Examining Anti-CAA Protests at Shaheen Bagh:
Muslim Women and Politics of the Hindu India

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The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed by the parliament of India on December 11, 2019. Muslim women and many other people in India are contesting this act on the grounds that it provides citizenship status on a religious basis. Key enactments of dissent in relation to anti-CAA protests have become visible globally through the media. One is the very visible presence of a local community of Muslim and other women in the physical space of protests in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi. We draw from on-site interviews with Muslim women protestors at Shaheen Bagh to examine how Muslim women are using their physical bodies in protest sites to show dissent and to challenge the hypermasculine Hindu body politic of India. Based in our grounded analysis, we explore four main themes in this study: visibility of Muslim women in protest sites, using social media for international visibility, pushing against fear, and using care as a protest strategy.

Keywords: Hindu body politic, anti-CAA protests, feminist methodology, fear and surveillance, Muslim women, Shaheen Bagh

> "The revolution will wear burqas and bangles."
> —Samina Sheik

　　　　Under the rule of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindutva ideology is gaining traction in India, deepening the already existing schism between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority populations. Since its reelection in 2019, the BJP has approved and implemented several discriminatory acts and policies to promote their political identity as pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim/minority political party. First, on August 5, 2019, the BJP revoked the special status of limited autonomy granted to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under

Article 370. This decision was designed to limit and reject the semiautonomous status of India's only Muslim-majority state and to change the religion-based demographics in J&K in favor of the Hindu community. The government increased militarization in the state and implemented an Internet shutdown under the pretext of controlling the law and order situation. Later, on December 11, 2019, the BJP implemented the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the country. This act is discriminatory toward Muslim immigrants, who have faced persecution and have fled to India. Citizens are contesting this act on the grounds that it provides citizenship status on a religious basis. In addition, the BJP intends to apply the National Registry of Citizenship (NRC) in all states in the country; this implies that every citizen will have to prove his or her citizenship, and the decision to grant this status depends entirely on the discretion of government officials. When the implications of executing the NRC and the CAA are analyzed together, it is evident that the Muslim citizens of India (or immigrants already residing here) will face extreme and systemic marginalization; they may even be ripped of their citizenship status.

On December 17, 2019, Shaheen Bagh, a small locality in the Jamia Nagar area of Delhi, emerged as the site of an indefinite sit-in protest staged by Muslim women opposing the CAA (2019). Shaheen Bagh, which lies at the intersection of several localities and houses many Muslim residents, includes areas such as the Batla House, Zakir Nagar, Ghaffar Manzil, and Noor Nagar. The location of this site is critical for the anti-CAA protests for several reasons. Shaheen Bagh's residents have diverse economic backgrounds; some are from the laboring class, such as migrant construction workers, plumbers, carpenters, and vendors, and others, including professors at the university, Jamia Millia Islamia, are categorized as intellectual elites. Still others own small and large businesses. For the residents of Shaheen Bagh, especially young students, obtaining a place at Jamia Millia Islamia is an aspiration. In addition, the university conducts several outreach programs in the communities and contributes significantly toward their well-being. As a result, when the Delhi Police brutalized university students who were protesting the CAA on December 15, 2019, Shaheen Bagh rose in protest to express solidarity toward the cause and the student protestors.

Key enactments of anti-CAA protests have become visible globally through the media. One is the very visible presence of local community women in the physical space of the protests in Shaheen Bagh, another is active participation of students on the physical streets, and a third is the significant protest voices mobilized from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi (DBA) caste locations. All three of these groups also have a significant presence online through social media. The themes we elaborate on in this article, however, are mainly focused on the participation and visibility of women from the Muslim community because our main site of analysis is the Muslim community of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi, India.

Shaheen Bagh protests appear to be largely organized, led, and sustained by Muslim women who, for a very long time, have not had a significant presence in public protests across India. This is also what we see significantly in social media representations. Therefore, a key question framing this article concerns the visual and discursive impact of the presence of a (Muslim) female body in the protest space. Through this research, we address three critical research questions:

RQ1:   *How is the female presence in physical streets mobilized and mediated to produce a sociopolitical impact?*

RQ2:   *What political functions are served through the presence of Muslim female bodies at protest sites?*

RQ3:   *How are marginalized identities such as religion (Muslim), gender, caste, and class visibly intersecting to shape the discourses surrounding protest movements at this site?*

To engage these questions, we review some literature, especially around women's presence in select protest movements in Indian history, the role of Arab women protestors with regard to the sociopolitical revolutions in the Arab world, and studies on how social media was used during other international protest movements, such as the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter movements.

According to scholars such as Ray (2000), Ray and Korteweg (1999), and others, the women's movement in India emerged significantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries within the struggle between the newly emerging nationalist movement and the British. Modern aspirations borrowed from India's encounters with the British informed the new national identity that was being forged through the freedom struggle. As a result, questions about women's rights became a major issue during the early 20th century. Men controlled the early attempts to reform the conditions under which women lived in the late 19th century; however, by the 20th century, women had formed autonomous organizations and groups to campaign against dowry and for more effective rape laws, and to fight against practices such as sati, and they participated in debates around complex issues such as the environment and religious personal laws. These movements can be classified into two categories: those that were largely organized and led by women, such as the communist-led food campaigns of the 1940s, the Chipko movement, and the antialcohol and anti–price rise movements of the 1970s, and those that were primarily controlled by men, but witnessed significant participation of women, such as the nationalist, Tebhaga, and Telangana movements.

The role of women protestors and the presence of Muslim female bodies at protest sites should also be examined in light of political movements in the Arab world. In her work, Khamis (2011, 2014) unpacks the role of Arab women in several activist movements and resistance during the Arab Spring. Khamis (2011) proposes that we adopt "a middle ground of 'cautionary-optimism'" (p. 694) and contextualize Arab women's participation in protest movements within the large context of the prevailing social-cultural-political-economic challenges and uncertainties. Her arguments draw theoretical force from the theory of "intersectionality" and highlights the need to examine the presence of Muslim women at protest sites in relation to their lived realities and subjective experiences with freedom, possibilities, and challenges. In a similar study conducted with 20 young Arab women citizen journalists, Radsch and Khamis (2013) highlight the role of technological mediation in young women's activism and protest. They argue that young women perceived their access to various communication technologies as empowerment; these mediated systems of communication allowed them to challenge traditional and gendered norms of participation in the Arab society.

These studies emphasize the need to develop a critical feminist approach to unpack links among bodies, protest sites, and marginalized social identities. These arguments pose important questions on how women's presence and participation in sociopolitical revolution in technologically mediated societies merit a feminist inquiry and further contribute to our understanding of conducting a truly feminist research study.

In the following section, we elaborate on our role as researchers and provide details about the feminist methodology we designed to conduct this study.

The Subjective Self

The two coauthors of this article come from two different generational locations originating in India. In terms of class, caste, and religious background, they come from the more privileged social locations in India. The first author (KB) is a graduate student who recently arrived in the U.S., and the second author (RG) is an Indian immigrant who has lived away from India for more than 30 years, except for the occasional visit to see family. Each of us has a different time-based experiential investment with India and the sociopolitical events that occur there. KB was in India during this time, during winter break from university studies. RG was following the events through social media and through being connected with several young women, including KB.

In what follows, we build on the interviews that KB conducted with Muslim women protestors at Shaheen Bagh while she was in India and participating in the anti-CAA protests. As a coauthor, RG enters through a view from the Internet, so to speak, and draws on her feminist research expertise and insights to comment on the strategic role of women protestors. She has, like several other researchers looking at social media spaces, also been watching the story unfold via digital publics, and she has used a variety of data mining tools provided by platforms such as Netlytic.org and the open-source software Gephi, which are designed to scrape, organize, and visualize large amounts of data. However, the scope of the current article does not include a detailed discussion of this part of the overall project. We note this exercise because watching the scenario unfold in digital publics shaped our insights into the overall strategy of care, nonviolence, and the visibility of Muslim women from the Shaheen Bagh community. This distance viewing through a transnational social media space allowed us to see that the performance/staging of an ethic of care and the high visibility—even centering—of the women of Shaheen Bagh, while enacted with genuine effort and honesty offline, was part of a clear strategy. We are not privy to the discussions and planning among organizers of the protests and therefore will not assume that the strategy emerges through a male-centered hierarchy; rather, there is clear anecdotal evidence that the discussions were cross-generational and involved both men and women. Thus, we posit that the necessity of the strategy to make women visible as protestors reveals an understanding by a majority of the community members that it was important for this community protest not to allow participants' dissent to be narrated as violent, while also breaking the stereotype of Muslim women being oppressed by their men.

Methods

In the present article, we center the interviews conducted by KB on site using grounded theory methods to understand why the women of Shaheen Bagh made themselves visible as activists during the anti-CAA protests. The interviews were carefully coded for themes using Atlas.ti. For coder reliability and verification, we had members of RG's research lab examine the codes.

As noted earlier, the KB was on site in Shaheen Bagh in December 2019, and RG was in the U.S. watching the social media space erupt in discussion, debate, and clashes around the events unfolding in

India. The CAA-NRC rulings came a few months after the home minister of India, Amit Shah, announced the removal of the disputed Kashmir region's special status. Under the pretext of bringing the state under control, the ruling government locked down the state and suspended several channels of travel and communication. While Kashmir was still disconnected from the rest of the world with its Internet shutdown, we heard of protests against the CAA NRC happening in various parts of India, including the Northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, the state of UP, and the cities of Mumbai, Bangalore, and Delhi. There were also protests reported in South India, particularly Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and some cities in Kerala.

The data collected for this article include field notes and 19 interviews—recorded and transcribed by KB and coded by RG and her team. Overall, the themes in this article were arrived at using a grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006). Our close line-by-line coding of the interviews also allowed us to see how the main four themes kept emerging across the data across social contexts; as Charmaz (2006) notes,

> The logic of "discovery" becomes evident as you begin to code data. Line-by-line coding forces you to look at the data anew. Compare what you see when you read a set of field notes or an interview as an entire narrative with what you gain when you do word-by-word, line-by-line, or incident-by-incident coding on the same document. Entire narratives may net several major themes. Word-by-word, line-by-line, segment-by-segment, and incident-by-incident coding may generate a range of ideas and information. (p. 50)

Thus, our aim was to derive "rich data" that would give us "solid material for building a significant analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

Interviews

KB's engagements—on site in Delhi—with Muslim women in Shaheen Bagh are largely informed by her political ideology and her intention to participate in the anti-CAA protests. She joined these protests as an activist and an ally to the movement initiated by Muslim women challenging the unconstitutional tenets of the CAA and the anti-Muslim stance of the BJP. KB attended the protests at Shaheen Bagh from December 23, 2019, to January 13, 2020, and she recorded her conversations. Twelve of the conversations were with Muslim women present at the protest sites. Some other conversations were with fellow activists who shared her social location in that they too were either students or had college degrees and were professionals. The conversations took place as they participated in sit-in protests and discussed the significance of protest gatherings and the coming together of social bodies for a cause. The conversations were loosely structured and included detailed discussions related to a vast range of topics, such as their families, jobs, everyday experiences (of lived discrimination as Muslim women), political parties, and the history of their communities. The conversations often steered back to their own presence at the site, Shaheen Bagh. KB and fellow protestors from communities outside Shaheen Bagh observed how the women from the community seemed to be practicing ethics of care. However, as RG and her team examined these interview transcripts and examined the themes for intercoder reliability, the team found several other themes as well. These will be discussed further in the next section and linked with findings from social media data collected.

Most of the recorded conversations lasted about 80 minutes, with some continuing for two to three hours. The selection of participants was spontaneous—much like that of a journalist following a story on site. This approach draws theoretical force from KB's experience of working as a journalist in India and merits attention because it expands the scope of sources from which meaning is derived. In initiating a dialogue with participants on site, her conversations with them were not simply a linear progression of thought; they emerged from, and were embedded in, the protest site and the lived realities of the participants. The simultaneity of multiple spaces, such as their lived realities, everyday experiences of discrimination, protest participation, and family histories (of oppression), and the systemic marginalization faced at several social institutions, such as workplaces, schools, public spaces, and government institutions, as well as from their policies, all contribute to the meaning-making process through these conversations, making them extremely layered and nuanced. She approached these women on site and asked for their permission to record their conversations. Each participant received the audio file of their conversation for respondent validation. She exchanged contact information and continues to stay in touch. It is, however, important to note that for the safety of the participants, we will be using pseudonyms in this study. Some of these participants were also active on social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram, and invited us to follow them online.

When the news of events in India became visible through the social media space, RG had conversations with several students in various parts of India, some of whom also participated in protest movements. Being connected to these young people via social media, she had several back-channel conversations with them through text messaging and sometimes through Skype and WhatsApp voice calls. During the coding process, we closely followed grounded theory guidelines; a first reading yielded some general categories, such as the significant presence of women from the community at the protest site, the involvement of younger activists (mostly university students), and the overall impression of an ethic of care. This led us to dig deeper into the interview data to look for specifics. In our second and third readings of the interviews, we not only found clear evidence to back up these themes, but also learned how these three themes are interrelated while also being underpinned by fear and anxiety.

Main Themes

In this article, we are focused on elaborating on four major themes that emerge significantly from the interviews conducted. One major theme is the visibility of Muslim women at the Shaheen Bagh protest site. We elaborate on how their presence in the protest site, and the insertion of Muslim female bodies within politically charged, Hindutva-dominated public spaces, subverts the biased discourse that Muslim women lack agency and are oppressed by patriarchal Muslim men.

A second theme is the incorporation of social media as a strategy to garner international visibility for the cause. A third theme we examine is that of pushing against fears. Depending on the class location of the interviewee and whether or not the interviewee was actually part of the Shaheen Bagh community, these fears ranged from anxieties around parental censure to fears for themselves, the younger women, and for the men in the community. Several of the interviewees repeatedly noted fears of surveillance and police brutality, and yet they persisted.

A fourth theme woven through all the themes and subthemes of the protests from within Shaheen Bagh is that of "care." This theme connects with both the social media influencers working to disseminate the protest materials internationally and with the presence of women on site. Although most activist communities rely on care work of supportive women and men—both allies and fellow protestors—the ethic of care in this activist site has been noted as significant. This feeds into an overall affective strategy that serves to represent the protestors and the community—that is, the protest site—as welcoming. The attempts to carefully curate the social media presence of this community as a caring one is therefore significant.

In what follows, we reveal how each of the themes is clearly evidenced in the interviews conducted and through select social media posts. The third theme, care, is interwoven into the other two themes, as noted earlier, so when we discuss the third theme, we will be weaving back to talk about each of the other two themes as relevant.

Visibility of Muslim Women at the Shaheen Bagh Protest Site and on Social Media

Feminist scholars such as Lochan (2019), Sra (2015), and Udupa (2018) illustrate how most of the public spaces in India are dominated by the patriarchal, hypermasculinist logic that pushes women, especially those from the marginalized communities, to the fringes. According to this masculinist logic, public spaces are heavily regulated, and the conduct of women in these sites is strictly surveilled and disciplined. Often, physical spaces are made unsafe for women to limit their presence and participation. These patriarchal systems of surveillance and discipline deploy the physical body as a site of practice (Bordo, 2004; Budgeon, 2003). Any act of controlling women manifests in the form of disciplining how their bodies are seen and inserted into public spaces.

The visibility of Muslim women at the Shaheen Bagh protest site is subversive because it challenges the commonly observed practices of women's participation both in politics and in public. The presence of Muslim women appropriating the hostile public spaces reconfigures these spaces as inclusive and democratic sites of participation. It changes the meaning of public spaces and makes them accessible to people from the margins, fraying the edges around dominant patriarchy. A 45-year-old woman protestor explained,

> These streets, these spaces, are as much ours as yours. We all have equal rights over everything that is public. Muslims, especially women, are being forced stay inside their houses—not come out, not be seen. They do not like it when we wear Hijab or burka. I think I know why—if they see Muslim women out in the streets, it will give them the impression that the streets also belong to us—the country also belongs to us. If we are confined to our homes, the public spaces are not ours. Standing on these streets is important to us—they do not want us to be seen. When they want us to stay indoors, they want to forget us. If they forget that we exist, they can take away our rights.

Muslim women were using their bodies to disrupt the fields of visibility on the streets, that is, who is seen, and when, where, and how. Streets in India are not only tied to the aggressive patriarchal practices, but also governed by the logic of Hindu superiority. As a result, Muslim women are actively invisibilized, neglected, or ignored. Examining the presence of Muslim women in public spaces practicing their right to

dissent helps unpack the linkages among bodies, religious identities, and gender. The presence of Muslim women changes the nature and meaning of these protest sites and begs the question of reimaging the potential of public spaces (Ranade, 2007).

Changing the fields of visibility also requires challenging the dominant, often harmful or biased, discourses representing Muslim women as the victims of Muslim patriarchy who need to be saved by the Hindu man. Although visibility of women in modern protest movements is not unique in itself (Prasch, 2015), the visibility of Muslim women in this particular scenario represents both the bravery of the women themselves, and an attempt to counter global stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed while their men are viewed as Islamist terrorists. A 68-year-old Muslim woman protestor at Shaheen Bagh explained,

> [Muslim] women are also coming out in large numbers because I think for the first time, they have also gotten a chance to say what they want to—they have a chance to be heard, to come out and speak. It is sad when people always speak for you. When you are a woman, everyone speaks for you, and then we are Muslim women. They will tell us how we are being oppressed—they do not ask us; they will act as if they are our messiahs. We don't mind it if the intentions are good—we don't want to be used as weapons to make our religious community look bad.

Many of the Muslim women protestors actively used their burqas, hijabs, and niqabs to assert their Muslim identity to infuse representations of "Indianness" with their religious identity. This was in keeping with the effort to revitalize the secular foundations of the country. They used their religiously marked gendered bodies to puncture the populist assumption that the politic-public in India is essentially masculine and Hindu in nature, while the Muslim is degraded as "the outside and illegitimate other" (Banaji, 2018, p. 337). A 68-year-old woman at the site argued,

> We are here, to organize and assemble peacefully, and to tell the world that we are not violent. We want to tell them that we are a part of this country and we want to be a part of this country. There are so many rumors—that Muslims do not want India to be India— Muslims want India to be broken. We want to tell them what we want—we want India to be a country that is true to its Constitution. So many people have problems that we unfurl green flags on our houses—here, we are unfurling the national flag. Each woman here has held a tricolor and sang the national anthem and said—again and again—that we chose India, and we will continue to choose it. And who can do this—continuously repeating the same thing again and again without tiring? Without getting angry about how we must still prove our loyalty.

According to scholars such as Bhatia (2019) and Kirmani (2007), media representations of Muslims, especially women, give voice to radical fringe elements from the community as sane and mature, while critical voices are derided as outliers. Muslim women are represented as victims of the patriarchy prevalent within the Muslim community. In doing this, Hindu men are applauded as the saviors who are tasked with the responsibility of rescuing Muslim women by abusing, oppressing, and even violating the Muslim men.

Though women at Shaheen Bagh are challenging the dominant media representations of their religious community in public spaces, the protest site they created was secular in nature, that is, with the presence of nationalist symbols, icons, and citizens from different caste, class, religious, gender, and other backgrounds. A frequently observed secular protest activity challenging the religious bias of the BJP was the public reading of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. The Preamble documents secularism, equality, socialism, and sovereignty as the core values and guidelines from which the Constitution derives its authority. Jameela, a 29-year-old protestor, explained,

> What this government is doing and this CAA and NRC—all these things are unconstitutional. Reading the Preamble at Shaheen Bagh symbolizes that this is a secular protest—look at the national flags. We have everyone here—people from different religions. They are here because they know that the BJP's anti-Muslim and antiminority policies will hurt everyone and hurt the "nation." We are not a religious country. We are secular.

Women at the Shaheen Bagh protest site often referred to secular national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Maulana Azad while explaining their political ideology and aspirations. They wanted to reflect on the secular, diverse, and peaceful nature of their protest. Through their conversations, discussions, and debates, they were imagining a secular nation into being—a country where questioning the government, working together as citizens, and challenging discrimination and hatred through peaceful ways is the new normal. Concluding her speech at Shaheen Bagh, Aashiya ignited hope in the hearts and minds of those who had gathered when she said,

> We have united across social differences and we are building a new nation where "Women" are at the center of politics in India today, literally, and metaphorically! If you have been here, you know that future revolutions will now wear burqas and bangles.

Incorporation of Social Media as a Strategy to Mobilize and Garner International Visibility for the Cause

Studies on political protests (Brooten, Ashraf, & Akinro, 2015; Naghibi, 2011; Neumayer & Raffl, 2008) across the world emphasize that the design structure of social media enables local protest to transcend geographical constraints and become globally accessible. According to Naghibi (2011), affordances of social media create an effect of immediacy and compel people to feel faster. Social media enables individuals from across the globe to receive and send information about political protests, thus making it easier for people to participate. As a result, the threshold to participate in the movement is no longer constrained by geographical restraints. Brooten and associates (2015) conducted a similar study to examine the role of Facebook in provoking global political activism in relation to the Rohingya crisis. According to them, social media is used to engage in politics of immediation, "in which social actors mobilize extreme, violent images" (p. 718) and universally familiar tropes of affect to draw global attention to local issues.

It is, however, critical to note that the process of building and sustaining a social movement draws from multiple layers of online–offline engagements. Many social media influencers and users deployed the potential of social media to mobilize for the protests at Shaheen Bagh and to reach large global audiences

through digital networks. Social media provide global modes of activism and create international visibility for the cause (Bhatia, 2019). Explanations regarding how social media informs processes of social change include a range of arguments, from scholars who believe that the Internet is disruptive (Aday et al., 2010; Howard, 2010), to those who argue that the Internet is conducive to the growth of authoritarian regimes, to those who situate social media technologies as critical to collective action and change (Hassanpour, 2014; Melber, 2011).

Many of our respondents agree that the use of social media to plan, organize, and create international visibility was critical. Through social media, protestors, organizers, and leaders contribute to the labor of making the protest visible. A 30-year-old Muslim protestor who uses her social media to support and document the Shaheen Bagh protest explained,

> When people see, constantly, that so many protests are happening, the movement does not lose its momentum. People do not get into a lull phase. We keep posting such encouraging posts about protest sites and activities. Many times, I post the performances staged by protestors at protest sites. That has a huge impact. Many people who cannot be there share these videos, and they pledge their support for our cause. What is important in these situations is to continue the struggle.

Many of our respondents argued that enacting activism through social media was an integral feature of the Shaheen Bagh protest for several reasons. To begin with, the immediacy of information circulation through social media enabled organizers to mobilize large crowds to specific physical protest sites at times of crisis. One of our respondents, a social media activist, explained,

> When students at JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru University] were attacked, we wanted to mobilize immediately. We wanted people to gather at gate 4 of the campus—having many students turn up would be a warning to the police to stop these organized attacks on those who were protesting. We could not have waited for the news media to help us. We had to use social media—the events were so immediate, and we wanted to circulate this "appeal to gather" through authentic channels because sometimes these goons will encourage you to gather at places which are unsafe—for instance, at places where the police have denied permission.

As is evident, social media grants the spontaneity and immediacy required to engage with "premeditated situations where the story is changing so quickly that TV or print media do not have the time to develop a fully sourced story" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012, p. 267). Many of our respondents used their social media accounts to share information about protest venues, times, and activities, and to document protest events using an insider's perspective. The nonhierarchical digital infrastructure of social media grants authorship opportunities to everyone who has access to these networks. Young women activists from Shaheen Bagh have used this affordance of social media to create narratives that are sympathetic to the struggles of Muslim women protesting the CAA and the NRC. These alternative online posts and stories disrupt the authenticity of mainstream media narratives that operate on a capitalist logic and are heavily regulated by the government. Ravida, a 33-year-old Muslim woman protesting at the site, explained,

> Social media helps in keeping these issues at the top of the trending list. We keep posting—every day I must post at least seven to 10 stories. It is not easy. I also come to these sites often to record videos and post real time. In many situations, like when the police attacked students in Jamia, or when some BJP led people got into the campus . . . the JNU, and started beating students. The news media will never report it—and never immediately. Most of the news organizations are for the government. We hardly have news organizations which would report about the police brutality against students. TOI, HT, Indian express, India Today, Aaj Tak, you name it, and it is sold to the government.

Muslim women we interviewed insisted that they used their social media platforms with the intention to circulate and create more inclusive and truthful narratives. They hope to encourage people to find ways to transform discursive engagement on social media into lived experiences and practices through offline protests and political activities. Also, this process includes the aspiration of reaching out to global audiences, leading to a transnational engagement with the cause. According to our 21-year-old respondent, social media enables users to create alternative narratives from the standpoint of a Muslim [woman], allowing for the exposure of the discontinuities and biases in the local/national media; these channels often invisibilize or mute struggles of the marginalized communities in favor of an existing religious-gender-caste-class hierarchy in India. A 21-year-old Muslim woman social media activist argues,

> I post so many stories from the protest sites, and some of my followers work in organizations such as Al Jazeera and the BBC. It is not easy or fast to get a revolution going. These small quantities of information we pass, you know, they seem small. When they are put together, from so many social media channels and platforms, they create a picture—like a big one and help attract attention to this problem. When the government knows that the world is watching, it is forced to act in a more democratic and constitutional way. Our government does not seem to care, and that is a different thing.

Social media activists invest hours in curating content and dialogues to sustain social causes. Social media labor contributes to forms of affective exchanges, such as solidarity building, information exchange, and extending support and/or resources both online and offline. According to Gajjala (2019), social media helps create digital networks and links between local protestors and people supporting the cause across the globe. A case in point is the involvement of the Indian diaspora and anti-CAA protests in several countries through online activism, thus pushing this protest into the global mediascape. The involvement of people from across geographical locations through social media occurs through the creation of digital networks and affective transformation (Gajjala & Verma, 2018). Social media can be examined as a relational digital space where people experience a sense of connectedness with those protesting on the streets through affect circulation. For instance, many respondents emphasized that they circulated emotionally charged images and videos of the protestors from different sociocultural backgrounds to evoke a sense of true nationalism among the viewers. These videos and images reflected feelings of care and compassion and aimed to generate a sense of belongingness to this movement among the digital viewers. This encouraged people—in different states of the country, at universities around the world, and in various Indian diasporas—to participate in the protest staged at Shaheen Bagh. Widespread participation enacted through personalized

politics in which people used their personal social media spaces to practice resistance transformed the Shaheen Bagh protest into a global issue of concern.

Pushing Against Fear

The body politic of India inheres a Hindu-patriarchal ideology (Banaji, 2018; Udupa, 2018) wherein the presence of Muslim women, claiming their political rights on the streets, disrupts the hypermasculine body politic of the Hindu India and creates immense discomfort. While the presence of Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh amplifies the disruptive potentiality of the anti-CAA protests, it also creates physical conditions that render Muslim women vulnerable. Our respondents were often threatened by the dominant rationality of Hindu patriarchy—sometimes manifest as a lathi-charging man in uniform, and other times as a masked goon vandalizing protest and campus sites. A 49-year-old Muslim woman protesting at Shaheen Bagh explained,

> I am here on my own. This is not safe. Standing here, telling the police and everyone else that you are opposing them. It means you are inviting trouble. I know that if they recognize me, they can eventually harass my family. I mean that this place is dangerous, and my presence speaks for the entire family. I am here because if we do not start now, we will have no future. They [the police and government] may lathi charge us or harm us. They may come to our houses and take our men away like they did in Lucknow. We are taking that risk. I am so old, I do not have any savings and if they beat me—even if they lathi charge and I get some injury on my head, I will probably die. Every minute we are here, we fear this violence, but we also know this is very small compared to what will happen if we do not start now.

The protestor was afraid the party would continue to suppress Muslim rights in India if the secular people of the country did not speak against this. As a representative of her family, she regularly visited Shaheen Bagh to support the anti-CAA protests initiated by the Muslim women protestors. Another 68-year-old protestor explained why she did not allow the younger members of the family, especially her sons, to visit the site. She was worried about their safety. "Everyone in our community knows . . . the police come to your house, arrest the men of your family, and leave," she said. Many respondents referred to the police notoriety and their use of illegal, brutal, and inhuman techniques and procedures. The respondents were referring to the process of "combing," in which unsuspecting Muslim men are rounded up, arrested, and imprisoned under false charges to threaten the entire community and prevent them from raising their voice against government injustices toward Muslims. Many women feared that if the men actively participated in these public protests, the Delhi police would identify them and arrest them on false charges. As is evident, these women protestors were using their bodies to shield the men in their families and communities from police brutality and violence.

The intersection of their marginalized identities as Muslim women in India amplifies both the disruptive potential of these protests and the discrimination faced by Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh. People contesting the presence of Muslim women in scenes of political protests has a deeply gendered structuring, in that the perpetrators rake "the private" and sexual accusations, and deploy the logic of shame

as a way to reinforce masculinist logic within the public spaces for political participation. A 61-year-old Muslim woman at Shaheen Bagh explained,

> We are Muslims, so we are targeted, and then we are women. We have a fear, not so much among old women like us, but young women. Many women in Jamia and JNU . . . so when police went to women's hostels, they also touched women in a wrong way. When men are arrested, they are beaten up—a lot of physical pain—but women . . . there is always a fear that they will do something to women in the police stations. I did not want my daughter-in-law to come here . . . and my granddaughter is just 13. What if they just identify us and later, after this is over, they will come for women in my family. Where will I go, who will I run to?

Muslim women receive sexual threats and are often abused because of their gender and religious identity. These threats are not limited to the offline sites and often seep into online discourses on social media platforms. According to Gajjala (2019), both online and offline sites have different conditions of vulnerability, and we must be attentive to both. Within the dominant technologies of discipline, the Muslim female body is rendered precarious and becomes a site for both contention and possibilities. A 33-year-old Muslim woman argued,

> Most of the women here have never come out in the open like this. When we are in the public, we are giving them a chance to identify us and then maybe target us. They will not tell you, but in some parts of Uttar Pradesh, like very remote parts, they [police] can just enter any Muslim house and take the men away. They say the police are not using guns; Didi, I know so many people who stay there. They tell us all about it. The media will not show it because everyone is supporting the government. They have attacked so many people—even children. This must stop.

Though the presence of Muslim women in public spaces can pose a risk to the corporeal bodies of those protesting, it also creates new ways of imagining, enacting, and experiencing political participation. Such a phenomenon unveils the possibilities of alternative meaning-making and helps redefine the role of Muslim women in politics.

Solidarity and Ethics of Care

The presence of Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh emerged as a source of solidarity among the protestors, as a means to advance their claims to political rights, and as an attempt to undermine the authority of a majoritarian Hindu state. The power of this protest cannot be reduced to individual efforts; it was sustained by collaborative work, collective action, and women working together (Aslam, 2017). Their claim to contest the CAA and the NRC, occupy public spaces for protests, and disrupt normalcy emerged from, and was sustained by, a rotation of responsibilities (Butler, 2011) for organizing protest sites, preparing meals, providing sanitation facilities, keeping Shaheen Bagh clean, extending information and technical expertise, and providing medical help and safety. The process entails creating horizontal relationships among the protestors. A 32-year-old Muslim woman explained,

No matter how poor they are, when they are at the site, somehow help always arrives. They do not go hungry. Someone is also seen serving food to the children—some good person, generally a woman, comes with bags full of food and just gives people packets. There are blankets and mats on the floors. From a distance, it looks as if we are not scared . . . we are together.

The anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh were built through the processes of collaboration, attention to the needs of the female protestors, and the creation and circulation of many inclusive narratives about India and its Constitution. Shaheen Bagh protests rely extensively on networks of care fostered through online and offline interactions between women from different backgrounds and caste-class-religious identities. A 55-year-old Muslim woman explained,

It takes a lot of courage and love to be here. Our ancestors chose to stay here because they told us that India is for everyone. We wanted to be in a country where there are differences because we did not want to be in an all-Muslim country. What are they doing to it? They are turning this into a Hindu Pakistan. We will face a lot of problems if that happens. You must be brave—you must love people regardless of their religion. Many young people here are from other religious communities. Why are they here? Because they believe that everyone has a right to exist respectfully here. They are reading from the Constitution of India—that is a book which defines India. We are putting in a lot of efforts, we are handling these protests with care.

The practice and ethics of care essential to organizing and sustaining the anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh required intensive on-site and online labor. Several young women spent hours updating their social media platforms with relevant information, creating inclusive stories, rearticulating the importance of secularism in India, mobilizing large groups of people to gather for the protests, and so on. A 28-year-old female social media activist who posts actively about the anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh argues,

When I post stories, exchange comments, discuss things with people, with my followers, I am contributing to something I call the intellectual or information labor—information is so important these days—right information. I spend hours creating content—I am an academic and I always felt I was not doing anything to make sure people could access whatever I had learned through my education. This may sound very optimistic, but if you really want to change something—like, for instance, if I want to change ways in which we talk about women—the words we use, how we behave with them, and all of that, we will have to care more about each other's problems and struggles.

Though many protestors suggested that they had employed care as an essentially moral and affective framework, our analysis reflects that practicing and embodying care at the protest site was a strategic decision. Embodying care translated into practicing nonviolence at the protest site and challenges the legitimacy of violence enacted by the police, the government, and those supporting the CAA and the NRC in India. Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh emphasize that their peaceful protest is in accordance with the legal and constitutional provisions granted to the citizens of the country and so cannot be policed and

regulated using violence and force. Practicing nonviolence and care at the protest sites also helps Muslim women protestors highlight the significance of their movement in the wake of increased violence against religious and caste minorities in India. The practice of care and nonviolence thus becomes a strategic background against which the violence and discrimination of the government and the supporters of the CAA and the NRC become visible.

Conclusion

Examining the presence of Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh as an act of resistance to the patriarchal Hindutva politics helps us unpack the role of female bodies in protest movements. Though we have witnessed the participation of Muslim women in several protest sites in different countries, cultures, and times, Muslim women at Shaheen Bagh were deliberately inserting their physical bodies in protest sites to change the Hindutva-dominated fields of visibility. Their presence in public protest sites is an act of resistance to the patriarchal body politic of India. They were deploying their bodies to reappropriate public spaces and discourses from the dominance of an increasingly oppressive and majoritarian BJP governance. In establishing their identity as "dissenters" and "protestors," they also challenged the discriminatory global stereotypes identifying Muslim women as either oppressed by the Muslim man or complaint to the Islamic patriarchy.

Although the insertion of physical bodies in actual sites of protest was the main political strategy, mobilization for the cause and the momentum around it was built through effective use of social media platforms, networks, and content. Most of the participants identified affordances such as immediacy, networking, and autonomy in content creation as primary reasons for incorporating these social media platforms as an integral component of their protest strategies and design. Moreover, social media allowed them to garner international attention for the cause and challenge the discriminatory protest discourses circulated by the mainstream national/local media channels.

This process of practicing dissent—of mobilizing against the dominant rationality of the Hindutva body politic—was laced with the fear of being punished and/or brutalized. Women protestors at Shaheen Bagh experienced physical, emotional, and legal violence enacted by the state and police. Their marginal religious and gender identities also made them vulnerable to sexual violence, defamation, and false charges. Muslim women deployed care as a resistance strategy to mitigate threats embedded in deeply gendered structures of political protests.

Though we have focused on the concept of care—practiced both through the digital and on the streets—it is critical to acknowledge that the romanticized and essentialized notion of care is somehow gendered. While our closer examination did reveal the large presence of women, we realized that applying essentialized notions around women and ethics of care that implicitly come from White feminist frameworks cannot be directly applied here. The centrality of women in this protest space emerged out of historic conditions and confrontations specific to a postindependence Indian sociopolitical context, with its layers of religious and caste discrimination that are becoming even more starkly evident in a current openly ("upper caste") Hindu religious right-wing ruling political climate. In such a context, the resistant force was visibly gendered. Indeed, although the female presence cannot be dismissed easily, we also cannot slot them away as performing essentially "womanlike" behaviors. The theme of care revealed through our analysis of the

select interviews is nuanced and intersectional—men in the community were acting through an ethic of care as well. Care was as much a strategy—based in the struggle of the men and women—with women expressing their fears for their men and in fact acting to protect them. Our analysis clearly reveals that the political presence and visibility of women in these protest spaces cannot be implicitly diffused through an invocation of a model of gendered ethics of care that situates the woman as a support figure and not a leading figure. Thus, the idea of care that emerges at the site of Shaheen Bagh cannot merely explain the presence of women within a view that essentializes and romanticizes caregivers as somehow magical and nonviolent. There was much police-state violence and fear. There was visible anger and determination.

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