

## Book Review

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Jamil, G. (2018). *Muslim women speak: Of dreams and shackles*. Sage Yoda Press. 216 pp. \$ 40.99 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-93-528-0500-6.

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The book, *Muslim Women Speak: Of Dreams and Shackles*, is an important addition to the feminist literature in postcolonial India. The author, Ghazala Jamil, is an assistant professor at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and has earlier taught at the Department of Social Work at Delhi University in India. The book sets an admirable example for authoritative and informative research on Indian Muslim women, a religious minority in the country, by its focus on their narratives, rhetorical choices, colloquial expressions, understandings, experiences, and preferred solutions to problems. The author achieves her research goals through close and sustained listening to Indian Muslim women as they articulate on the central aspects of their being. The book focuses not only on the subject of research but also on the positionality of the researcher. Ghazala Jamil is precise and thoughtful in addressing her own identity in the text as a researcher who is also an Indian Muslim woman.

Jamil argues against the discourse that renders Muslim women as victims without agency in relation to Muslim masculinity. She also challenges the common notion of Muslim women as victims of “*purdah*, triple *talaq* (divorce), polygamy” (p. 7). She argues, instead, that the presence of three other interlocking forces, “patriarchy, communalism, and poverty,” which are “tangled parts of a whole” (p. 116), define the situatedness of the young Muslim women and inform their everyday reality. She focuses on how Muslim women “understand their world” and “live within its contradictions” (p. xii) despite the stereotypes, spatial exclusion, civic negligence, and structural and communal violence that the Muslim community faces in India. The book investigates the dreams, aspirations, everyday life, labor, leisure, and views on *purdah* of subaltern young Muslim girls from the perspective of postcolonial feminism, specifically Islamic feminism. In doing so, she aptly uses in-depth interviews, participatory and projective techniques, focus group discussions, and observational narratives with young Muslim women from 12 different states of India.

Jamil argues that the dominant discourse that has rendered Muslim women as voiceless is dominated by the Indian feminist movement, largely dominated by upper caste Hindu women. The author claims that this dominant discourse does not provide space and voice to Muslim women “unless they shed their Muslimness” (p. 119). Hence, the primary solidarity of Muslim women lies with their male counterparts with whom they face basic questions of identity and communal tensions. She argues that Muslim women’s absence from the Indian public sphere creates the need for them to speak and to be listened to. Hence, Jamil’s chosen methodological approach for the book is qualitative research. She has insisted on the necessity of qualitative research as an approach to studying Muslim women in India through her sharp critiques of earlier quantitative works on Muslim women in the country. The author has equated the usage of quantitative methodology to represent


the “oppressed communities” as “canned recipes that are routinely opened and served” (p. 26), arguing that they fail to take into account the voice of the marginalized and their lived experiences.

*Muslim Women Speak* is an engaging read in which theory and narratives are purposely interwoven within the text. The book also focuses on regional trends and diversity among Indian Muslim women. For two examples, Jamil highlights problems arising post attaining puberty like restrictions on mobility in Ilyangudi town of Tamil Nadu and concentrates on Muslim girls in Ahmedabad who are not able to speak predominantly but instead express themselves through writing in workshops because of the severity of the trauma of communal violence in Gujarat in 2002 that has devastatingly prolonged ripple effects due to post-traumatic stress.

The book is a must read for social workers who work in India or anywhere else in the world where Muslim women of Indian origins live because it analyzes the dynamics of intercommunity and intracommunity conflict and connectedness with regard to gender and religion. *Muslim Women Speak* provides social work practitioners with an understanding of a minority community’s perspectives and also highlights the roles of social workers as understood by the Indian Muslim women themselves. *Muslim Women Speak* is also an important book for policy makers, human rights activists, sociologists, and scholars of gender, religion, and minority studies.

Jamil features in her book Indian Muslim women’s statements about the particular changes that they think social workers can help them bring about in their lives. Unafraid to represent harsh truths, the author highlights the popular tropes and violence—at micro and macro levels—that constrict and contort Muslim lives in India.

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