# Feminists against Fascism: India's Female Muslim Protest

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### Abstract

This article examines debates about India, citizenship, and nationhood through the eyes of Indian Muslim female university students in Delhi. The Hindu majority administration adopted new citizenship legislation in December 2019. It sparked significant outrage because of its negative ramifications for Muslims and a big segment of the socioeconomically disadvantaged population. As a result, millions of people, mostly Dalits, Adivasis, and Bahujans, took to the streets to protest. Young Muslim female students and women rose to the forefront of a serious public debate for the first time. This scenario shattered the popular idea of repressed Muslim women who lack public voice and agency. This article draws on the accounts of Indian Muslim female students who took part in these protests to show their perceptions of, and discussions with, the authorities.

Keyword-Indian Muslim, Feminists against Fascism, and Muslim Protest

# Introduction

Muslims in India have taken to the streets to protest against anti-Islamic comments made by two members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Two protesters died of gunshot injuries sustained during clashes with police in the eastern Indian city of Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand state. Ten people were being treated for various injuries at the hospital. Senior police official Surendra Kumar Jha said at least 14 police officials were injured in the incident in Ranchi and other areas. In northern Uttar Pradesh state police said they had arrested 230 alleged rioters after unrest spread across several towns after Friday prayers. In the eastern state of West Bengal, authorities enforced an emergency law prohibiting public gatherings in the industrial district of Howrah until June 16. At least 70 people were arrested on charges of rioting and disturbing public order, with internet services suspended for more than 48 hours after the latest

communal violence. Earlier this month, the BJP suspended its spokeswoman Nupur Sharma and expelled another leader, Naveen Kumar Jindal, for their controversial comments about the Prophet's private life that also triggered a diplomatic backlash from Muslim countries.

Police cases have been filed against the two former BJP officials. Countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Iran – India's key trade partners – lodged protests through diplomatic channels and used social media to demand an apology from the government. India's foreign ministry said last week the tweets and comments did not reflect the views of the government. Clashes over the remarks simmered across the country, as some in the Muslim community see them as the latest instance of pressure and humiliation under the BJP rule on issues ranging from freedom of worship to the wearing of hijab head scarves. Two protesters died of gunshot injuries sustained during clashes with police in the eastern Indian city of Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand state. Ten people were being treated for various injuries at the hospital. Senior police official Surendra Kumar Jha said at least 14 police officials were injured in the incident in Ranchi and other areas. In northern Uttar Pradesh state police said they had arrested 230 alleged rioters after unrest spread across several towns after Friday prayers.

Muslims took to the streets in huge protests around Asia after Friday prayers, sparked by remarks about the Prophet Mohammed by an Indian ruling party official that embroiled the country in a diplomatic storm. Anger has engulfed the Islamic world since last week, when a spokeswoman for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party commented on the relationship between the prophet and his youngest wife on a TV debate show. According to Time Magazine, Nupur Sharma insinuated that Mohammed was a pedophile, as some sources indicate Aisha was nine years old when the couple's marriage was consummated. Around 20 countries have since called in their Indian ambassadors and the party has gone into damage control, suspending the official from its ranks and insisting it respected all religions. Members of India's 200 million-strong Muslim minority community staged demonstrations in several cities, with a large crowd gathered on the steps of the 17th-century Jama Masjid mosque in New Delhi.

Elsewhere in the capital, social media footage showed students of the prestigious Jamia Millia Islamia university burning an effigy of Nupur Sharma — the Bharatiya Janata Party spokeswoman whose comments set off the furor. Authorities in Indian-administered Kashmir cut the restive territory's internet connections, restricted prayer congregations at mosques and imposed a curfew

on Friday. The Indian government must apologize to Muslims and they must take strict action against the politicians who made the remarks," protest coordinator Ali Hasan told AFP. The row follows anger across the Muslim world in 2020 after French President Emmanuel Macron defended the right of a satirical magazine to publish caricatures of the prophet. French teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded in October 2020 by a Chechen refugee after showing the cartoons to his class in a lesson on free speech. Images of the prophet are strictly forbidden in Islam.

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Protests have been erupting in many Indian cities to condemn the demolition of homes and businesses belonging to Muslims, in what critics call a growing pattern of "bulldozer justice" aimed at punishing activists from the minority group. On Sunday, authorities in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh rode on a bulldozer to raze the home of Javed Ahmad, who they said was connected to Muslim religious protests that turned violent last Friday. Police arrested Ahmad on Saturday.

The protests were sparked by derogatory remarks about Islam and the Prophet Muhammed made recently by two spokespeople of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. The party suspended one of them and expelled the other, issuing a rare statement saying it "strongly denounces insults of any religious personalities." Bulldozers also crushed the properties of protesters in two other cities in Uttar Pradesh last week. In April, authorities in New Delhi used bulldozers to destroy Muslim-owned shops days after communal violence in which dozens were arrested. Similar incidents have been reported in other states. "The demolitions are a gross violation of constitutional norms and ethics," Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a specialist on Hindu nationalist politics and biographer of Modi, told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, 12 prominent people, including former Supreme Court and High Court judges and lawyers, sent a letter to India's chief justice urging him to hold a hearing on the demolitions, calling them illegal and "a form of collective extrajudicial punishment." They accused the Uttar

Pradesh government of suppressing dissent by using violence against protesters. Two people who were protesting the remarks by the governing party spokespeople died of gunshot injuries in clashes with police on Friday in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand state. Several Muslim-majority countries have also criticized the remarks, and protesters in Bangladesh called for a boycott of Indian products, leaving India's government scrambling to contain the diplomatic backlash.

Violence has been increasing against Muslims by Hindu nationalists emboldened by Modi's regular silence on such attacks since he was elected prime minister in 2014. Muslims have been targeted for their food or clothing, or over inter-religious marriages. The rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have accused Modi's party of looking the other way and sometimes enabling hate speech against Muslims, who comprise 14% of India's 1.4 billion people, but are the second-largest Muslim population of any nation. Modi's party denies the accusations. Over the weekend, Uttar Pradesh's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu monk-turned-governing party politician, told state authorities to demolish illegal buildings belonging to people linked to Friday's protests, in which more than 300 people were arrested. On Sunday, bulldozers turned Ahmad's house into rubble after authorities claimed it was built illegally, which Ahmad's lawyer and family denied.

"If the construction was illegal, why was no action taken earlier? Why did the government wait until the riot took place?" asked Shaukat Ali of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, a political party. Officials say the demolitions only target illegal buildings, but rights groups and critics say they are an attempt to harass and marginalize Muslims, pointing to a wave of rising religious polarization under Modi's rule. On Saturday, Adityanath's media adviser tweeted a photo of a bulldozer and wrote, "To the rioters, remember every Friday is followed by a Saturday," suggesting there would be repercussions. His words sparked an immediate reaction, with many calling the demolitions a clear punishment. "It was a threat that if you raise your voice against the government or the BJP, your house will be demolished," said Lenin Raghuvandhi of the People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights.

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