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Introduction

With over 14% of the total population of India, Muslims are the largest group among religious minority communities in the country, while Hindus comprise nearly 80% of the total population (Reyaz 2015). But due to the complex history of South Asia, the partition of the country, and communal politics, the meta-narrative is often set against native Muslims (Reyaz 2015; Pandey 1999). In the last decade, the upsurge of right-wing Hindutva politics, fueled further by prevailing global Islamophobia, has seen public discourses getting shriller, feeding on anti-Muslim content (S. Ahmed 2010, 2012; Green 2013). Muslims oscillate between “visibilisation as the demonic ‘other’ and invisibilisation of their acts of charity and responsible citizenship” (Choudhary 2020). Indian media has also not shied away from attempting symbolic annihilation or biased representation. When there are Muslim characters/stories, Indian films (Kabir 2005; Murty 2009), news media (D. Kumar 2010; S. Ahmed 2017), and soap operas (Asthana 2008) have repeatedly used the dominant trope of stereotypical representation of Muslims. In these narratives, Muslim men are often portrayed as “rigid oppressors” from whom allegedly suppressed women need saving (Anand 2005; Kirmani 2009; Kishwar 1998).

Ohlan notes that Muslim women are relatively backward educationally and economically compared to their counterparts from other backward castes (Ohlan 2020). There have been skewed representations of Muslim women in soap operas, such as *Gul Gulshan Gulfaam* (Doordarshan, 1987), *Heena* (Sony TV, 1998), *Nargis* (DD Metro, 2000), *Jannat* (DD Metro, 2001), and *Meher* (DD National, 2004). Except period drama series like

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