

New research explores contemporary Muslim girlhoods in Assam, India

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CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM GIRLHOODS IN INDIA

A STUDY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, IDENTITY AND
AGENCY IN ASSAM

Saba Hussain



Contemporary Muslim Girlhoods in India: A Study of Social Justice, Identity and Agency in Assam by Dr Saba Hussain is published in the Routledge Research in Gender and Society series.

A new book by Dr. Saba Hussain of the University of Warwick Department of Sociology offers new insights into the nature of educational disadvantage experienced by Muslim girls in the Assam region of India, exploring the impact of religion, culture, location, class and ethnicity on their educational experience, and arguing for a novel theoretical framework which centres Muslim women and girls in scholarship about them rather than viewing them as passive subjects.

Drawing on extensive research which mapped the entire field of school education, including the Indian state, teachers, parents and the [girls](#) themselves, Dr. Hussain developed a rich understanding of how school-going Muslim girls in India accept or reject attempts to confer identities upon them, and how these identities are lived, negotiated and resisted.

Though focused on education, the book makes an original contribution to the broader understanding of gendered minority subjects in post-colonial contexts, and discusses the myriad forms of disadvantage experienced by Muslim girls in North-East India.

Dr. Hussain said: "My research offers a way for us to understand Muslim women's gender injustice claims within the family and community, while being sensitive to their claims of injustice as a member of a minority community in India and elsewhere."

Among her key findings, Dr. Hussain argues:

- The equal education policy regime in contemporary India disproportionately values the protection of cultural rights of Muslim girls over their economic rights
- Teachers showed deeply gendered, classed, religious, and ethnic biases against Muslim girls, especially girls from lower-class backgrounds with a Bengali speaking heritage in a location where the majority of women were Assamese-speaking Hindus.

- Contrary to popular perception, Muslim parents across class backgrounds valued education for their daughters—but in the context of a "good girlhood" in which education, [academic achievement](#), and career success were seen as pre-requisites to joining the "domestic" realm as future wives and mothers.
- School-going Muslim girls don't passively accept the identities created for them but actively create and articulate their own self-identities, in ways that seek to claim authorization as legitimate actors in the field of education, and which increasingly seek to articulate and politicize their experiences of subordination.

Dr. Hussain added: "The figures of Muslim women and Muslim girls are increasingly invoked within India's popular politics, policy and legal frameworks, in development and aid regimes globally and in discourses around countering violent extremism (CVE) in the West.

"Muslim women have become the site of powerful contestations between the "West" and the "Rest," between "secular" and "religious," and between "modern" and "traditional." They have come to symbolize an incomplete subjecthood as though they are in a constant state of becoming—more modern, more secular, more nationalistic, more empowered and so on.

"The broader contribution of this book is towards the sharpening of our analytics to understand how "Muslim women' and "Muslim girls' are being constructed and used towards explicit and implicit political projects."

The book is expected to appeal to scholars of sociology and [gender studies](#) with interests in [education](#), class, religion and identity.

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More information: Contemporary Muslim Girlhoods in India: A Study of Social Justice, Identity and Agency in Assam.

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