Resisting Erasure

How Muslim Women in India Are Responding to Hate and Hostility in Their Everyday Lives

A Collective Narrative Document by **Sara Asfiya Ali**

Illustrations by **Neha Ayyub**

A letter from the author

Dear Reader,

I am grateful that you have found your way to this document and that you are taking the time to sit with these stories. This collective narrative document weaves together the voices of 21 Muslim women from various urban cities across India who shared their experiences of navigating, resisting, and responding to everyday Islamophobia. I have had the opportunity to witness these stories, collect them, and write them as a Muslim woman myself — not from a distance, but from a place of proximity to the experiences described here.

This document is grounded in the methodology of collective narrative practice, developed by David Denborough (2008). Unlike traditional research approaches that extract stories for analysis, collective narrative practice is collaborative and community-centred. The goal is not to produce knowledge about a community but to create something with and for the community — a document that belongs to those who shared their stories. This process involved individual in-depth interviews with Muslim women students, mothers, professionals, journalists, and community workers living and working across different parts of urban India. Rather than imposing my interpretations onto their words, I worked to preserve their voices as they were spoken. The stories were then woven together thematically — organised around shared responses and strategies rather than individual profiles.

Documenting these narratives felt necessary not only to make visible the lived experiences of Muslim women in India's current socio-political environment, but also to illuminate the skills, knowledges, and strengths these women draw upon to actively respond to their conditions. Their stories testify to the fact that Muslim women are not passive victims of social suffering — we respond and resist through many daily, often invisible actions. This document is a collection of these everyday acts of resistance.

This approach is rooted in narrative therapy's practice of double-storying — holding space for both stories of hardship and stories of resistance (Denborough, 2008). By deliberately highlighting acts of resistance alongside experiences of oppression, this document challenges singular narratives of victimhood. It shows that struggle does not negate agency and that even in the face of systemic injustice, we are not passive.

Telling these stories from within the community creates a different kind of listening – one that recognizes the unspoken, the shared silences, and the complexities of everyday realities that may not always be fully captured by the limitations of language. As Marnie Sather (2024) notes, when the researcher is also an insider, there is a responsibility to approach these narratives with care and accountability. This document was not created by me alone; it was co-created with the women who participated. As David Denborough reminds us, collective narrative documents are built in partnership — they are crafted with, not about, those who share their stories. The women who contributed to this document have read it, reflected on it, and told me that they can hear their voices in these pages — that they feel seen and represented. This is what I hold as the most meaningful validation of this work.

Finally, this methodology attempts to highlight that stories need witnesses to be complete. As Barbara Myerhoff (1982) writes, "It is not enough to tell one's story. It must be told to someone who receives it. It is this act of receiving which makes the telling a healing act." This is why, at the end of this document, there is an invitation for readers to respond — not as evaluators or commentators, but as witnesses. Your act of reading, reflecting, and responding becomes part of how these stories carry meaning forward.

This document is not a neutral account. It is a quiet refusal of the singular stories often told about our lives and identities. It is an act of reclaiming our very right to narrate our own stories. And for me, it is also a deeply personal and very deliberate act of resistance.

With Love & Care,
Sara Asfiya Ali

A letter from the illustrator

Dear Reader,

As the illustrator of this document, my intention was to translate the narrative into a visual language that renders the experiences into visible, tangible objects. While the document is rich in varied lived experiences of Muslim women across the subcontinent, it was equally important to find imagery that resonates with our collective struggles — one sister's struggle is just as real to me as it is to hers. In that sense I've also borrowed images from my own memories of navigating hatred and Islamophobia in the country.

From the beginning, Sara and I had agreed on using bold pencil strokes and strong elements within the illustrations. The style is deeply inspired by feminist graphic work and comic storytelling strategies to document lived experiences and resist dominant narratives. Employing a restrained color palette, I highlighted certain symbols in red to explore the various contours of othering, resistance, and care present in the document. It was also important for me to portray significant moments of our social movements to honor them and their stories of resilience.

While reading and illustrating this document, I realised how important it is to imagine collective liberation, to offer acts of care and spaces for reflection. I believe the illustrations themselves are my reflections and responses to the stories shared by Muslim women in the country; it not only teaches us to reclaim our stories but also how to tell them. I'm thankful to Sara for allowing me to be a part of such a powerful document and the collaborative process of its creation.

With warmth,
Neha

Situating these stories

In recent years, the sociopolitical climate in India has changed in ways that have made it increasingly difficult for Muslims—particularly Muslim women—to move safely through public and institutional spaces. These changes did not happen overnight. They unfolded gradually, then suddenly, through legislative shifts, state-sanctioned violence, and the mainstreaming of hate — each event building on the last, creating a climate where Muslim women must navigate fear, exclusion, and violence as part of everyday life.

The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019, alongside the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), introduced profound insecurity about belonging and citizenship (The Wire, 2019b). For many Muslim women, the documentation required to prove identity is complicated by generational exclusion from formal records and land titles. That same year, violent police crackdowns at Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University during peaceful protests marked a turning point (The Wire, 2019). These were not only moments of repression but also clear signals of whose dissent was considered illegitimate.

In early 2020, the Delhi pogrom unfolded—a targeted violence against Muslims resulting in dozens of deaths, wrongful incarcerations, and widespread displacement, with justice remaining elusive (Amnesty International, 2020; The Quint, 2020). Laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have been used to arrest students and activists—who included Muslim women—further restricting space for political expression (Indian Express, 2019). Young Muslim women who participated in the anti-CAA protests were arrested and held for years without trial under terrorism charges. These legal instruments, often selectively applied, contribute to a broader pattern of surveillance and criminalisation of Muslim resistance (Bebaak Collective, 2022).

By 2021 and 2022, the targeting of Muslim women became more explicit. Online harassment campaigns such as the Bulli Bai and Sulli Deals apps publicly auctioned Muslim women's images to humiliate and degrade their dignity (Maktoob Media, 2022; The Wire, 2022). In 2022, the hijab ban in Karnataka forced Muslim girls and women to choose between education and religious expression (The Quint, 2022). Muslim women wearing the hijab, burqa, or niqab are frequently subjected to bullying, harassment, and intimidation in public spaces, with viral videos of verbal abuse amplifying fear within the community.

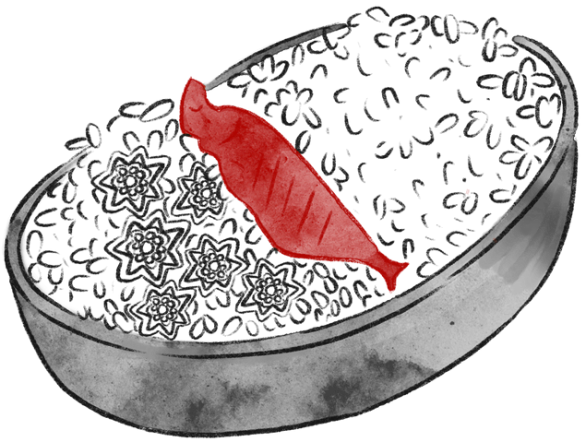
Violence against Muslim women became increasingly brazen and public. Following the April 2025 Kashmir attack in Pahalgam, 21 incidents of anti-Muslim violence were documented within days, including assaults on Kashmiri women and students, and evictions of Kashmiri students from their rented homes and hostels (Al Jazeera, 2025a; Al Jazeera, 2025b). India Hate Lab recorded 98 in-person hate speech events in the 16-day period following the attack (India Hate Lab, 2025). In December 2025, a state chief minister publicly pulled down the *niqab (face veil)* of a Muslim woman doctor during a government ceremony. The act, captured on video, showed officials laughing as the woman's religious covering was forcibly removed (Al Jazeera, 2025c; Amnesty International, 2025). Amnesty International condemned it as "an assault on this woman's dignity, autonomy, and identity" (Amnesty International, 2025). The woman subsequently declined the government position. These conditions are not isolated events — they shape everyday life. These targeted acts represent systematic attempts to marginalise Muslim women by attacking their religious and personal identities.

India is famously diverse, and so too are Indian Muslims. We represent a rich mosaic of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and traditions, speaking numerous languages and following varied regional customs. India's Muslim population is far from monolithic; diverse experiences, regional histories, and socio-economic backgrounds deeply shape our identities. While I had conversations with Kashmiri Muslim women and Muslim women from the queer community, I have chosen not to include their voices in this document. Their experiences are distinct and deserve dedicated individual projects that can centre their specific realities and give their stories the space and attention they require.

Too often, Muslim women's lives are portrayed primarily through the lens of victimhood, with emphasis placed on their oppression while their acts of resistance go unnoticed. In media and popular discourse, Muslim women are often depicted as either silent sufferers or symbols of religious backwardness, flattening the complexity of their lives and erasing the ways they resist. Yet Muslim women have never been passive in the face of oppression. During the anti-CAA protests, one of the largest and most pivotal acts of Muslim women's resistance unfolded at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. As documented by the Bebaak Collective (2022), women occupied public space for months, sustaining their communities through relentless protest and mutual aid. Shaheen Bagh became a symbol of visible, collective defiance—proof that Muslim women will organise, mobilise, and fight back when their rights are threatened.

But resistance is not only found in large protests or highly visible acts of defiance. It also lives in the everyday—in the quiet refusals, in the assertion of dignity in hostile spaces, in speaking when silenced, and in holding space for one another. This document seeks to make visible both forms of resistance: the loud and the quiet, the collective and the personal, the public and the intimate. It is a collection of these everyday acts of resistance—acts that may not make headlines but are powerful responses in their refusal to be erased.

We remember



For many of us, the experience of othering began early—long before we fully understood what it meant to be Muslim. Our first encounters with Islamophobia and exclusion were not on university campuses, streets, or workplaces but in our childhood classrooms, school buses, and among friends. While sharing these stories, we realised a lot of them had been buried in our memories, and they surfaced later as we became adults. As children, many of us did not know how to identify what is hate or what is classified as Islamophobia. Yet these moments have stayed with us, in our memories—shaping how we came to understand ourselves and the world around us.

One of us shared, “I believe the first instance I had of knowing that I was a Muslim, or realising it, was in first grade. A girl from my class went to the teacher and falsely accused me of carrying a knife in my bag and threatening her in the name of my religion. I remember standing at the back of the class with my hands up, crying, telling the teacher that I didn’t do it. I blocked this memory out for a very long time, but a lot of my life after that was just me trying not to be a Muslim.”

Another one of us recalled another incident from their childhood, which happened right after the Bombay blasts in 2006. “I used to travel to school by bus with our driver, whom we the children called Kaku (uncle). He was loved by all of us. One day, we were talking about our favourite heroes, and all the kids mentioned Shahrukh Khan, describing how much we loved him. And Kaku replied, ‘Yeah, he's nice, but if you bring him to the bus, he'll probably blow it up.’ I was in class four. I remember uncomfortably laughing in that moment, but somehow, this memory has stayed with me. Now as I think of it, I reflect that even someone as popular and loved as Shahrukh Khan was still seen through this lens.”

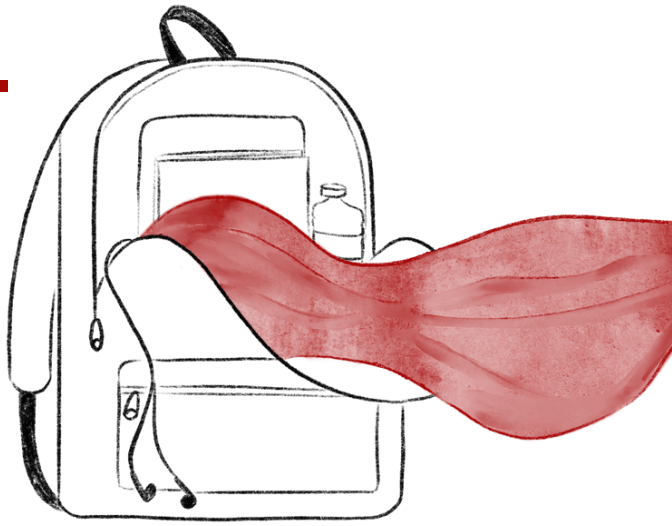
Another one of us recalled a visit made to a classmate's home. “I remember being friends with a girl who would constantly bring up my Muslim identity to others. The first thing she told her parents when I entered their home was, 'This is Aliya. She's Muslim, but she's not *that kind of Muslim.'* I was young and I didn’t know how to respond to that. This family were Brahmins. I also remembered I was given water in a steel glass that I was supposed to drink from without my lips touching it, and I was instructed about their household rules.

Such incidents kept happening until I realised, much later as an adult, that what I was experiencing was both Islamophobia and casteism.”

One of us shared how she would ask her mother not to pack non-vegetarian food for lunch because most of her classmates were vegetarian, and she didn't want to make them uncomfortable. “I would argue with my dad, who didn't understand why I felt the need to hide my Muslim identity or my food preference for lunch. As a young child, I felt that practicing my faith this openly was not okay.”

“I remember in third grade, travelling by bus after India won an India-Pakistan match. One of my classmates literally said, ‘Why are you happy? You should be supporting *Pakistan*.’ Even as a kid I remember thinking - **Why would I support Pakistan?**

We embrace ourselves — fully



As Muslim women, some of us chose to wear the hijab very young, while many of us wore it as adults growing up, and some still choose not to wear it. Wearing the hijab means that we are visibly pronouncing our Muslim identities, and our journey with it has been so unique. Some of us would leave our home wearing our hijabs, only to quietly take them off before reaching school. There were times when we abandoned the idea of being visibly Muslim so that we wouldn't be excluded, asked strange questions, or othered by those around us. One of us shared, "I would never introduce myself as Sofiya Khan. I would just say I'm Sofiya and let them assume I'm Christian or something." It helped us not stand out.

Sometimes, these messages didn't just come from strangers. Even within our families, we were asked not to draw too much attention to ourselves. My father would tell me not to wear the hijab because people are going to judge me; people are going to stay away from me. One of us shared that she feared embracing a more visible Muslim identity and taking on the hijab would threaten those who had accepted a certain version of her already. "Even my Muslim friend responded with scepticism when I told him I wanted to start wearing the hijab. Despite carrying a hijab in my bag for days, I would hesitate to wear it on campus, perhaps because the prevailing atmosphere increasingly equated being visibly Muslim with extremism."

But no matter how much we tried to erase, blur, or hide our identities, we were still marked and othered. One of us echoed this

"Even if I call myself an atheist, having my Muslim name is enough for them to discriminate against me. **So then why not accept my identity?"**

For many of us, this realisation was a turning point. If our very names were enough to invite exclusion and othering, then how would hiding our visible identities protect us?. Even in classrooms, professors made us feel that our hijab disrupted what was meant to be a secular space. We had internalised that “religion is a matter of the private sphere”—we shouldn't bring it to the forefront of our identities.

For some of us, the journey of reclaiming our identity was slowly putting the hijab back on, step by step. We would first put it around our necks; then, on some days, it would cover half our heads. Some of us would carry our hijabs in our bags, and when asked, “Why do you have this thing with you? It’s so hot,” we would reply. “Oh, it’s for when I’m feeling cold.” One of us remembered when it was peak winter in Delhi. So she wore the hijab and thought to herself, ‘Let’s confuse people. Let them think it’s for the cold. And one day, when summer comes, I will never take it off.’

“I was trying so hard to assimilate into the national secular image; it took me so far from myself and whatever roots I had come from... I was so far removed and detached from all of these things trying to fit into the other crowd, but I had completely lost whatever identity I had. Putting the hijab back on was quite a transformative experience in reclaiming that self... there is no point in trying to assimilate because there is no real assimilation into this society.”

One of us shared how deciding to wear the hijab again was also a political statement. “When I wore the hijab as a teenager in Kerala, it felt more like a cultural marker of a 'good Muslim woman' rather than an act of rooted in deep religious conviction. However, the events in Karnataka against the hijab ban and the atmosphere in Delhi's political circles, where you can talk about Muslim issues but can't be visibly Muslim, made me reconsider. There's this pressure in liberal circles for Muslims not to be too outwardly religious, to not 'wear their religion on their sleeves,' as if being Muslim isn't part of India's culture. For me, wearing the hijab has become a very political statement. My first public appearance wearing it was in a media video, and it felt huge because everyone from my college knew me as this liberal, critical person.”

Another one of us shared: “To Muslim women in India who might have gone through similar experiences, I would say, don't abandon yourself and your identity for the sake of trying to find your voice or fit into spaces where you have to shrink yourself. Trying to abandon your faith or identity for survival or fitting in is - not worth it. Never shrink yourself to the point of being completely invisible, and assert yourself as much as possible without compromising your sense of justice.”

“Be really sure of your own identity and understanding. If you don't want to practice religion, don't, but don't make that decision out of fear of judgement.” So, step by step, we have now stopped hiding and shrinking ourselves. We choose to be seen — fully.

We ignore
We walk away

Some of us have learned to ignore and walk away when others stare or look at us in strange ways. One of us shared about a time standing in the ATM queue: "I was taking some time inside the ATM, and there were a lot of people waiting behind me. I can understand people's frustration if someone is taking time at an ATM, but there was a particular person wearing a saffron scarf who was giving me a death stare. So, I just kept looking at him until I disappeared into one lane. He kept on staring at me, and I cannot call these very violent hate crimes, but it was still the worst thing that I have ever experienced since I began wearing the hijab again." She also added that sometimes it's hard to know whether they're staring because of the fact that we're wearing the hijab or if it is just misogyny—men who don't have manners.

One of us shared how, growing up, she was the only hijabi in her whole school in Uttar Pradesh. "Everyone always kept looking at you. So, I would simply take off my hijab and keep it in my bag on the way to school and back while taking public transport. But as soon as I reached the school building, I would wear it back again."

One of us shared an experience about another friend: "When my friend first visited the housing society where she lives right now, everyone there was staring at her—like, how come a Muslim entered the vicinity of this society?"

One of us shared a very painful story of why it's hard to respond to these experiences. Two colleagues were having a conversation right next to her table about how it's hard to trust the working class—security guards and housemaids—these days. And all of a sudden, one of them said it's even harder now—because what if someone's *Bangladeshi*? The word 'Bangladeshi' in India carries a lot of weight in the current political context. He spoke about how Bangladeshis are illegal people, and they come, commit crimes, and then run off to their own country. And all while he was saying these things, he was staring at me. I was not even part of their conversation. I felt very insulted and couldn't process what had just happened. The way he looked at me when he was saying all those things—I wanted to report this to HR, but how can you prove someone was looking at you?

One of us shared how Muslim women need to share these experiences with other Muslim women in their circles.

When we go through these experiences, sometimes we second-guess ourselves. People around us may not believe this particular form of staring was directed at us because we wear the hijab. But when you speak to a fellow hijabi, it often validates your own experience, and you feel a bit better. **You don't feel insane and alone for feeling the way that you did during these incidents.**

We speak up for ourselves and others

Sometimes, experiences force us to respond immediately. One of us shared a story: “One day during Ramadan, I decided to start wearing my hijab to my workplace. As soon as I entered, the first person at the door, a colleague, pointed to my head with a nasty expression and asked, ‘What is this thing you’re wearing today?’ I didn't know what to say for a couple of seconds, and then I launched into a rant in front of him. Remember, this was the time when in Karnataka there was a ban on the hijab. You have to be really clueless, unaware, and very stupid to not know what a hijab is when it is in the newspapers all the time. I said this to him—but I said it a little mildly.”

Then there are also times when we are so shocked we don’t know how to respond. Once while I was at my close friend’s wedding, she introduced me to a few of her other friends and asked, ‘Can you guess what her religion is? You would never be able to.’ I immediately asked her to stop it. 'Why are you saying that?’ She responded, saying, ‘What? You absolutely don't look like a Muslim. You're not like *them* at all.’ I didn’t even know how to react, as this was coming from a very close friend.

For many of us, speaking up isn't a choice—it is what we believe we must do. "You are a human—you have to stand for any injustice that is happening around you."

Some of us confront even when a backlash is expected, especially online. "There was this really popular page… which posted that any woman who covers her hair has internalized misogyny and is controlled by a man. I left a comment saying that "I think we should let women decide that—you being a man sitting behind a screen is no one to tell women, and what you're doing now is exactly what you criticise—you're taking away their agency to speak for themselves."

One of us shared, "With the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments, every political event and incident that affects other Muslims in India has become deeply personal to me. This feels personal because of our shared identity. All of this feels personal." Another one of us shared why she chooses to speak up: "My father raised me to always be an honest person and stand for what is right. So I speak up and stand up to injustice. ".

Another one of us added, "During the CAA/NRC, I was in college. I used to post a lot—on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Some days I would cry into my pillow and still post on social media. There were so many hate comments, and I used to reply to them and explain how we're feeling as a community. But then I realised you can't go and preach to them and expect them to understand. If a person has to take heed, they will take heed from anywhere."

At the same time, some of us find it very tiring to respond, explain, and justify our lived experiences to others. We're tired of getting into conflicts. And when we get tired, we hide our Instagram stories or mute chats from those who constantly question us when we speak. We want peace in our lives. We will post and speak our truth, but we may not want everyone to see it.

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Some of us do not speak up the way we want to—because we need to protect our families. “Before 2014, I was more vocal. You can say I was full of anger because of the hate crimes happening in our country. But after 2014, we have seen what happens if you speak and if you are vocal about anything. You are being crushed. You are being silenced. So, my family tells me not to say certain things or not to post online. And since then, I have been mostly quiet. Yet when I feel I have to speak, I do it in very subtle ways. Because many of us know that simply having a Muslim name and speaking up against the state can result in jail time, even if we're not religious Muslims. Isn't Umar Khalid an atheist?

Sometimes we speak back with actions, not words. One of us shared an incident at school when her teacher humiliated her and the only other Muslim girl in class for wanting to study computer science (a very competitive subject in my school). “She asked us, ‘What made you think you would get selected for Computer Science?’ I cried a lot that day. But when I actually did make the cut and get into computer science, I went back to the same teacher and showed her my good scores. That was my response to her. ”Even if I were or weren’t a great student, she had no right to humiliate any student in front of the entire class.

We don’t just speak for ourselves; we speak up for others. One of us shared how she is always alert now. “If someone were to say anything at all and be mean towards anyone at all who was a visible Muslim, I would just jump in.”

Some of us feel very confused by how people respond to hate around us. We have seen many of our classmates and friends speak up about events like George Floyd’s death and the Black Lives Matter movement. Although that’s an important movement to support, these same people don’t speak up and stand up to hate crimes against Kashmiris and Muslims in their own country.

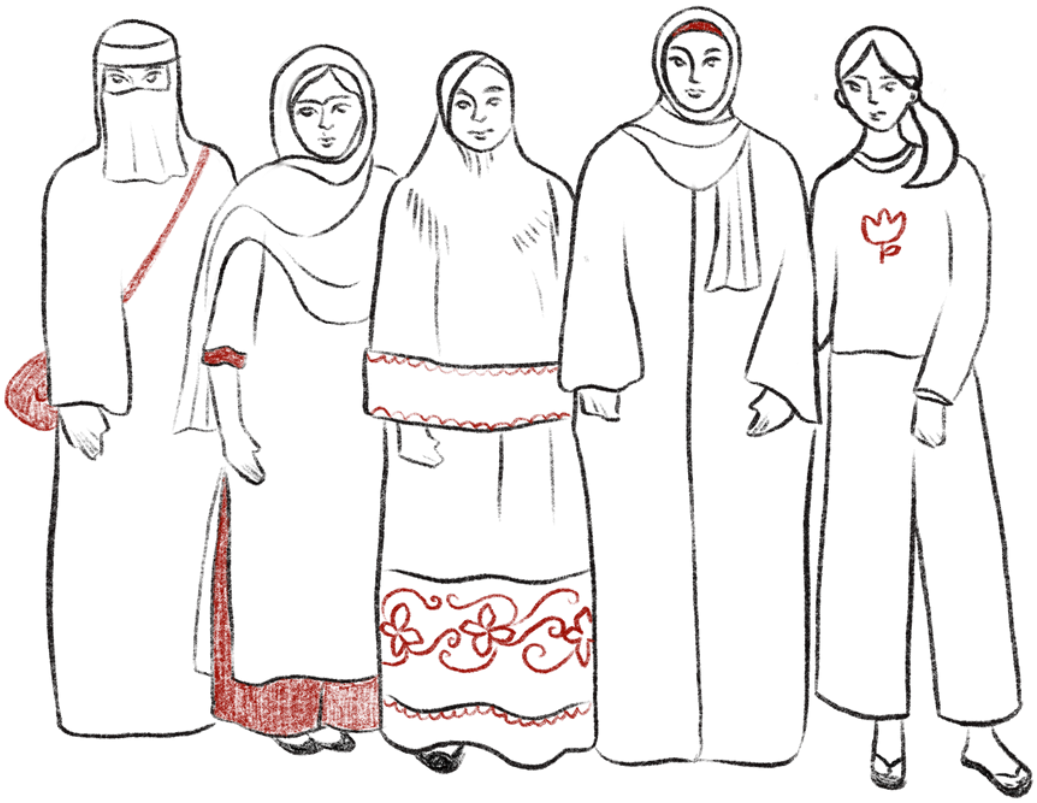
We wish others weren’t silent witnesses when we’re made to feel unsafe in this country. Even if it is not your community, if something major is happening in the capital city of your country (referring to the Delhi Pogrom) — “Kuch toh bolo?” (Say something?).

It is not always on us to defend ourselves when we're targeted in public spaces—when someone else jumps in and says something like, "Why are you targeting this person like this? " It carries more weight. When some of us feel anxious for our fellow Muslims, we simply pray for them.

One of us shared, "These days when I see someone who is visibly Muslim, wearing a skullcap, or someone wearing the hijab or the burqa—especially if they are working class—then I feel very scared for them, and I just begin praying inside my mind that may Allah protect this person because they are out on the streets. They don't have the privilege of just staying at home like I do. So, I just begin praying."

We speak back and stand up for ourselves and others when we see injustice. We hope others will do the same for us.

We define our Muslim-ness



Some of us are able to observe how progressive, secular, or liberal/leftist spaces that claim to amplify the voices of those oppressed often propagate their own othering of Muslims.

"They accept you as long as you fit into their idea of a Muslim." In their mind, they have an idea of a good Muslim — **and that Muslim is generally a non-practising Muslim.**

Everything is expected to be under the whole banner of secularity… so your identity should not come out much. We are made to feel that our very being is threatening their secularism.

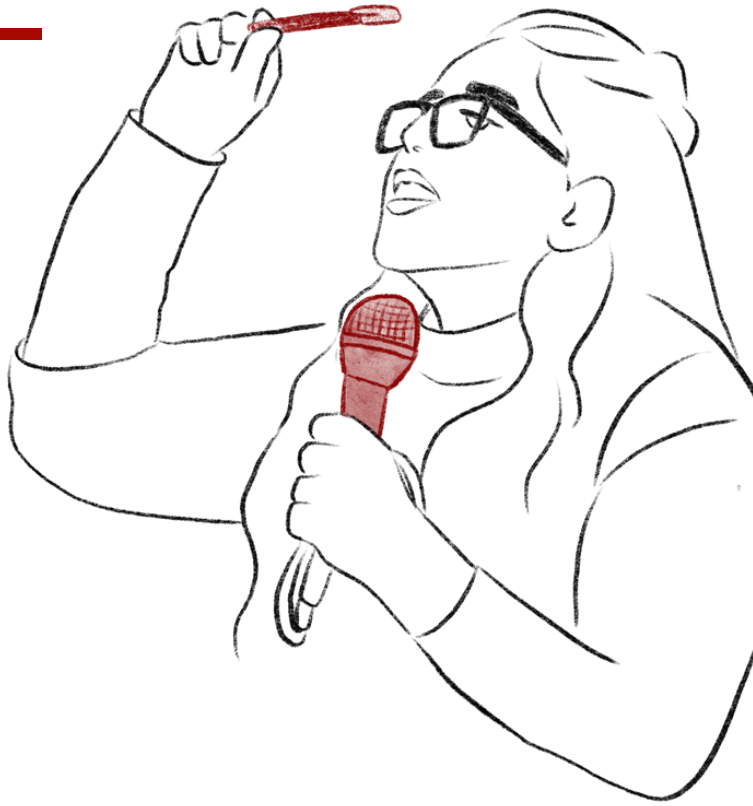
We have had experiences when we bring our Muslim identities to seemingly progressive spaces. One of us shared, "Throughout undergraduate years, the notion that I was a Muslim but not 'too' Muslim persisted. There were other Muslim students on my campus, like Bohra Muslims, who dressed in specific ways and practiced differently and were often labelled as 'extreme'. I had also reached a point where I felt I could just be a good human being, and I do not need to focus too much on religious practices. Seeing how others responded to practicing Muslims, I tried my best to be the 'cool' Muslim and fit in with liberal circles, queer circles, and Christian circles. Despite studying English literature, which was supposed to be a progressive space, I realised that acceptance in these spaces is conditional and often excluded Muslims."

Another one of us shared how exclusion is sometimes from within our community. "I recall working with a small media organisation where I was tasked with creating a video on the violence against Muslims. Despite being a Muslim himself, the director told me I couldn't present the video because I wasn't wearing a hijab. It felt like being slut-shamed and made me question if I would ever be good enough for either Muslims or liberals.

Muslim women are treated differently from men when they take a position on religion. Atheist men are often seen as rational, while atheist women are often viewed as escaping or responding to the difficulties imposed by religion on them. Even among practicing Muslims, politics is often seen as a man's domain. We don't pay as much attention to female Muslim politicians. When hijabi women started speaking out politically and protesting the hijab ban in Karnataka, they weren't given the same platform by even Muslim organisations. It was often left to individuals to speak out. The responses to the hijab ban were a significant political statement by Muslim women, yet they were often overlooked. There's this difficulty in accepting that a woman can be religious, loving, kind, political, and hold a job—it's seen as contradictory. Men, on the other hand, can practice religion and be vocal about politics without the same questions."

We want to say that Muslims in India are not a monolith. A Muslim could come in shapes, forms, and colours. We practice religion in different ways. **We need to create more spaces for Muslims to be Muslims and not be needed to fit someone else's model of a Muslim.**

We tell our own stories



Sometimes, those who speak for us speak over us, not with us. When speaking about the Delhi pogrom, one of us shared how the media often shows a very different picture from what actually happened. “We, as people who live in the areas where the riots have occurred, know what really happened. But the whole country knows another version of the story.” So, when it’s the battle of the narrative, it becomes important to tell our stories in our own voice.

One of us shared her perspectives from a book called Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire. “In that book, Freire speaks of how there are always 2 groups—a group of oppressors and a group that are oppressed. In the Indian context, we have upper-caste Hindu leftists who want to show solidarity with Muslims of India. And it's good that they are showing solidarity because that's what we want. We want people who can amplify our voices. But what happens instead is these ‘well-meaning people’ who share the privilege and identity of the oppressors come to us and are often very condescending. They make us feel as if our lived experiences don't matter and their theoretical understanding of a political issue is more important. They often hijack our spaces. But that should not be the case. Their role is to show solidarity, amplify our voices, and extend their support by whatever means they can, but not take up our spaces because only we share our experiences or know our issues much better because we face the direct impact of whatever is happening.”

Some of us resist our right to tell our own stories through our work. One of us, who is a researcher, observed how research on Muslim issues is often done on “Muslim blood and sweat", but the faces and voices that are amplified are those of liberal upper-caste individuals. You end up writing what they want to hear, and it's exhausting to constantly detach the personal from the political. “Now I write only things that I want to. I’m not going to tweak my language, and I’m not going to go with the secular liberal dogma.” She added, 'There is a purpose when we create something… it’s just like how people sculpt. Researchers sculpt, too. I finally feel sure of my identity and where I fit in, not from external pressures but from my own understanding and choice. This brings a lot of clarity and a sense of purpose and calmness.”

One of us shared a very powerful quote by Malcolm X, which she resonated with. When asked, “What can white people do to help Black people?” Malcolm X famously responded, "Nothing". But he expanded on this by saying, “If the white man wants to help the Black man, he can help, but he can’t join. He can help by speaking among whites to change the attitudes towards Black people. But he can’t join us. We have to do that ourselves.” Malcolm X emphasised that Black empowerment must come from within Black communities themselves, rather than relying on white intervention or leadership. He saw the primary responsibility of white allies as confronting racism within their own communities, rather than attempting to lead or join Black movements.

“Stop claiming Muslim spaces and Muslim voices. It's tiring to see upper-class names attached to narratives documenting and amplifying Muslim suffering. There are already existing Muslim voices that can be amplified.

These so-called intellectual spaces often lack real support for Muslims within them. Stop taking our spaces. Stop the fetishisation of Muslim suffering. Do your part on a personal level, don't do harm, and stop taking over our narratives. When a Muslim woman talks about her faith and politics, don't bombard her with irrelevant questions.

Some of us have been watching closely. “I always try to find—if there is a group doing community work in Muslim-dominated areas—who else is on their board. Who is even working with them? Surprisingly or not surprisingly, none of them belong to the Muslim community.” We’ve seen the extractive cycle. “Muslim issues are often just stories in research papers to be taken out of the country and then get awarded for.”

Many of us echo this feeling — **if you don't give the mic to the people who are oppressed... you are doing nothing but continuing the oppressive circle.** This is not just for the Muslim community, but also when you're speaking about the Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalised communities within India.

Some of us shared stories that justify why Muslim women should be given the mic to tell our own stories. When others speak for us, they are also taking the space of the victim by being like, "Okay, I am also the victim." The narrative is changed. 'I remember during the CAA/NRC protests, there were people in liberal left spaces asking, "Why are Muslims communalizing this issue?"' But the whole issue is basically communal discrimination against one community — Muslims. So why are people threatened by a Muslim professing that?"

Some of us shared why we want to contribute to this document. "One of the reasons why I wanted to give this interview was because I was so happy a Muslim woman is doing this." Another one of us shared, "When you reached out to me with this topic, I thought to myself—I want to help her (referring to the author) in any way possible because there are so many people who are doing work *on us* instead of us doing work with us."

We want to tell our own stories so that we can reclaim our narratives.

We gather
We express our rage

Some of us realised that we couldn't wait for others to react and respond when our rights were taken away from us. One of us shared her response to the December 15th violence on one of the major university campuses in Delhi: "Students at Jamia and Aligarh Muslim University had faced a lot of brutality. We can't be sitting in our homes. The men were already heading out for protests around the campuses, so we decided to mobilise women and children to step out of their homes and demonstrate their solidarity with the students. They should know we're not okay with this."

One of us, who witnessed the police brutality directly on the campus, shared, “When you are exposed to the suffering of different people—like in Palestine,. And when you become close to your identity, you start seeing yourself in those people as well; there is a very minute line that separates me from those people. So, that is what happened. I think that is why 15th December is very important because we could see before our eyes the impunity that has been granted and how little our lives matter. You sort of realise how when push comes to shove it is the people of the community who you can rely on, who will open their homes for you when you're running away from the police, and who will take you in without asking your name. The number of elders from the community who had very little space in their houses just flung their doors open and were taking in as many kids as possible so that the police would not round them up. A lot of them had locked their houses so that the police think they're not at home.”

Some of us lost friendships where we did not find solidarity. One of us shared how the anti-CAA/NRC protests were a major turning point for her. “During these protests, I noticed that mostly Muslim students were actively participating. Others would make plays about the protests, incorporating 'exotic' elements of our struggle, but wouldn't protest alongside us. This opened my eyes to the politics of my friendships. I knew that if I started openly talking about my faith and Islamophobic experiences, those friendships would likely fall apart—and they did.”

We express our rage and protest because **we know it could be any of us any day.** Even if those with the most centrist and the most liberal views could be jailed for speaking up against the government—it could be anybody, any day.”

We find belonging and support in each other

Some of us went house hunting in Mumbai—it wasn't mentioned that Muslims aren't allowed, but when you visited the apartments and the brokers got to know that you were Muslim, they would indicate this in different subtle ways, like "We don't want non-vegetarians here." Some others even say it directly to our faces: "You won't be able to find a house here." And we would be shocked. One of us remembered, "My company director, who is also Muslim, shared how he had to search through around 30-40 flats before he found one." I was shocked. He is a senior director of a big company, and he has a lot of money. If such a person is facing a problem, then who am I?"

One of us shared, "Batla House is one of the most congested places to live in Delhi. In the back of my family's mind we know we could easily afford a better locality to live in, but we and many Muslims still chose to live here because it feels like one of the few places that are safe in Delhi for Muslims to live in. This leads to the ghettoisation of Muslims in many cities across India.

Some of us shared about spaces where they have found belonging as they navigated these experiences. “We have found belonging in our female friendships with other Muslim women. In these friendships, we could be ourselves. You could tell your story as it is, and you do not have to refine it. You do not have to hide or lie about certain things. They would just understand, and we found belonging with each other. There’s a different kind of comfort in spaces with other Muslim women. Another one of us echoed, “The acceptance and the sisterhood that you find among Muslim women… it is something else entirely.”

One of us shared how sometimes women can also be harsh to each other. “As women, we do a lot of gatekeeping. Especially if you don’t agree with each other, instead of having conversations, we may start drifting away.” Which makes us very harshly judgemental towards other women who may not fit our lens. But we are also learning to hold space. We should be more accepting towards each other.

“We all have stories that we could learn a lot from.”

Some of us found belonging within our own communities. “I started attending Quran classes and getting more involved in Muslim spaces. This led to finding a community where I felt truly understood and accepted. Unlike previous experiences where acceptance felt conditional, in these Muslim spaces, I was welcomed without having to conform. There was a strong sense of sisterhood and openness that I had never experienced before. We engaged in collective activities like Ramadan gatherings and creating posters for events. Academically, these spaces and the university department provided platforms for critical discussions about larger issues like the state, nationalism, and geopolitics, which gave me confidence.”

But sometimes we feel so hurt by these experiences of othering and the silence from those we thought would stand up for us. We have also turned to others when we felt powerless. “I would think, what can I do? Whom can I go to? I had a professor who was from a Christian background in Pune. I was very upset, and I went to him to share about the different messages I was receiving. He explained to me how even in the Bible all the prophets and the followers of the prophets were harassed by other people and how this is how God tests the people whom he loves.”

To Muslim women who are still seeking belonging while also embracing their full identity: “There is definitely a space for you, especially in Muslim settings and within Muslim sisterhood, where your voice will be heard." It might take time to discover them, but such spaces exist.”

We hold on to faith and knowledge

Some of us would hold on to the faith we acquired when we were very young. “My mother would attend *ijtimas* and gatherings. I used to listen to the stories of the *sahabas*, I used to listen to the Quran, and I used to listen to the translation and why Allah has asked you to cover yourself.” These memories stayed with us — stories that shaped what we would later return to when the world asked us to question who we were.

Others began learning about our religion through friends. “My friends, who were more learned in the aspect of religion than I was, helped me, guided me, and addressed all the questions that I had.” One of us shared, “When I went to a new place, it was the first time I had Muslim friends, and then I started learning about my religion a lot. That sort of motivated me… it was me accepting myself as a Muslim.”

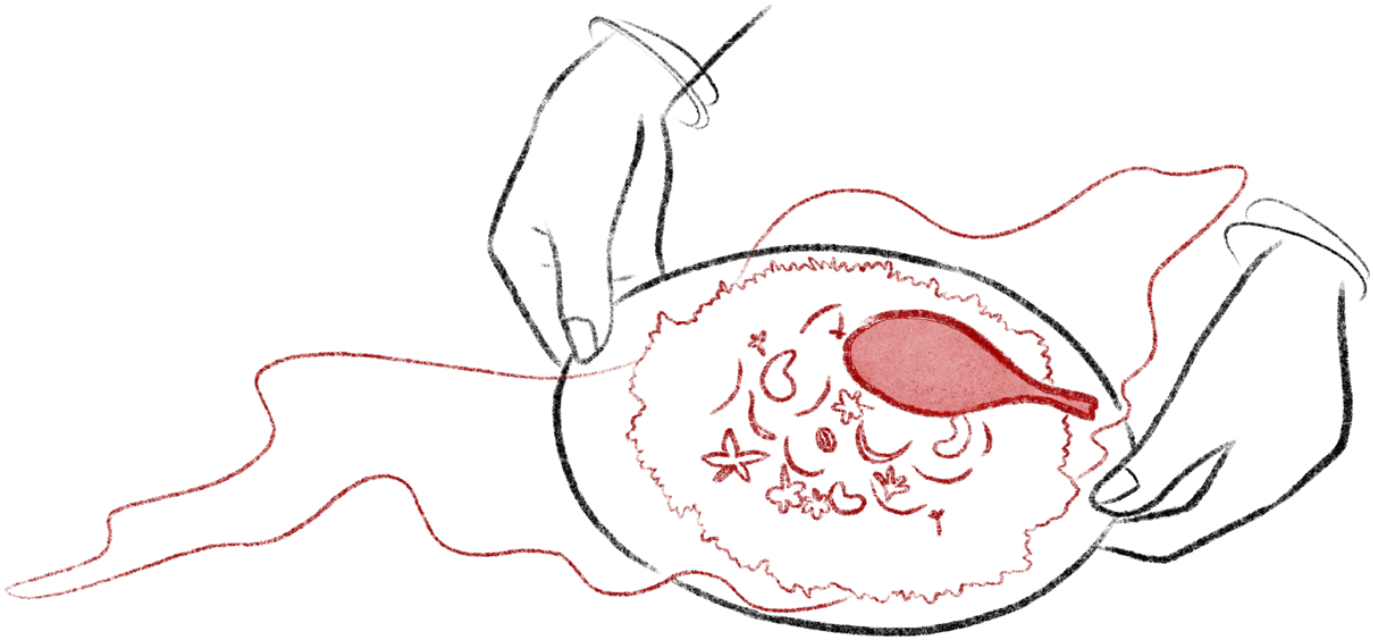
Some of us began reading widely and deeply. “It is important to learn your religion completely — what your faith actually is and what the truths of it are." We read the Quran, understood the meaning of it, and deepened our faith to have a realistic view of the world.

For some of us, religious education came alongside political clarity, so we say the same to other Muslim women. “It can sound clichéd, but we must get educated. Not just in the sense of getting a degree, but also having some kind of political and socio-economic understanding of your own community. We should increase our knowledge of what is happening in the world.”

Some of us learned about the histories of women who came before us. “Muslim women who fought wars… who served their communities… who were businesswomen and opened universities and were educated and learned. ”They are part of our history.

We also want to speak about the oppression we face within our own communities. One of us shared, “Muslim women face oppression from many different directions—internal and external. There are a lot of misconceptions created by patriarchal interpretations of Islam. We don't need to learn our religion only from men—all our imams are men, and all our religious leaders are men. I think we need to have a very feminist narrative of Islam, and that should be taught to women. Religion is very important to a lot of us, and religion needs to support our journey to realise what we want to do in our lives. We need more spaces for Muslim women to learn, share their stories, accept each other and experience the power of such a collective. ”.

We respond with kindness and hold on to our values



One of us shared that despite the hate and hurt they've faced, their response is always kindness. They shared a painful story of how they were suddenly asked to vacate their apartment by the landlord without any reason or explanation. "The landlord would walk into our home and ask, 'Why have you put this Masha Allah frame on your wall? Take it off!' We were not able to find a flat because of our names. People used to simply refuse. On Eid, we were again being asked to vacate the flat by our landlord. We had to vacate the next day after Eid, and the people whom we called our friends, our neighbours who used to come and feast with us on Eid, used to just mock us by asking, 'Mila kya?' (Did you find one?).

Their sarcasm, their smirk would hurt me. But still, I chose to be kind. Still, I chose to be loving. They come to my place irrespective of the festivals and I cook for them. **No matter at what time of the day they come, I cook for them."**

To the Muslim women who are hurt by these hardships—one of us shared: “We should be kind to everyone. You will be surprised to know that all my friends are non-Muslims. And I'm very close to them. No matter what hatred they carry for me, I don't care. I will be who I am. And probably this might change them. This might change their heart. Because of what the media is telling them, what the politicians are telling them, and what is being portrayed. When you are living as a Muslim, you should — you should be what Allah has asked you to be. You should be what the Prophet has asked you to be. That's it. You should live by example.”

One of us shared that we can be more empathetic: “People may have so much going on in their lives. Perhaps we don't know; perhaps people that we are judging for sinning or for doing a certain thing, perhaps Allah Paak is not judging them for doing this because He knows what hardships they're going through. So, empathy and kindness are two things I feel would change the course of humanity.”

Another one of us shared a powerful reminder: “We need to **find hope in our despair.** It is of course getting difficult. It might get more difficult, but it might get easier also one day. The meaning of my name (ease) reminds me to do this - It was taken from the most famous verse in the Quran.

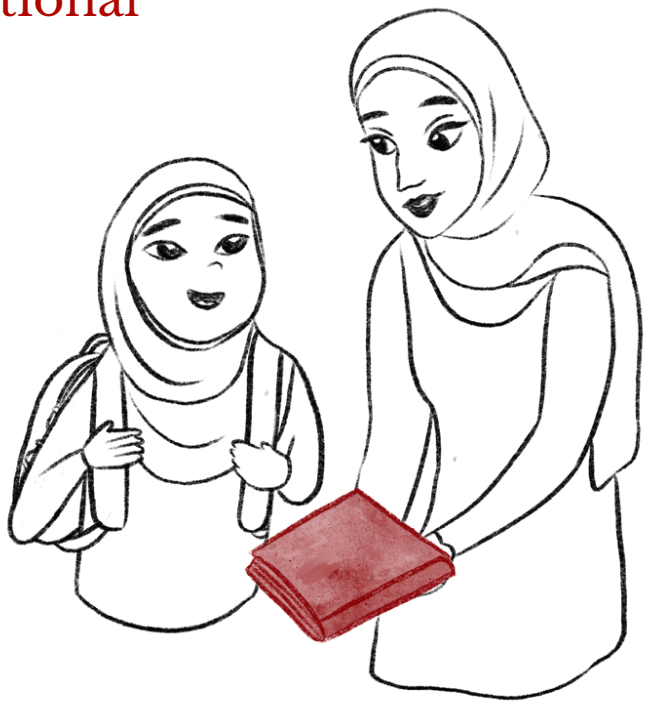
فَإِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

So, surely with hardship comes **ease**.

(Quran 94:6)

We pass it on to our children

Parenting & inter-generational knowledge as resistance



Our experiences have given us many values and skills to navigate this world. And we make sure we pass these on to our children as they navigate this world. One of us shared, “I go pick up my kids from school frequently. There are kids at my kids' school who know me, and when they see me wearing my Palestine badge, they come and ask me, 'What is this?' So that's a chance that I get to talk to these kids about what is happening there. I sometimes give the badge to them and and ask them to read more about Palestine and wear the badge if they would like to.'

Some of us aren’t able to speak to huge crowds or educate or empower masses of people. But whatever we learn, we pass it on to our children, and they pass it on to their friends. We try to keep the communication alive. We actively talk about everything and make sure that the children are aware of what's happening in the world around them, because they should not feel attacked or suddenly judged by any of these things happening. We make sure they know—even if all the hate comes our way, we are not aliens in this country. This is exactly where we belong. We teach our children to live with dignity.

We also teach them to respond if they see something wrong happening. One of us who is a mother of two shared, “I keep telling my kids that if somebody is bullying somebody at school, if somebody is saying something bad to anybody at school, intervene.” We don't want our kids to feel like if they intervene when they see injustice, someone in authority will attack them for it. We always tell them to do the right thing and then come to us. We will handle the rest. But don't come home without intervening when someone is being abused. That's not what we do. “Stand up for what is right. Even if it is scary."

For many of us, we have learned to do this watching our own parents. "I think it's from my dad. He was a fearless person. He had any amount of courage to do the right things.” She remembered when she and her brother were very young, their Dad would say to them

“You have to stand up for what's right. You have to be there. You may get beaten up, that is a different story but don’t be frightened. Stand up."

Some of us have watched our children face discrimination at very young ages, and it is terrifying. “My younger one is seven years old. When I came back from the USA and my girls joined school in India, on the first day of joining, a boy in her class called her 'Pakistani'. She didn't even understand what he was trying to say because she didn't know. I had not introduced these concepts in my family—no politics, no religious discussions. I did not know that in ten years' time of being outside India so much has changed here, that my daughters at the age of seven are facing this. When she came home and told me, I called the class teacher. She apologised and assured me that she told the child that these are topics of adults and should not be discussed amongst children. I interrupted her and said, 'These are not even topics for adults. These come from children being exposed to the wrong narratives and fake media. The child should be told that “We are one nation, a beautiful nation with many languages, cultures, traditions, states, and dressing senses—beautifully one.”

We believe it takes a village to raise a child. And one of the most important parts of that village is the educational institution. It’s important that schools and educators have the onus to spread harmony between children even at the tender ages of grades one and two.

We teach our children through example. “You have to exemplify your noble character in a mixed community. There's no point blaring and shouting. You just exemplify very basic Islamic deen in your character. It may be wishing an elderly person well, an act of kindness, or you giving them a helping hand. If you see someone underprivileged, irrespective of the community they belong to, you help them out. That is exactly what the religion of Islam teaches us."

Our invitation to you

This collective narrative document is not complete — it is a living document. The stories, experiences, and everyday acts of resistance shared here are only a beginning. There are many more stories that have not yet been told. This document will continue to grow, creating space for the diverse voices of Muslim women across India who, every day, resist and respond to hate and hostility in different ways.

This document invites you not only to read but also to bear witness—to become part of the act of completing these stories through your listening, reflection, and response.

If you are reading these stories and find yourself moved, we invite you to take a moment to respond as someone who has listened and witnessed. You are welcome to write a letter to the women whose voices are carried in these pages—a letter of reflection, recognition, or solidarity. This act of outsider witnessing is a way of honoring the strength, values, and hopes expressed by the women who shared their lives.

Your words, thoughts, and reflections can become part of this ongoing conversation—an act of solidarity and witnessing in response to the courage shared here. You might like to reflect on:

- What stayed with you as you listened to these stories?
- What do these stories reveal to you about the courage, dignity, and values of the women who shared them?
- What actions did you take or are you inspired to take after reading these stories?

I warmly invite you to share your responses, reflections, and letters with me to add to this document by sending them to sara.asfiyali@gmail.com

Letters From Readers

Since sharing this invitation, we have received some thoughtful, heartfelt responses. The following are letters of reflection, recognition, and solidarity sent by those who read and became witnesses to the stories of these women. These letters are not meant to be commentaries or evaluations but acts of witnessing (Myerhoff, 1982; Denborough, 2008). They are included here because the stories shared in this document do not find their full meaning unless they are received and responded to. These reflections stand as part of this document's ongoing life. I hope to receive your letter soon.

Letter from Akash

What stayed with me the most was the act of reclamation. Whether within a conservative or liberal circle, there was a common experience of one's religious identity, connected with personal identity at large, being questioned. What I was holding on to as I heard the experiences of the women sharing their stories was this constant act of surviving erasure. And therefore, to hear about smaller acts of resistance against this erasure, by reclaiming one's Muslim identity, is something I felt really inspired by. To take back that ability to define one's "Muslim-ness" when the whole country is constantly trying to dictate the definition of a good Muslim. The first thing that immediately stands out is the effort to connect. As I read through these stories, I noticed an effort to resist. What I also observed through these acts of resistance was the effort to connect more deeply with one's faith and one's community. To take up more space in public, to be seen fully without censoring oneself to fit the definition of a good Muslim. To be as vocal, as visible, and in your face is a particular strength I noticed through these values. I think this reveals to me the hope of being more authentic. There's the hope of finding a sense of belongingness and support within one's own community.

I think these stories stayed with me on a very personal level. It made me conscious of my identity as an upper-caste, Hindu male, who often ends up doing what was called in this document "fetishisation of Muslim suffering." And even though that is definitely not my intention, hearing about it from Muslim women sharing their everyday lived realities shifted my perspective to a great extent. It reminded me how everyone is regularly trying to hijack these spaces in the name of solidarity. And that nobody is willing to give the mic to those who are most affected by Islamophobia and the growing anti-Muslim violence in this country. And while resistance has become the new buzzword, it continues to remain a performative act unless the mic is handed over.

This was such an important document for me to recheck my privilege and allow myself to learn from Muslim women on what resistance truly means.

Letter from Elyeen

What stayed with me the most was the collective resilience and perseverance, the courage to speak up about the truth of all our sisters. The universal need for acceptance and belonging—with both local culture and national identity—is wired in all of us. And yet, there are people who feel so insecure about someone else's belief that they actively create abrasion for Muslims. Life is a test, and this is one of ours.

Coming from Kashmir and recently having had similar experiences for being a Muslim and a hijabi, I could relate, and the ignorance I faced blew my mind. I could sense the ‘not welcome', the xenophobia, and the almost threatened vibes from people. The attempts of my house to help conceal their Muslim identity because of threats to their lives and non-Muslims only 'choosing' people with the same beliefs felt unnerving because I witnessed it firsthand. I was also, at first, alert and anxious about my identity as a Muslim woman in Haryana. Then I put my guard down, made friends, and let my actions and personality speak for themselves. Being confident about my hijab and deen normalises it in the eyes of their kids as well. Educating these kids, who are radicalised at a very young age, became a privilege that I used as an opportunity to challenge their brainwashed, pre-conditioned minds—and the same with adults around me. All I can see is their insecurity and how it has nothing to do with me, personally. Yet, the subtle-to-not-so-subtle abrasion feels hurtful at times. But I keep reminding myself that this is a test; Allah is with us, and we keep marching through this life, challenging false narratives by being more present and more vocal and crushing that barrier between ‘them’ and ‘us’ and turning it into ‘we’ as humans. It is a tsunami of a wave to surf, but our efforts will matter in the end. As a Muslim woman, I have felt this to be the worst possible combination someone can end up with in India. Being a woman feels like a crime here already, and then being Muslim makes us a target of this mismanaged insecurity as well.

Letter from Mahi

The resilience of all the women who shared their stories, and their spirit of defiance, was what caught my eye the most. I was particularly moved by the sections where they mentioned how their faith became a guide and helped them accept their identities and personhood. I personally quite resonate with ideas of faith and the strength that can be found from there. These stories revealed to me how this occasionally vicious but mostly simmering contempt and othering can affect someone, and how important it becomes to really hold on to your values in such moments. It made me see the strength of character as well as the steadfastness towards their own values, and how holding onto their faith guided them.

I was touched by the passage that said, “If our very names were enough to invite exclusion and othering, then how would hiding our visible identities protect us? The only response was to accept and reclaim our identity — fully,” which showcases the long, tumultuous journey they had to go through to reach a state of acceptance. As someone belonging to a privileged class and caste structure, I never had to go through the kind of everyday, less-mentioned othering that these women have gone through. It made me recognize my own social location, realising that even normalcy can be a privilege for many. I would hear of these stories from people, but reading them in their own words made me realize just how deeply this hostility can take root in someone’s mind. It also made me question my role in this social location and wonder what proactive steps I could take as an individual to lessen the burden.

Letter from Archit

What stood out to me while listening to these stories is how often people who claim to "support" Muslim women do so more to bolster their own image than to genuinely uplift and advocate for equal rights and respect. While microaggressions have always been prevalent, it has become increasingly clear that much of the majority population remains sheltered within their own communities and experiences. As a result, they often lack the empathy, awareness, and understanding needed to recognize these aggressions, respond appropriately, and stand up against them. These stories reveal the resilience, self-awareness, and unwavering strength of the women who shared them. They highlight a journey of growth and the cultivation of empathy—where moments once dismissed as jokes or passive-aggressive exclusion by friends and colleagues eventually led to a deeper realization of marginalization. Rather than remaining silent, these women found their voices, asserting their individuality and standing firm in their faith. Their experiences showcase not only their strength but also their determination to challenge misconceptions and advocate for their identity with confidence and zeal.

As a heterosexual atheist man in India, I have always experienced a prevailing sense of security and have never had my way of life questioned by those around me. These stories have shed light on the stark contrast in experiences — how something as routine as walking to school, buying groceries, dressing a certain way, or cooking specific foods can become a source of scrutiny for Muslim women.

Many of these narratives emphasise how men, regardless of their religion, rarely face this level of policing. These stories highlight the daily struggles Muslim women endure, yet despite it all, they continue to fight for their identity, demonstrating incredible resilience in moments where it might be easier to simply give in. In a country where governance often leans more toward religious influence than policy-driven progress, and where these policies frequently fail marginalized faiths and genders, these stories stand as a testament to the strength of Muslim women. They have built unwavering support systems and continue to advocate for change, refusing to be silenced in the face of systemic and social challenges.

Letter from Muntaha

What I realised after reading these testimonies of Muslim women—whether from their own childhoods or from watching their children grow up now, especially in India—is how early and how quietly the violence begins. It does not always appear as loud hatred, but often as small moments of being looked at differently, spoken to differently, or made to feel slightly out of place by friends, classmates, teachers, and society at large. Over time, this produces something far more insidious: a form of internalised Islamophobia, where one slowly begins to see their own faith through the eyes of those who already consider it backward, oppressive, archaic, or dangerous.

This made me wonder what it would mean for Muslims, collectively, as a community, to take responsibility for how we pass on our ways of knowing, being, believing, and practising—especially in ways that do not reproduce this sense of inferiority within our own children, and particularly within our girls. What would it look like to teach Islam not as something constantly on trial, something that always needs defending, explaining, or apologising for, but as a complete moral and spiritual world that can be inhabited with dignity and confidence?
I find myself thinking about how God is first introduced to children—whether through love, nearness, mercy, beauty, and meaning, or through fear, surveillance, and the constant threat of punishment. Many of us from the millennial generation grew up with a fear-based religious language that harmed our relationship with faith more than it nurtured it, producing anxiety, guilt, and distance rather than rootedness. The real gift we can offer the next generation, then, is not only religious knowledge or correct practice, but a deep and unflinching self-esteem: a confidence in who they are, in being Muslim, in loving God without shame, and in doing good without needing validation from hostile gazes.

This feels especially urgent for Muslim girls, who are so often treated as moral risks or symbols rather than full spiritual subjects in their own right. An upbringing that nurtures dignity and confidence cannot happen in isolation; it must be collective, visible, and embodied. Children need to see Islam lived joyfully, confidently, and unapologetically—not as a reaction to Islamophobia, but as something rooted, expansive, and life-giving. Only then can they grow up without having to unlearn self-hatred, without needing to repair a broken relationship with God, and without learning to see their faith through someone else's hostile lens. Instead, they can receive it as a gift that speaks directly to their souls, with love, dignity, and freedom at its centre.

Letter from Hano

This moved me in ways that I wasn't prepared for, but also in many ways, I was also waiting to be moved because what has happened in this country over the last 10 years seems nothing like a collective psychosis, and within that, to hear collective narratives of hope, resilience, and faith from the lived experience of Muslim women has made me quite hopeful.

Living in India and still believing in what the nation stands for, I think, has become the most courageous act, and to be a Muslim, especially a Muslim woman, requires courage of a very different nature. For someone like me who's moved into faith, it was in many ways a response to this collective psychosis. To read how faith is that force that is helping so many women come to terms with not just their faith but also their identities just reminded me how important it is to keep resisting.

Reading this has left me with a lot of questions, questions of faith, questions of gender, and questions of nature. There are narratives that made me well up, narratives that made me angry, and narratives that were so personal. Despite me not identifying with the narrator's identity, there were parts of my despair that found a space to belong—despair that usually gets forgotten in constantly trying to make sense of and respond to the tyrant's decree.

Closing this with the lines of Faiz Sahab, imagining Iqbal Bano singing this with her saree in defiance of all that is sold to us as truth by the regimes across not just borders but time and space.

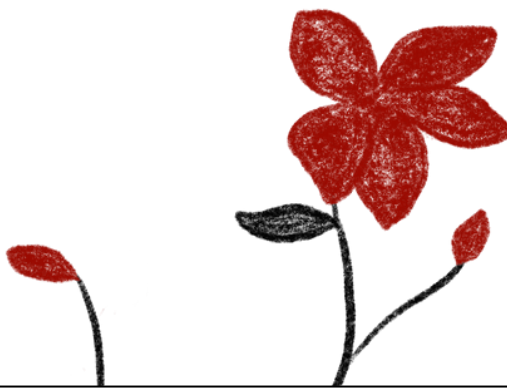
उट्ठेगा अनल-हक़ का नारा
जो मैं भी हूँ और तुम भी हो
और राज करेगी ख़ल्क़-ए-ख़ुदा
जो मैं भी हूँ और तुम भी हो

Letter from Yusuf

I am a Muslim man, and parts of these stories were familiar to me from my own life. But what stayed with me most was how clearly they echoed what I have seen through my mother. She was singled out and openly discriminated against for years in her profession as a school teacher. She was persistent in enduring while continuing to do her work with integrity and excellence.

The students she taught and the parents she counseled stand as evidence of her accomplishments. Over time, she was appointed principal of the very same school. The opposition did not disappear. Parents affiliated with right-wing organizations openly objected to a Muslim woman holding that position. Yet years later, many of those same parents returned grateful, respectful, and humbled when their children graduated after being transformed academically and morally.

Reading these stories helped me name what I had witnessed growing up. What I once understood as personal strength, I now recognize as part of a wider, shared reality that many Muslim women navigate daily. We have no option but to persist like a flowing stream and wear down these boulders.



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