

## PREFACE

This thesis presents a comprehensive ethnographic examination of the daily lives of Muslim women in West Bengal, focusing on both rural and urban contexts, with particular emphasis on Bankura, Hooghly, Kolkata, and Metiabruz. Conducted over a period of three years, the research investigates the interconnected effects of structural marginalisation, patriarchal oppression, economic deprivation, and Islamophobic discrimination on women's everyday lives, aspirations, and forms of resistance.

The study introduces the concept of Accumulative Invisible Violence (AIV), developed organically from the ethnographic field, to describe how repeated, subtle, and frequently overlooked acts of exclusion, neglect, and systemic bias accumulate over time, resulting in sustained harm and diminished agency. AIV offers a conceptual framework that moves beyond conventional binaries of visible/invisible or structural/interpersonal violence, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of how marginalisation is both experienced and perpetuated.

Methodologically, the research is grounded in extensive ethnographic fieldwork, comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, walking interviews, and photo-elicitation involving over 80 Muslim women. This methodological approach enabled the capture of embodied, complex, and often contradictory experiences, while allowing reflexive engagement with the researcher's positionality.

The findings reveal significant rural-urban disparities. In rural areas, women are primarily affected by severe poverty, limited access to government welfare schemes, inadequate healthcare and education, and early marriage customs, which are closely tied to patriarchal social structures. In urban settings, challenges include ghettoization, housing discrimination, systemic exclusion from formal employment, and direct Islamophobic harassment in public spaces, educational institutions, and workplaces. Structural violence is normalized across both settings, with discriminatory practices often accepted and internalized as routine.

This research contributes to academic debates on gender, religion, marginalisation, and violence by providing an empirically grounded and theoretically informed analysis of

intersecting forms of oppression in India's postcolonial context. It argues for the need to move beyond grand theoretical abstractions and statistical generalisations, emphasizing situated, context-specific understandings of systemic inequality and the agency of marginalised individuals.

Ultimately, the thesis calls on scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to engage attentively with the voices of marginalised women, treating their individual experiences not merely as isolated cases, but as emblematic of broader systemic injustices.

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