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# Critical feminist resistance to the politics of hate in India

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**ABSTRACT**

Genocide Watch has declared a 'Genocide Emergency' in India with serious consequences for Muslims and Dalits in India. The Hindutva ecosystem uses the figure of Muslim women as central to the politics of hate. However, Muslim women have also emerged as an important force in resisting this. In this context, this article interrogates what discourses and processes of anti-Muslim violence are being enabled by the Hindutva anti-social learning movements, and how critical-feminist social-learning movements, especially feminists from Muslim backgrounds, challenge and disrupt Hindutva politics. The article shows how critical-feminist social movements are learning, producing, and theorising new understandings of resisting the politics of hate. The article ends with reflections on the significance of this learning in subverting fascistic politics today.

'Where do you see yourself in five years?

In a detention center.'[1]

## Introduction

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, warned on 9th December 2022 that 'Discrimination and hate speech, the early warning signs of genocide, are on the rise everywhere' and urged political leaders, communities, civil society, private sector, and the media, including social media, to 'take concrete steps to protect minorities and other communities at risk of genocide' (UN News 2022). India's situation warrants urgent global attention in this context. Genocide Watch (2022) has declared a 'Genocide Emergency' with serious consequences for Muslims and Dalits. Its indicators put India in the sixth tier of genocide – 'polarization'. As regional intensity varies, a more detailed analysis would be needed to determine if Muslims in the whole of India are at risk of genocide. Kashmir and Assam, for instance, are on the eighth stage – persecution – according to Genocide Watch (Stanton 2022). In light of the fact that Gregory Stanton, founder of Genocide Watch, warned the world about the Rwandan genocide five years in advance of its occurrence, it is crucial that the alerts of genocide experts are widely shared. Taking warnings lightly undermines the awareness-raising efforts of already vulnerable groups.

India is a vital case study within the global upsurge of neofascism, authoritarianism and right-wing populism (Choudry 2019; Gandesha 2020; Giroux 2019; Lall and Anand 2022; Stanley 2018).[2]

Although some commentators hesitate to describe the current state of Indian politics of hate as fascism, others have argued that recognising the fascist underpinning of India's hate politics is essential (Kumbamu 2020; Narasimhaiah 2022; Patnaik 1993). An analytical reluctance is a serious mistake, according to Narasimhaiah (2022, 515), as it 'plays right into the hands of RSS and the Sangh Parivar (it's family of Hindu nationalist organisations).'

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent body of the Hindutva ecosystem, was established in 1925. Its foundational text is *Hindutva*, written by Savarkar (1922), a caste-elite, heteronormative male, in 1922. According to this vision, India belongs only to the Aryan Hindus, following White supremacist ideas of biological race. Hindutva was suppressed post-1947 in India when its sympathisers assassinated Gandhi, but it has thrived in the West under liberal multiculturalism (Kamat and Mathew 2003). The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the political arm of the RSS, became a force in neoliberally globalising India in the 1990s not 'merely to win elections and form governments but to establish a *Hindu Rashtra*' at all costs (Ahmad 2017, 172). Under Modi, Hindutva ideology has shifted from the fringe to the political mainstream (Ahmad 2017; Narasimhaiah 2022).

Western powers, interested in India's vast market and strategic alliance, have colluded with the regime under the pretext of development despite the genocide alert (Banaji 2018). Modi has received the highest corporate funding in Indian history (Ahmad 2017; Narasimhaiah 2022). There are also global alt-right, neo-Nazi, and far-right networks that support Hindutva's anti-social movement (Leidig 2020; Schaeffer 2018; Thobani 2019).

The Hindutva ecosystem has used globalisation and propaganda to castigate Indian Muslims as enemy subjects (Lall and Anand 2022). They are demonised as 'anti-national', 'terrorists', 'extremists' and threats to 'national security'. The Indian government has also passed citizenship laws in 2019 that have sparked fears of similar consequences to Myanmar, where the state first legally disqualified the Rohingya from citizenship, and then expelled them through violence and genocide (Stanton 2022).

The figure of Muslim women is used as a central locus for enacting mass violence. The Hindutva narratives position them as damsels in distress, in need of rescue from their oppressive religion and men, or as security threats, deserving of violence. More broadly, the mainstream construction of the figure of Muslim women in India is that of subalterns who are oppressed by their religion and patriarchy. While Muslim-feminist voices are treated as exceptions, they are mostly investigated as objects (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020).

Contrary to the stereotype, Indian Muslim women have emerged as an important force in resisting genocidal politics (Salam and Ausaf 2020, 7). They led the largest Muslim female-led civil movement in India's history: Shaheen Bagh (Nigam 2020). Their struggle interacts with broader movements led by historically-marginalised social groups including Dalits, Adivasis, Vimukts, sexual minorities, farmers and labour unions, as well as students, climate activists, refugee activists and human rights defenders.

As opposed to Hindutva anti-social movements led by dominant-caste Hindu patriarchs with an extensive base spanning class and caste, grassroots resistance has been led overwhelmingly by women from Muslim, Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds, as well as farmers. Nabiya Khan's poem (2020), dedicated to 'womxn', also recognises the contribution of trans people and non-binary people and depicts the recent 'new revolution' as 'dressed in bindi, bangles, burqa, and hijab'.

This article does not claim to capture the full landscape of social learning movements, which have nuanced histories and which hail from many quarters, including Dalits, Bahujan, Adivasis, Vimukts, Siddis and Nagaland, Assam, Lakshadweep, Kashmir and Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus and rationalists. Nor does this article romanticise any social movements, as the landscape is full 'of internal tensions, contradictions and limitations' (Choudry and Vally 2020, 5).

The article makes a three-fold argument: (A) Islamophobia is a form of casteist and patriarchal violence against Muslims. (B) The combination of caste supremacy, white supremacy, and neocolonial capitalist patriarchy puts Muslims, Dalits, and others at risk. The demonisation of Muslims helps populists to deflect blame for all issues on Muslim scapegoats, absolving the dominant-caste

rulers of any political accountability and creating an internal coherence between diverse peoples around a 'common enemy'. It also enables a small minority of dominant-caste men to maintain power over the majority by shifting anger from the 'slow genocide' of a majority caused by food, water, environmental, and livelihood injustice to Muslim scapegoats. (C) Muslim women are an important force in resisting the politics of hatred.

The rest of this article is organised as follows: first, it outlines methodology and situates India's Muslims within the caste landscape. Then the findings are divided into two sections: (a) the violence of Hindutva anti-social learning movements and (b) the resistance of critical-feminist social-learning movements.

## Methodology

Methodologically I employ a critical-feminist approach. According to bell hooks, 'Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (2000, 1). Angela Davis (2016, 111) explains, feminism 'involves so much more than gender equality.' It includes consciousness of capitalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, ability and sexuality. It is not 'something grounded in gendered bodies, but … an approach – as a way of conceptualising, as a methodology, as a guide to strategies for struggle' (Davis 2016, 28). Its intersectional framework allows us to see the interlinked nature of oppression and to form global solidarities. In my work, I focus on the voices of feminists from Muslim backgrounds who are fighting exclusion and seeking justice. In this article, they are treated as producers of knowledge rather than as objects of study.

I do not write from the 'hubris of the zero point', which Mignolo describes as the now 'untenable' assumption 'that the knowing subject in the discipline is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured.' (2009, 2). I am a 'subjective self' (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020) in the context of India as I hail from a mixed caste, mix-class Muslim background, I grew up in rural India and I live as a first-generation migrant in the UK, with increasingly greater access to Savarna caste and class capital and 'global North power and privileges' (Efange, Ouldali, and Woodroff 2022, 9).

This article is informed by social movements and praxis and as such by 'a vast sea of undocumented experiences and insights' – so it cannot stay confined to disciplinary conventions (D'Souza 2019, 47). This work draws upon my messy and extensive engagement both online and offline. This article draws on multiple sources, where both Hindutva and feminist movements contest knowledge. These include articles, blogs, newspapers, social media, webinars, audios, open letters, pamphlets, artwork, cartoons, petitions and political speeches. It also includes data from YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook. I have also attended diasporic spaces of activism: protests, webinars, panel discussions, conferences and book launches. I focus on the well-known sites of Muslim female-led protests in Delhi: Jamia Milia Islamia and its neighbourhood, Shaheen Bagh, while also closely noticing the struggles and lives of the Dalit Muslims, Siddhi Muslims and Adivasi Muslims that I encountered through my geographical, and relational intimacies with Gujrat and Maharashtra. I used a purposive sampling technique to understand Muslim feminist voices accessible on social media and otherwise. In addition to reading commentaries by Muslim-feminist intellectuals, I participated in projects and panel discussions involving women and students from India.

This article cannot speak for all critical Muslim feminist movements across India as the dynamics of struggle take different contextual nuances in Kashmir, Assam, Lakshadweep and elsewhere. My knowledge of India's intersecting injustices and resistances is limited and situated given my geographical, and relational intimacies with Gujarat and Maharashtra and the UK diaspora and is continuously evolving. As Davis, et al. (2022, 14) perceptively note 'political consciousness … is an ongoing, collective and pedagogical process rather than a finish line'. Also, I do not unpack internal tensions, contradictions and limitations within the critical feminist movements, which

will require another paper. Moreover, it is 'challenging to write about … the ideas that are by nature in motion and therefore always nuanced in their relationality' (Choudry and Vally 2020, 2).

Choudry observes: 'some of the rich learning and knowledge production … arise when people come together, collaborate, document and organise against state surveillance' (2019, 17). I have been part of a group of educators, students, activists and members of the public in India and its diaspora from across caste, class and religious backgrounds through our efforts to create a youth-oriented educational initiative for critical consciousness to counter casteist-neoliberal-heteropatriarchal-racist-ableist practices (Kadiwal et al. 2022b). I also co-produced a documentary film on India's treatment of Muslims and internal migrants as the COVID lockdown was announced (Chhara and Kadiwal 2020). I have also been involved in an international solidarity group for academic freedom in India. We have been discussing, collaborating and documenting our insights. Consequently, I have made a journey of unlearning from being a naïve development-practitioner who had internalised a Eurocentric and Savarna gaze, to becoming involved in decolonial, anti-racist and anti-caste global justice movements and learning to do things differently only in recent years. Inevitably, to borrow Sunera Thobani's words (2002, 5), my insights are 'grounded in … the social justice movements to which I am committed.'

## Who are India's Muslims?

Most of India's Muslims are indigenous. They are very diverse: Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, Malayali, Punjabi, Tamil, Kashmiri, Dalit, Adivasi, Black, dominant caste, rich, poor, liberal, conservative, and so on. Instead of a 'clash of civilisations', Hindus and Muslims from the same region, from the same socio-economic-linguistic background, are likely to have more in common with each other in terms of languages, poetry, literature, music and jokes, than two co-religionists from two different regions of India.

Caste plays a central role. Nearly 85% of India's Muslims are 'Pasmanda' (meaning 'left behind'), consisting of historically marginalised castes: Shudras, Dalits, and Adivasis (Ansari 2019; Khanam 2013). The Pew report lists 60% of Muslims as 'historically disadvantaged class' (Kramer 2021). 'Savarna' Muslims ('upper caste'/dominant caste), constitute a small proportion of 'Ashraf' Muslims who trace their descent from Western or central Asia (e.g., Sayed, Sheikh, Mughal, Pathan) and native dominant-castes (e.g., Rajput, Tyagi, Gaur, Brahmins, etc.) (Ansari 2019).

The majority of adherents of Islam, like Buddhism and Christianity, hail from oppressed-caste backgrounds who have adopted these religions to flee, albeit unsuccessfully, a deeply inegalitarian caste system (Ambedkar 1936; Khanam 2013). In India, power, resources, opportunities, knowledge production and dignity concentrate in the hands of a dominant-caste male minority (Desai et al. 2010; Mahendru et al. 2022). This inequality is sustained by what Piketty (2020) calls *a nexus between ideology and capital*. In India, the ideology takes the shape of casteism. Brahmins are at the top of the caste hierarchy, followed by the *Kshatriyas* (warriors, kings, princes, feudal lords) and *Vaishyas* (trading communities). These castes make up the Savarna upper/dominant social groups. The *Shudras* are rendered a lowly position within the caste hierarchy and the Adivasis, Dalits, Siddis and others are placed outside the caste hierarchy and 'at the bottom' in terms of dignity, land distribution, resources and opportunities (Desai et al. 2010; Piketty 2020). Lower-caste communities are seen as inferior/impure, existing to serve superior/pure dominant-caste masters (Kapur 2022). This ideology, identified as 'Brahmanism'/ 'Brahaminwad' or 'Manuwad' (an ancient scripture attributed to a priest Manu) is reinforced through social conditioning, violence and state institutions (Ilaiah 2002; Murali 2020).

In short, Hindu or Muslim categorisations are not neat and homogeneous – or even the most fundamental – identities and belongings for everyone in India. They intersect with caste, region, class, skin colour, gender, sexuality, and other intersectionality.

## Engineering genocidal processes in India

Genocide does not occur suddenly. An array of discriminations, violence and political repressions targeted at the victim group, lay the foundation over a long time. In this sense, genocide is not an event but a deliberately-induced process over a period (Stanton 2022).

The UN Genocide Convention (UN 1948) describes genocide as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'. Adapting from Genocide Watch's *Ten Stages of Genocide* (1996), I will describe these acts under three broader umbrellas which explicitly target Muslims with an intention to cause them harm as a social group. The inter-connected structures of caste supremacy, white supremacy, and neo-colonial capitalist neoliberal patriarchy have set processes in motion that put Muslims, Dalits and other marginalised groups, a majority, at grave risk. It is evident that instead of learning lessons on how to avoid genocide, powerful actors have learned how to cause it.

### *Propagating hate*

The first set of processes, which lays a foundation for genocide, includes dividing populations into an antagonistic 'us and them' (Stanley 2018). Once people are arbitrarily classified, differences are exaggerated through markers such as names, colours, clothes, places of worship, slogans, rituals and signs (Genocide Watch 1996). The targeted group is dehumanised by calling them insects, animals, vermin, or disease. The majority group is made to believe that the victim group is a threat, and that peace can only be restored by getting rid of them. Incessant hate-propaganda, through media, speeches, and textbooks, aims to reduce empathy for the targeted group. Eventually, this can lead to restriction on the specific groups' freedom, and their mass detention, eviction and in extreme cases, mass extermination (Stanley 2018).

Hindutva propaganda divides populations into good Hindus and evil Muslims. It portrays Hindus as the 'self' of the nation, and Muslims (and Christians) as outsiders who are preying upon the rights and privileges of the dominant community. The Indian Muslims are described as unpatriotic and loyal to Pakistan. Hindus are presented as the superior civilisation with a golden past that was ruined by Muslim invaders. The storyline is simple: *Hindu khatre mein hain* (Hindus are in danger). By conflating Hindu religious identity with the identity of India – as Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation), the whole country is projected as being in danger. It stokes aggrieved anti-Muslim masculinity, which must seek revenge for its past and present humiliations.

The Hindu right and nationalists manufacture political consent for the repression of Muslim populations, also drawing upon: the event of partition; the Hindu-Muslim genocide that followed the partition; the subsequent major wars between India and Pakistan over the political control of Kashmir; and occasional violent attacks by Islamist Jihadists that are supposedly sponsored by Pakistan. In doing so, the right-wing nationalist ecosystems of India and Pakistan mirror each other in manipulating history and education to bolster their positions, putting ordinary Hindu and Muslim minorities on both sides in danger (Kadiwal and Durrani 2018; Kadiwal and Jain 2020).

The Hindutva anti-social movement learns from a colonial anti-Muslim recipe. It was the British administration that first engineered the mass-scale, arbitrary classification of people as 'us and them' based on religion, through the 1872 Census (Bhagat 2013, 435). Historian Romila Thaper (2009) offers context. According to Thaper, the 'war of independence' in 1857 against the East India Company was fought under the titular banner of the last Mughal emperor. Faced with opposition, British propaganda forged the narrative that it is not themselves but the Muslims who were the real invaders and aliens. The British, in fact, were Aryans, a superior race, like Brahmins and had come to help restore the golden age of Aryan civilisation and bring progress like an ideal Roman Empire. Thus, the British Empire contributed to producing an imaginary of Hindus and Muslims as mutually hostile religions and nations.

The Hindutva, Nazis and the far-right also share a history of anti-social learning (see Leidig 2020; Schaeffer 2018). The second president of the RSS, Golwalkar, suggested actual purging of minorities, hailing Germany as a model:

> … to keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races … a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by. (1939, 105).

The Hindu Mahasabha even called for a 'Hindu Fuehrer'. According to Leidig (2020), in the 1930s, Moonje, who played an influential role in shaping the RSS, visited Mussolini to learn how young Italian boys were being recruited and educated to form a fascist paramilitary. This became the RSS's training model. Italian and German businesses generously funded educational interventions to indoctrinate Indian youth into fascism. The Aryan connection between Nazism and Hindutva was strongly argued by Savitri Devi (born Maximiani Portas), who was hailed as a spiritual icon by Hitler and married a dominant-caste Hindu nationalist. Her theory stated that Hitler was a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, which is known as 'Hitlerian Esoterism'.

Modern-day, wealthy dominant-caste RSS donors from the Hindu diaspora ally with alt-right lobbies and neo-Nazi groups and use 'War on Terror' rhetoric to stoke Islamophobia to advance their own interests (Thobani 2019). Hindutva extremists are aware that Islamophobia plays a central role in the USA's 'War on Terror'. A Brahmin monk, Amritanand, justified his position thus: 'We are doing what America is doing, we are doing what Britain is doing' (Kunjulakshmi 2022; Mashal, Raj, and Kumar 2022). Savitri Devi's doctrine has also been revived by alt-right figures as an ideal form of Indo-European spirituality as it emphasises 'violence, power and virility' (Smith 2016).

The Hindutva and the alt-right share a common script: eroding the secular character of their respective states; a common 'enemy' in Muslims; propaganda to protect their religion (e.g., 'white Christian identity'/'Hindu identity'); racial purity; misogyny; anti-democracy; and wealth and power concentration. They recycle the myth of a glorious past, and promote the ideology of one religion, one nation, one history and one language. Muslims are depicted as carrying out all types of *jihad* and it is claimed that Muslims want to establish Sharia Law in India (Figure 1). Muslims are projected as overpopulating and replacing Hindu populations. Bengali/Assamese-speaking Muslims are labelled as a Bangladeshi or Rohingya and claims are made that the country will soon be overrun by refugees.

9/11 and displacement of Muslims in Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Bosnia and elsewhere are presented as caused by fanatic-Muslim masculinity. Policy failures are explained away as wilfully
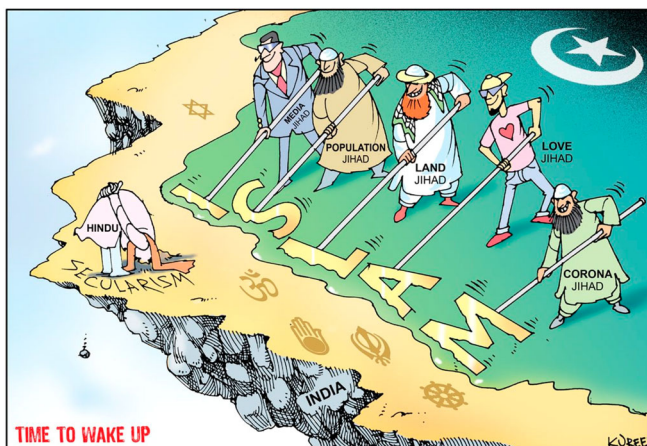


**Figure 1.** The image is widely available on social media.

triggered by Muslim terrorists. The narrative omits any positive Muslim contributions. While every socio-economic indicator suggests that Muslims are marginalised (GOI 2006), Hindus have been made to believe that Muslims have been appeased (Dey 2018).

## Institutionalising hate

'Genocide is an organised endeavour' (Genocide Watch 1996). The second set of processes that can lead to genocide include organisational, institutional and legal measures that disenfranchise the victim group. Changes to citizenship laws are integral to fascistic politics (Stanley 2018). In 2019, the government introduced an explicitly anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment ACT (CAA) that made religion a basis for granting citizenship for the first time in India (Varadarajan 2019). Rights movements have drawn parallels with Nuremberg and Myanmar (Mahmoodabad 2020). Minoritised populations face a risk of mass statelessness minorities (HRW 2020, 4), as it disproportionately affects socio-economically and politically marginalised communities such as Muslims, women, Dalits, Adivasis, Christians and nomadic groups (HRW 2020). Laws prohibiting religious conversion, which contravene freedom of religion, have also been announced in several states (IRFR 2021).

The regime has criminalised dissent. Its 'pedagogies of repression', to borrow Choudry's words, 'seek[s] to discipline and isolate those targeted, spread fear and deter others from dissenting or organising a challenge to the status quo' (2019, 3). Any opposition to the fascist narrative is ridiculed as 'anti-national'. Political opposition, social activists and independent media are decimated through violence, allegations of sedition, corruption and terrorism (Amnesty International 2020). They are accused of conspiring against the state, plotting to assassinate Modi, instigating riots and stoking Hindu-phobia. India has become an electoral autocracy (V-Dem Institute 2021). The current regime has also launched an attack on the secular Constitution. Freedom of expression, equality and human rights are seen as hindrances in dealing with the dangers the nation faces (Mashal, Raj, and Kumar 2022). Education also emphasises duties of citizens over Constitutional Rights and critical thinking (Kadiwal and Jain 2020).

The Hindutva ecosystem has also promoted a hypermasculine jingoism that glorifies wars. People are made to believe that they are safest with the authoritarian strongman. It also helps create an illusion that India is being made safer because the dangerous Muslims are being contained. There is an investment in training militias, co-opting police and creating a vast support base. The propaganda architecture includes trolls, media, cultural workers, education and think-tanks to influence policies abroad.

## Channelling hate into genocide

The third set of processes incite an actual mass killing. Key words that were heard at the brink of genocide against Jews, Armenians and Tutsis such as 'final solution', 'ethnic cleansing' or 'purification' (Stanton 2022) are circulating in India to generate mass anti-Muslim paranoia. Civilians are being incited to execute vigilante violence.

For instance, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a well-organised media campaign placed the blame for the spreading coronavirus squarely on Muslims. The Hindutva ecosystem called for 'extermination' of the 'Corona Jihadis', and to 'quarantine' entire Muslim ghettos as 'buffer zones', and lock the Muslims somewhere they could be 'crushed' (Biswas, Chatterjee, and Sultana 2021; Chhara and Kadiwal 2020; Tiwari 2020). Extremist groups organised several events calling for anti-Muslims genocide (Raj and Jafri 2022). For instance, in December 2020, 'Dharm Sansad' (religious parliament) took place in Haridwar, an important place of Hindu pilgrimage. Monks urged thousands of devotees to arm themselves and kill Muslims (The Wire Analysis 2021). They positioned genocide as the 'final battle' against Muslim terrorists for survival of Hindus. A monk asked every institution to participate in the carnage, 'Like Myanmar, our police, our politicians,

our Army and every Hindu must pick up weapons and conduct a Safayi Abhiyan (cleaning mission). There is no other option left' (Shukla 2021). A speaker asserted (Al Jazeera 2021),

> Even if just a hundred of us become soldiers and kill two million of them, we will be victorious … If you stand with this attitude only then will you able to protect *Sanatana Dharma*.

Speakers also stoked anti-Sikh and anti-Christian sentiments (Al Jazeera 2021). They denounced the Indian Constitution as 'the end of the Hindus' (Mashal, Raj, and Kumar 2022). Likewise, the Hindu Yuva Vahini (youth organisation), founded by Uttar Pradesh's chief minister organised oath ceremonies to kill Muslims (Sengupta 2022). Many temples display signs that ask Hindus to prepare for *dharm yudh* (religious war). Monks have drafted a Hindu Constitution for the proposed *Hindu Rashtra* in which Muslims and Christians do not have the right to vote (ET 2022).

The Hindutva forces are also recycling anti-Semitic and anti-Black propaganda to stoke anti-Muslim sentiments. For instance, Varadarajan (2022) compares the images below (Figure 2). A cartoon shows Muslims hanging by the noose, which echoes both the Nazi propaganda which shows Jews, communists and others hanging from the noose, and the white-supremacist propaganda that shows black slaves hanging from the noose in the USA.

Analysts have noted a marked increase in violence since 2014 when BJP came to power as the majority party. Muslims have been refused housing, have had livelihoods snatched and have been brutally lynched in the name of cow protection and 'love jihad' (HRW 2020). Many have been sent to forced detention in Assam (CSSS 2019; Das 2019). Hindu vigilantes have bulldozed hundreds of homes (Mahmudabad 2022). Many have lost their lives in extrajudicial killings by the police. In Assam, ruling ministers have stolen lands from Muslims (Hasnat 2021).

Through the simultaneous work of the above three broader processes, anti-social Hindutva movements make anti-Muslim vigilante violence seem seductive and the only viable option.

## Critical-feminist social learning movements

> Ayega Inquilab Pehenke bindi, chudiyan, burqa, hijab
> *(Revolution will arise dressed in bindi, bangles, burqa and hijab)*
> Nabiya Khan, a revolutionary Indian poetess

This section offers my initial articulation of five strands of feminist knowledge produced in resisting the Hindutva politics of hate. It is vital to document these insights as Choudry notes (2019, 4), 'while there has been important documentation of state repression against a number of historical

**Figure 2.** Propoganda.

and ongoing social struggles, the question of lessons learnt (and missed) by activists from such experiences has been far less explored.' After all, as Sara Ahmed notes, 'documentation is a feminist project' (2017, 26).

### Unsilencing casteism

Ahmed (2017) also notes that being a critical feminist is about learning to name oppression and expose oppression. Critical anti-caste feminists are making a distinctive contribution in the struggle against the Hindutva ideology as they name a complex situation that hides behind India's Islamophobia: Casteism. Noted historian Uma Chakravarty, who coined the term 'Brahminical patriarchy' argues that caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy serve as organising principles of feudal social order in India (2013; 1993, 579). Taking a cue from this debate, a key argument of this article is that Islamophobia is an intensification of casteist and patriarchal violence against Muslims. Feminists note that deeply ingrained caste-hierarchy acts as the 'common sense' of the dominant-caste, far-right Hindu nationalist patriarchs, who view themselves as 'pure' while treating Muslims as the 'pollutants'.

India Ink (2021) argues that Hindutva supremacists deliberately use 'Hindu vs Muslim' to hide casteism and centralise power. Narasimhaiah (2022, 514) observes, the Hindutva project 'is inextricably intertwined with the consolidation of upper-caste supremacy and male domination'. The demonisation of Muslims helps populists to deflect blame for all issues on Muslim scapegoats, absolving the dominant-caste rulers of any political accountability and creating an internal coherence between diverse peoples around a 'common enemy'. Thus, silencing their caste identities and only highlighting their Muslim identities allows the Hindutva ecosystem to portray them as enemy 'others' instead of allies of other caste-oppressed populations. If the majority follows one chosen religion and vanquishes Muslims, the future will be golden.

Feminists also note that the BJP uses casteism prevalent within Muslims to divide Muslims when the need of the hour is to unite against anti-Muslim genocide. However, Ansari (2019) observes that Brahminical and Sayedist dominant castes employ the politics of religion to maintain their dominance, while historically oppressed castes are frequently the victims. In this sense, a Muslim woman from marginalised backgrounds suffers quintuple jeopardy at the intersections of caste, gender, religion, race and class. Bilkis Bano's feminist struggle for justice is an illustrative example. Several men raped Bilkis and her mother and killed members of her family, including her three-year-old daughter, during the Godhra pogrom under Modi's Gujarat in 2002 (Venkataramanan 2022). A Mumbai court sentenced the convicted men to life imprisonment in 2008. On India's 75th Independence Day, they were released. Locals ceremoniously welcomed them with salutations, sweets and garlands. BJP minister Raulji, a member of the panel justified the decision. 'They were Brahmins. Brahmins are known to have good *sanskaar*' (good moral values and behaviour) (Sharma 2022). Brahmin men are assumed to be incapable of committing crime, whereas Bilkis is violated at the intersection of being Muslim, a woman and an oppressed caste. Thousands of protestors, overwhelmingly womxn, marched, drawing attention to widespread casteist structural violence. Inevitably, one of the most popular protest chants among marginalised populations is: *Hum kya Chahte? Brahminwad se Azaadi* (What do we want? Freedom from Brahmanism).

Bilkis's case is not an aberration, rather, as research by Srujana Bej, Nikita Sonawane and Ameya Bokil of the Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project (2015) suggests, it is illustrative of 'the Brahminical legacy of a criminal justice system conceptualised by the British' that 'has been upheld through laws formulated by the post-independence Indian state.' They argue that dominant-caste police and state overwhelmingly attribute criminality to marginalised castes and treat lower-caste women as tools for sexual retribution. According to their data, 66% of prison populations are from marginalised castes and over 18% of them are Muslims. For Vimukts, Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims, the society itself functions as a prison. Their situation is as Davis describes in the case of Black populations in the USA: 'One misstep and one can be arrested and hauled

off to prison; one can be transferred from an open-air prison to a closed prison.' (2016, 61). The process of seeking justice itself becomes the punishment.

Some of the most violated Muslims are those at the intersections of caste, race, class, gender, and religion. Ayesha Siddi's feminist struggle is another illustrative example. She has formed Siddi women's group, to guard their lands from dominant-caste landsharks. Black-African Siddhi Muslim populations, who were brought as slaves, soldiers and servants from Africa several hundred years ago, survive at the margins of society as 'outcastes' (Mitra 2021). They were arbitrarily categorised as a 'nomadic tribe' in the 2011 census, which has made it even more difficult for them to keep their land (Mitra 2021). Thus, a Siddhi woman faces marginalisation for being Black, being Muslim, being poor, being a woman and being a Siddi Muslim. Similarly, Abeda Tadvi has joined Radhika Vermula, the mother of a Dalit PhD student Rohith, who committed suicide due to casteist discrimination at the University of Hyderabad, to seek justice for her daughter. Payal, her 26-year-old daughter, was among the first girls from the Adivasi ('Indigenous') Bhil Muslim community to train as a doctor. According to her suicide note, she had suffered harassment from her upper-caste seniors (Shantha 2020). An Adivasi woman faces multiple disadvantages: for being Adivasi, being Muslim, being a woman and being politically, economically and culturally disadvantaged. The implications could be even worse for those at the intersections of ableism and ageism. The alliance between Abeda Tadvi and Rohit Radhika Vermula is an example of oppressed-caste solidarities that transcend religion. Meanwhile hundreds of homes of Muslims have been bulldozed (Ravindran, Raj, and Sonawane 2022). Muslim women and girls had to climb onto bulldozers to stop them from destroying their homes. The victims of pogroms in North-East Delhi, Godhra, Hashimpura and Nelly have also been overwhelmingly marginalised populations.

The architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar (1936), who hailed from a Dalit background, had agitated that India could not become a political-democracy until there was social democracy that annihilated caste. The Indian Constitution deemed equality and freedom from discrimination the right for every citizen. However, these rights have still not translated into meaningful reparations for the centuries of caste-based marginalisation. The same people: Dalits, Vimukts, Adivasis and Muslims, continue to experience disproportionate exclusions (Desai et al. 2010; GOI 2006). A substantial section of the urban middle-class that has benefitted from neoliberal globalisation, and makes up the Indian bureaucracy, reinforces contempt and prejudice against Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims as 'being inherently inferior and underserving' of access to opportunities and rights (Vijayan 2020, 44). Thus, we can see how critical feminists are unpacking 'obvious and non-obvious relationship of domination' (Davis et al. 2022, 3).

## *Deconstructing patriarchy*

Feminists see a misogyny in the Hindutva ecosystem. The 'saving women' trope, which was integral to British colonisation in India, continues to be used by both the West and Hindutva nationalists (Spivak 1994; Srujana, Sonawane, and Ameya 2015). BJP and the Hindu right have presented themselves as saviours who are out to deliver Muslim women from the clutches of misogynistic Muslim men (Mustafa 2020). They also use globally-circulating Islamophobic discourse, which draws on a gender index to showcase the extent to which a social group is civilised (Jamil 2017; Kowalski 2020). In doing so, Bhatia and Gajjala observe that 'Hindu men … are tasked with the responsibility of rescuing Muslim women by abusing, oppressing and even violating Muslim men.' (2020, 6295)

However, Muslim women are seen as threatening when they question the status quo. For a patriarch, feminist dissent is deeply unsettling. Guru (2011) observes that ancient texts assign a lowly place to women, Dalits and Shudras as servants of the Brahminical patriarchy. When they challenge the status quo it is perceived by caste patriarchs as transgression, humiliation and a threat to social order and peace (deSouza 2011). Patriarchy expects a good woman to be domesticated. A woman who ventures into the public realm is a 'loose woman'. Therefore, she must be degraded and violated.

Patriarchal disciplining is evident in the public auctioning of Muslim women on social media. Over a hundred Muslim female who are actively engaged as journalists, politicians, youth leaders, broadcasters, pilots, authors, actors and social workers have been put on auction on mobile apps called Sully Bai and Bully Bai (both are derogatory terms referring to Muslim women) (Ara 2022). Conversations around sexually raping Muslim women circulate on social media. In an app called ClubHouse, one male said 'Did you know, that if we hit a Muslim pussy, our sins will be washed away? … You get as many blessings as you would for destroying Babri [mosque]' (Barton 2022). Similarly, addressing the Virat Hindu Chetna Rally (the great Hindu awareness rally) of young Hindu males, a leader said 'Now is the time to get their mothers and daughters out of graves and rape their children' (Alt News 2018). The intimidation also takes the form of arrests and legal charges. Ismat reported (AAfaq and Sharma 2021; Ara 2022),

> In January last year, police … filed a First Information Report (FIR) against me for my coverage of the farmers' protests. (… a document issued by Indian law enforcement in acknowledgement of a criminal complaint.) They claimed I had spread fear and alarm in the state and was a threat to India's 'national integration.' I was only 22 and not even six months into my first job.

The punishment for protesting against the discriminatory citizenship-amendment was the anti-Muslim pogromme in a Muslim-Majority neighbourhood, in Delhi in February 2020 (OHCHR 2020). Caste-patriarchs claimed Muslim women had brought this upon themselves.

The politics of hate also pits Hindu and Muslim women against each other. It posits Hindu females as the rightful inheritors of the nation, and hijab-wearing Muslim females as the alien 'other'. Female students who wear the hijab have been barred from accessing higher education in the state of Karnataka (Alam 2022). When students protested, the principle of the college filed a police case. The young students were criminalised for asking their right to education. When they went to court, the court made it about whether it was necessary in Islam to wear hijab, effectively taking control of defining Islam for Muslim women. The pro-Modi media deliberately mis-recognised the issue as girls prioritising the hijab over their education when it was the state that barred them from accessing education, thus making Muslim girlhood appear as irrational and deserving of national ire. Their access to education was compromised for electoral gain. Shahrukh Alam (2022), the human rights lawyer, explains how the court twisted the lens of inquiry:

> As a matter of fact, the constitutional court has framed the question in the inverse. To be clear, it is the women who are before the court to challenge the actions of the educational institutions, and the state government, that affect their access to education. The state has not come before the constitutional court in a challenge to the hijab. Thus, the focus of scrutiny should be the state action, on its own merits, which is the subject of the writ petitions. Rather than examining the state's action where it seeks to regulate access to education, and the set of circumstances, when it might be considered reasonable to do so, the court and public discourse has made women's choice the subject of enquiry.

Appropriating the #LoveJihad that emerged from far-right in Europe, the Hindutva represents Hindu girls as vulnerable to Muslim men, who are supposedly luring them and forcibly converting them to Islam (Dutta 2022; Leidig 2021). For the first time in India, in 2020 in Uttar Pradesh, a state with a substantial population of Muslims passed a law: the Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance. Feminists argue that the law has provided a basis to criminalise Muslim men who marry Hindu women by mutual consent. Contrarily, the discourses encourage Hindu men to marry Muslim girls so that they can be forced back into Hindu-fold in an act of 'ghar vapasi' (returning home) (Justice for All 2022). Thus, the figure of Muslim women is central to fascistic violence.

### Debunking saviourism

With the Shaheen Bagh, the largest Muslim female-led civic movement in India's history, something has collectively snapped in India's public sphere (Kadiwal 2021; Nigam 2020). It inspired hundreds of Shaheen Baghs in India and abroad (Nigam 2020). Zoya Hasan, Professor Emerita of

Jawaharlal Nehru University, who has researched on the socio-economic status of Muslim women, notes that Shaheen Bagh transformed the perception of the figure of the Muslim woman from a voiceless object to an empowered subject who redefines her role in the Indian public-sphere and socio-religious affairs within the community. They are the saviours of the very idea of a democratic India (Agha 2020).

The Shaheen Bagh protest emerged in December 2019 from Delhi's mixed-income neighbourhood. Women of this locality had rushed out to protect students of Jamila Milia Islamia (JMI) in their vicinity. Jamia's students protested the anti-Muslim citizenship amendment (Mustafa 2020; Salam and Ausaf 2020). The state retaliated brutally. Seeing students facing state-violence, feminists snapped.

Bilkis, the 82-year-old activist-grandmother, was outraged at the violence unleashed inside the female hostel of Jamia (BBC 2020). For her, it was the 'final straw' (Davison 2020). Similarly, Kaneez Fatima, the coordinator of Shaheen Bagh Women's welfare society expressed 'they arrested children, they thought if they arrested them, the movement would disappear, but families, and friends and parents and families of those arrested made Shaheen Bagh stronger.' It was a multigenerational social learning movement. 82-year-old Bilkis, 90-year-old Asma and 75-year-old Sarwari stood alongside young students. Collectively, they emerged as the 'sheroes' of the protest. Their movement transcended the binaries of personal and political, and university and community. Arfa Khanum Sherwani observed,

> I had never thought Muslim women would come out in a huge number and organise the widest and longest historical protest against the government. Now that they can't patronise Muslim women, Muslim women are speaking everywhere now, this is a huge pushback … Shaheen Bagh was the first mass challenge to the current regime. (Anhad India 2022)

These 'wilful subjects' are leading from the front. They are helping each other learn from the significant anti-caste works of Savitri Bai Phule and Fatima Shaikh and long feminist struggle against patriarchy, bigotry, colonisation, imperialism, exploitation and misogyny (Kadiwal 2021; Kadiwal et al. 2022a). The social movement has become 'in a very real sense, 'universities of the streets', full of rich discussions, conversations and exchanges' (Choudry 2014, 255).

Critical feminists are exposing violence because they are 'concerned with the survival of people' (Ahmed 2017, 79). They feel compelled to do something about lynching, potential loss of citizenship, home and rights, and potential threats of detention and genocide (Kadiwal et al. 2022a).

Feminists are not waiting for the mic to be passed to them through the benevolence of elites; they are taking up spaces that have been withheld from them. They reject conditional allyship that directs Muslim female bodies to what they can think, say and can be. Seemi Pasha's (2022) words sum up the defiance:

> As much as we respect the whole world's desire to rescue us from our hypersexual men and our dogmatic religion, we would love it if we could simply be left alone … If you really want to celebrate Muslim Women Rights Day, stop telling us what to wear, who to marry and how to practice our religion.

Afreen Fatima, whose home was bulldozed by the Hindutva ecosystem, asserts:

> We are over the insecurity that we are the problem here and the inferiority complexes that have been fed to us especially by the secular and liberal political parties who want to make us their slaves, in a sense that we are tied to them, and we don't have any options. We have started to reject it. And we have started to realise that we have a voice of our own and we will raise our voice, no matter who comes and stands next to us and who does not come stand next to us. So one thing that is for sure that you will see Indian Muslims out on the streets … We're seeing Indian Muslims fighting in courts, in jail cells, on the streets everywhere and this fight will continue and we're not going to be silenced anymore and we're not going to be told that we are the problem. It's not us. It's the people who are radicalized, it's the people who are hateful towards our community. (Justice for All 2022)

These words reflect a feminist snapping-out of a caste politics that has treated oppressed castes as 'slaves' who merely existed to serve the masters. Instead, these words denote the existence of what

Safoora Zargar, another student leader calls 'Shaheen Bagh 0.2' where India's Muslims are fighting for their rights as equal citizens in courts, in prisons and on the streets, through protests, laws, open letters, public education and solidarities (Kadiwal 2021). These words also reject the tendency where those who point out the problem in the system get seen as the problem. Afreen traces the source of the problem back to the structures themselves, rather than accepting criminalisation of the entire community. Islamophobia is not the result of the acts of Muslims. It generates from the casteist/racist structure. Thus, Indian-Muslim feminists are debunking saviourism.

## Building coalition

Social movements are forming coalitions with national, and global social movements to stop genocide. There is a sense of urgency that extremely powerful actors are engineering the social context in India to create genocide and the need of the hour is to 'get together and resist in time'. This discourse of forming coalition subverts the majoritarian logic and reclaims the term 'majority'. The argument is that in India power, and resources concentrate in the hands of a minority. It is causing 'slow genocide' of a majority through food, water, environmental and livelihood injustices. The need of the hour is to unite everyone who suffers from violence. The maxim is that 'none of us are free until all of us are free'. Kaneez expresses these sentiments:

> They have come up with laws against farmers, they have taken them back, but they have also passed laws against workers, labourers, women, Muslims. We can't fight all these battles separately, we have to fight them together. (Anhad India 2022)

A narrative around why populism has grown in recent times views the hegemony of mega corporations, oligarchy and global finance as having pushed India to become a neofascist state (Patnaik 2021). India is experiencing 'the stark wealth inequality' as 'a result of an economic system rigged in favour of the super-rich over the poor and marginalised' (Oxfam 2022). During the pandemic when nearly 84% of Indian families' income declined, 98 billionaires made enormous profit (Mahendru et al. 2022, 7; Oxfam 2022). Tax reliefs to the richest increased the indirect tax burden on the poor, and commodification of health and education and erosion of safety nets for the most marginalised have ensured that inequality has gone back to levels noted in colonial times (Bhattacharya 2021; Piketty 2020). According to Patnaik (2021), state withdrawal from public services, mass unemployment, severe inequalities, crisis and the hegemony of global finance are conducive to fascism. Big businesses find explanations that blame the 'other'. It redirects the anger of the socio-economically underprivileged majority towards scapegoats. The state, acting on behalf of private, capitalist interests, passes laws to crush labour movements and protests and silence any critique of capitalism or government policies.

Anti-genocide social movements have formed international collaborations highlighting the relationship between inequalities, casteism, the role of the World Bank, Israel, and white supremacy in facilitating India's slide into neofascism. These ideas were discussed for instance, in a global summit called 'India on the Brink: Preventing Genocide' (https://indiaonthebrink.com/) which took place online from February 26th-28th 2022. The summit asked: 'Please join us as we do our utmost to prevent genocide in India.' It was supported by at least 18 anti-genocide solidarity groups located in India and abroad. Students, activists, experts on genocide, civil-society actors, interfaith groups, and human-rights advocates from India and the Indian diaspora and from other countries that have suffered from genocide gathered to exchange knowledge and draw up strategies. Similarly, in early January 2022, a civil society organisation 'Act Now for Harmony and Democracy' (ANHAD) organised a webinar – *Women Against Hate* – to counter calls for genocide (https://www.anhadindia.com/about/). ANHAD was founded after the Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. This group brings together India's feminists, writers, musicians and filmmakers. Likewise, 'The Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference' held in September 2021 brought together noted scholars in South Asian studies and social critics (https://dismantlinghindutva.com/).

Several organisations have collaborated to resist powerful vested networks and interests. These solidarity groups have held USA Congressional Briefings on India against persecution of women, Muslims, Christians, Dalits and other minority groups. The briefings were co-hosted by at least 22 national and international solidarity groups. Similarly, in the UK, several solidarity groups have joined hands to hold the UK government accountable.

Anti-genocide social learning movements are widening each other's understanding of how fascistic violence leads to genocide. Discussions have revolved around the long history of genocides in India. They are also exchanging notes on how genocides were fomented in Rwanda, Myanmar, Germany, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and elsewhere. They explain how the documentation process of confirming citizenship rendered 1.5 million people stateless in Assam, a state in northeast India (CSSS 2019; Das 2019) and how a similar process could lead to mass statelessness, mass detentions and civil war in India.

They are also building the capacities of people. The following exchange in the 'Women Against Hate' webinar is a poignant example:

> A female audience member (writing in chat function): I am an individual; how do I fight fascism?

> Response: We have to stand in our family, our office, our streets, our political party, our student unions, and join the organisations fighting this battle. If not at least keep your thinking right. It (hate) is in the air like corona. Question the videos. Is this right? Is this correct? … question its very basis, why are people playing this (politics of hate), they are using us, some people are benefitting from it. We don't need to be fools. Spend time get to know each other.

Thus, by building intersectional solidarities feminists are trying to wrestle power away from the elite patriarchs to the deprived majority.

## Seeking accountability

These critical feminists are learning from each other how to make the state accountable to people. Aijaz Ahmad (2016) observes that far-right, like in India, need not dismantle the exterior façade of liberal democracy if it can take over these institutions with support from the ruling class and the masses. Inevitably, feminists are calling for reclaiming the state institutions.

There are powerful visions of what can replace fascism. There are echoes of Abolitionist Feminism. It imagines 'a society that is secure … but not the kind of security that is based on policing and incarceration' (Davis 2016, 52). It calls for 'insightful responses to the violence of systemic oppression' (p.4). It asks for diverting funds from the securitisation industry to the wellbeing of communities; and for the creation of a world free of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and poverty, and where environment, human and non-human are respected (Davis 2016, 80). These sentiments echo in the response of Syed Hamid, a women's rights lawyer and who wrote a landmark report on the status of Muslim women in India for policy formulation. She notes, 'hate is systemic'. She calls on the state to fulfil a comprehensive duty of care towards vulnerable populations, instead of criminalising them (Justice for All 2022).

> Hate speech is not one off, but it is the systemic malady. It creates a systemic stigma around communities. Hate crimes incite immediate violence. But they also have indirect structural impact, discrimination in employment, in the provision of public services … Hate speech, hate crimes, cannot have an answer only in criminal law. (It) needs a much more comprehensive constitutional approach, the principle of duty of care towards those populations who are vulnerable.

'Feminist scream' is viewed as crucial because 'silence emboldens the state'. Students, academics, ordinary members of the public, writers, activists and journalists from diverse backgrounds are calling out fascism. There are ongoing national and international talks, webinars, conferences, petitions, audio-visuals, films, columns and campaigns, and parliamentary briefings organised by various solidarity groups. Citizens from various walks of life have written to the office of Prime

Minister and the President asking to act against those calling for genocide. For instance, one letter from former civil servants, lawyers, students, academics, and veterans reads:

> Take urgent action … We cannot allow such incitement to violence together with public expressions of hate – which not only constitute serious breaches of internal security, but which could also tear apart the social fabric of our nation. One speaker made a call to the army and police to pick up weapons and participate in the cleanliness drive (*safai abhiyan*). This amounts to asking the army to participate in genocide of our own citizens and is condemnable and unacceptable … We therefore call upon the Government, Parliament and the Supreme Court, to act with urgency to protect the integrity and security of our country. (The Wire Staff 2022)

Feminists are also calling the global elites from political, industrial, digital and academic worlds, with capacity to intervene, to accountability. Rana Ayyub, journalist and author of *Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up*, notes that under the Genocide Convention, 'incitement to commit genocide is an act of genocide' and people should be prosecuted for that. She asks why US president Biden, instead of banning Modi, provided him with a platform to launder his reputation on the international stage as a 'champion of free speech, rule of law and a secular and pluralistic ethos' (2021). In February 2020, Trump visited India, hugged Modi, and increased USA's arms sales to India exponentially (Reuters Staff 2020). In April 2022, Boris Johnson too visited India, hugged Modi and announced (2022), 'it is very important that we – the *khaas dost* (special friends) – get closer together.' He signed the 'new and expanded Defence and Security Partnership' with Modi, making it possible for him to buy military/security support more easily from the UK – instead of protecting hundreds of Muslim women and girls, who had to climb onto bulldozers to stop them from destroying their homes. The UK PM himself controversially sat on a bulldozer in a Tory-donor owned factory in Gujarat (Kunjulakshmi 2022). Activists are also raising concerns about digital platforms, which have colluded in the spread of hate and facilitated the spread of disinformation (Dutta 2022).

## Concluding reflections

This article has contrasted learning produced by two social movements: the hate knowledge bred by Hindutva anti-social movements in alliance with supremacist far-right networks, and 'struggle knowledge' generated by India's critical feminists in alliance with solidarity movements in countering it. This topic is urgent because it speaks to discussions about the political emboldening of right-wing chauvinistic nationalisms in various contexts where 'zombie' neoliberalism (Peck 2010) is not merely 'walking', but fanning xenophobia, accelerating ecocide and creating genocidal situations. It shows how contradictory forces are colliding in the context of post-9/11, aggressive, brutal and interventionist imperialism (Novelli et al. forthcoming), extractive, jingoistic authoritarianism and a 'disaster capitalism' that profits from the global pandemic. To borrow the words of Novelli et al. (forthcoming, 129), 'Now more than ever, we need' such 'social movements to stem this tide'. The learning arising from the feminist struggle has importance for how such misogynistic, vigilante and neoliberal hyper-nationalism can be understood and countered, particularly through the learning, knowledge, and struggles of social movements.

Choudry (2015) notes that those who suffer the most from the neoliberal capitalist regime, have as a result 'privileged knowledge' about the system that governs everyone (Novelli et al. forthcoming, 23). Likewise, India's critical-feminist movements generate contextually rooted and nuanced analyses from the standpoints of those at the sharpest end of receiving violence. They expose the very nature of a fascistic playbook that is fundamentally casteist, racist, and gendered and whose roots go beyond the contemporary neoliberal-capitalist regime. Their situated learning suggests that it is not possible to think transformative justice in India outside an anti-caste, anti-racist and feminist framework. The politics of hate is inextricably intertwined with the solidification of dominant-caste and white-supremacist patriarchy. It deliberately uses the colonial, religion-based politics of 'us' and 'them' to hide Brahmanical patriarchy, deflect blame onto scapegoats and centralise power. It shows how the figure of women is central to fascistic violence, in which women

from the targeted group are violated and women from the dominant group and targeted groups are pitted against each other. It allows power and resources to concentrate in the hands of a minority of caste patriarchs, at the expense of a 'slow genocide' of the majority. However, by trying to build an intersectional movement, critical feminists are subverting the majoritarian logic and reclaiming the term 'majority'. In doing so, they are attempting to wrestle power away from a minority of caste patriarchs to widespread solidarity. Thus, the insights emerging from some of the most violated people contribute to new understandings of transformative peace.

bell hooks reminds us that marginality is not merely 'a site of deprivation' but also 'a space of resistance' and alternative possibilities (1990, 341). Similarly, India's critical-feminist movements are resisting, and seeking to defend entire communities at risk of, exclusion, statelessness and vigilante violence. They are trying to bring about social change and striving to transform the space of marginalisation and exclusion into a site of radical possibility. They are doing this without recourse to Eurocentric, Savarna-centric and 'methodologically nationalistic' abstract theories. Like their counterparts in South Africa, Nepal, Colombia and Turkey, they are not looking to the Global North for guidance, nor are they turning to China or Russia for support (Novelli et al. forthcoming). Rather, they are drawing learning and solidarity from intersectional, inter- and trans-national movements such as anti-caste, Black Lives Matter, decolonial, Indigenous and other global-justice movements led by actors and networks from the global majority. Their knowledge offers important resources for critical theory to be grounded in the sensibilities, theories and praxis of those who are living through the high end of violence.

To conclude, a critical feminist in India recited Maya Angelou's verse, indicating learning with and centuries-old solidarity with the Black Lives Matter,

> You may tread me in the very dirt
>
> But still, like dust, I'll rise.

## Notes

1. An activist from India relayed the incident between two Muslim male students. It reflects fear for the future even in lighthearted humour among Muslims.
2. I dedicate this article to Aziz Choudry, a late intellectual and radical activist. In our last meeting at Sussex in 2019, we agonised over the situation in India but expressed hope in the strong resistance. He encouraged me to document 'struggle knowledge'. This article, therefore, honours Aziz's work and my promise to him.

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## Disclosure statement

## Declaration of interest statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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