to women's rights, critical feminism emphasizes localized strategies that respect cultural nuances while challenging oppressive practices (Narayan, 1997).

Critical feminism also foregrounds agency as a layered phenomenon. Instead of viewing Muslim women through a purely victimhood lens, it highlights their capacity to strategize, negotiate, and resist within patriarchal structures (Mahmood, 2005). It also acknowledges the possibility of women's expressions of piety or religious commitment serving as an inspiration to reinforce empowerment, to build a sustainable space for activists sharing the same sense of oppression (Ahmed, 1992).

Furthermore, it also contributes by criticizing the essentialist notions of culture. Consequently, Hindutva relies on monolithic portrayals of both "Hindu" and "Muslim" identities, and subsequently homogenizes these categories in parallel with the communal divisions they foment. (Sarkar, 2002). Critical feminism dismantles such narratives by showcasing the heterogeneity of Muslim women's perspectives and the continuous evolution of religious traditions (Narayan, 1997).

### **Conclusion**

The research has looked into the multifaceted nature of Muslim women's activism against Hindutva using the framework of critical feminism. An analysis of the historical context, contemporary mobilizations and diverse case studies illustrates that Muslim women in India have a long-standing tradition of using their agency in organizing for their rights, working within the legal framework and forging alliances across religious and social

boundaries. They advocate for intersectional resistance beyond Hindutva's exclusionary discourse that challenges the patriarchy present in Muslim communities.

Critical feminism is an important theoretical tool in this discussion as it shows how religion intersects with gender and other identity markers such as class and caste to make a deleterious effect on women's lives. In doing so, it makes the point of not underestimating the importance of disrupting monolithic narratives of Muslim women as oppressed subjects as presented by Hindutva that essentializes the creation of a culturally homogenous, inherently patriarchal and radically nationalist society. Muslim women's struggles of the twenty first century employ multiple strategies – legal, digital, communal and transnational – to demand their agency and rights. Shaheen Bagh protests, Bilkis Bano's legal battle, a splurge of activism from the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, and countless other grassroots initiatives attest to the energy and tenacity of Muslim women's activism. Challenged by Islamophobia, class-based marginalization and familial constraints, these women created spaces of dissent and enabled dialogues on inclusive citizenship.

The scope of this research extends far beyond India. The story of Muslim women activists in an age of global Islamophobia and an upsurge of right-wing populism is a tale of successful resistance, solidarity and feminist praxis. By amplifying these voices, scholars, policymakers, and activists around the globe can learn how to build more equitable, pluralistic societies. Further research, particularly ethnographic and participatory projects, can clarify the local variations, transnational solidarities of Muslim women across the borders, as well as their ongoing resistance against different forms of religious nationalism.

### **Future Directions**

Moving forward, fostering sustained momentum in Muslim women's activism will require both policy-level changes and grassroots efforts. At the policy level, there must be stringent enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, legal reforms that address communal violence, and protections for women activists. Civil society organizations can bolster this process by undertaking public advocacy, lobbying legislators, and filing Public Interest Litigations to hold state actors accountable (Shaikh, 2020).

Grassroots efforts should continue to emphasize leadership development among Muslim women. Mentorship programs, capacity-building workshops, and community media initiatives can all cultivate new generations of activists. Equally vital is the role of men who support gender justice. Encouraging male allies within the Muslim community and beyond can shift patriarchal norms more effectively (Engineer, 2004).

Additionally, transnational networks can provide solidarity, resources, and visibility. Muslim women's movements in India can link with women's rights organizations worldwide, drawing on shared experiences of Islamophobia, patriarchal control, and right-wing populism (Mohanty, 2003). Such alliances not only offer moral support but can influence international bodies and diaspora communities to advocate for minority rights in India. Muslim women's activism in India against Hindutva encapsulates a powerful intersection of local resistance, global feminism, and transformative social change.

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