Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Gender as Axis of Hindutva Politics: An Empirical Analysis of BJP Rule in Assam, India (2016-2026)

Sanghamitra Choudhury

sanghamitrac74@gmail.com

Gauhati University

Akhil Ranjan Dutta

Gauhati University

Research Article

Keywords: Gender, Hindutva politics, BJP, masculinity, Assam

Posted Date: November 16th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11372314/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Gender as Axis of *Hindutva* Politics: An Empirical Analysis of BJP Rule in Assam, India (2016-2026)

Abstract

Analyzing the BJP's (Bharatiya Janata Party) decade-long *Hindutva* politics in Assam (2016-2026), this article demonstrates that gender serves as the primary axis upon which political power is systematically constructed and sustained. Pivotal to this statecraft is the deliberate politicization of masculinity, which BJP leaders leverage to manipulate the electorate. Operating through this framework of masculine power, the BJP uses anti-Muslim regulatory practices to regulate marriage, reproduction, sexual violence, and space, ultimately resulting in the victimization of women. Interestingly, to build political legitimacy, BJP leaders rely on dual right-wing populist strategies: an "us versus them" majoritarian rhetoric and neoliberal women-centric schemes. These dual right-wing populist strategies operate as key mechanisms of post-truth politics. However, current women's dissent to BJP's *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft suffers from fragility. Consequently, this article underscores the urgent necessity of building sustained women's dissent through counter-narratives.

Keywords: Gender; *Hindutva* politics; BJP; masculinity; Assam

Introduction

A close examination of the gendered dynamics embedded within *Hindutva* politics is essential. Within the broader national context of India, a substantial body of feminist literature critically examines how gender intersects with the politics of *Hindutva*. Yet, despite this extensive national discourse, systematic analyses that situate these dynamics within the unique political landscape of Assam remain largely underexplored. Though Bhattacharjee posits that Assam's complex demographic tapestry resists the standard majoritarian scripts of the "Hindi heartland (Bhattacharjee, 2016)," the BJP has nevertheless succeeded in establishing *Hindutva* in the region. In practice, the state government's activities are heavily influenced by national template, actively replicating its overarching majoritarian goals on the ground. To align state governance with these national ideological benchmarks, the BJP deploys a vast array of gendered methods. As Karat observed, within the *Hindutva* eco-system, BJP chief ministers adopting laws which militate against women's rights are playing their roles (Karat, 2024, p. 98).

Following the BJP's sweeping victories since the 2014 Indian general elections, political attention increasingly gravitated towards a mode of *Hindutva* statecraft designed to institutionalize, normalize, and embed its ideological project within the fabric of India's political and social life (Anderson & Longkumer, 2018; Hansen & Roy, 2022; Nielsen et al., 2023). Since Islamophobia is foundational to *Hindutva* political ideology (Babur & Akhtar, 2021), this statecraft operates by continuously constructing the Muslim community as a structural "other." In Assam, this national project has unfolded with distinct regional intensity, fundamentally reordering the local political landscape through the consolidation of Hindutva statecraft. Rather than displacing local identities, *Hindutva* politics operates through a regional synthesis that converts traditional Assamese ethno-nationalist anxieties into a religious majoritarian imperative, reframing local demographic concerns through a Hindu civilizational lens. Following its electoral breakthrough since the 2016 state assembly elections, the party solidified its political foothold by manifesting a strong and assertive governance model centered on the projection of masculine power, thereby restructuring gendered hierarchies.

This article is structured around six key analytical axes. First, it traces how masculinity is politicized within the BJP's contemporary governance framework in Assam. Second, it outlines the methodological note. Third, it explores the party's anti-Muslim regulatory practices and how these practices victimize women. Fourth, it unpacks how the BJP manufactures political legitimacy by leveraging right-wing populist mechanisms. Subsequently, the chapter maps women's dissent against this overarching *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft, before transitioning to the conclusion.

Methodological Note

This study employs a qualitative, document-based research design that integrates content analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The data for this article is drawn from a textual corpus comprising books, articles, news reports, political speeches, legislation, and press releases. CA is applied across these materials to map and understand the prevailing concepts, government narratives, and actions. Building upon this baseline, CDA serves as the primary interpretive engine. Differing from traditional discourse analysis approaches that treat political discourse as value-neutral or purely objective, this approach completely rejects such assumptions. Instead, a critical lens moves beyond surface meanings to uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideologies embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Rajini, 2025). It thus serves as a fertile ground for examining the strategic use of language to influence public perception, assert authority, and legitimize ideologies (Rajini, 2025,

pp. 480–481). Politicians carefully use language to persuade, mobilize, and often manipulate the masses (Rajini, 2025, p. 481).

Politicized Masculinity: Concept and Context

In Assam, under the aegis of the BJP, masculinity is systematically politicized to serve the ideological exigencies of *Hindutva*. At its very inception, this politicization operates through a strategic bifurcation of masculinity into two opposing categories: Hindu masculinity and Muslim masculinity. Here, Hindu masculinity is linked to duty and service to the nation that stands legitimated, whereas Muslim masculinity is linked to Islam seen as ideology not faith that stands delegitimated (Murty, 2009, p. 272). Consequently, Muslim masculinity is seen as virile and dangerous, cast as a perpetual threat to the identity of the Hindu male (Subramanian 2019). As scholars have insightfully noted, Hindu communalist rhetoric conjures the image of lustful Muslim males seducing Hindu women (Gupta, 2002, 2009; Rao, 2011; Strohl, 2018; Sonkar, 2022). The BJP simultaneously foregrounds women as inherently vulnerable in Assam, framing their protection as the central justification for Hindu masculinity as the indispensable guarantor of women's protection. The leaders simultaneously broaden this protective mandate to encompass the safeguarding of indigenous populations and *Sanatan* (Hindu) values from perceived threats posed by Muslim masculinity. This aligns with broader feminist critiques noting that *Hindutva* elevates masculinity and denigrates femininity (Bacchetta, 1994, p. 191; Banerjee, 2006).

By appropriating Narendra Modi's persona as the "*Vikas Purush*"[1] (Jaffrelot, 2021; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2021, p. 5; Pande, 2022), BJP leaders in Assam construct a narrative in which their presence is indispensable for development of the state, intertwining political authority with masculinity. This narrative posits manly power as the linchpin of development, positioning male leaders as the primary agents through whom the state's developmental ambitions are both imagined and operationalized. This construction not only naturalizes the leaders' indispensability but also renders development inseparable from masculine authority, implying that progress cannot occur without the intervention of a strong male figure.

Although the explicit "56-inch chest" metaphor[2] (Chakraborty, 2025, p. 287) was absent, the 2016 and 2021 assembly election campaigns saw Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma perform as embodiments

[1] The epithet "*Vikas Purush*" literally translating to 'Man of Development' operates in Indian political discourses to glorify leaders particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi as personifications of development-oriented governance.

[2] Lit., the "56-inch chest" metaphor denotes a prodigiously expansive thoracic dimension, emblematic of extraordinary corporeal vigour and virility. It evokes the image of a physically formidable and indomitable male figure, whose bodily robustness symbolizes moral fortitude, political will, and sovereign authority.

of a hyper-visible masculinity. Both leaders projected an image of resolute strength, unyielding decisiveness, and patriotism, effectively mobilizing masculinist symbolism to acquire political power. This performance affirms both leaders' courage and ability to bear burdens in the service of *Asomi Aai* (mother Assam). Accordingly, BJP leaders routinely project physically assertive and morally unyielding images through public events, rallies, and party campaigns. Furthermore, Modi's ascetic persona—epitomized by simplicity, self-discipline, and detachment from material excess (Chakraborty, 2025, p. 287)—finds a selective echo in Assam. While Sonowal embodies this ascetic masculinist ideal, Sarma departs from this model and adopting a pragmatic, power-centric masculinist style. This differential appropriation of asceticism functions as a performative instrument of masculinity embedded within *Hindutva* agenda.

While the traditional akhara-based militant asceticism[3] does not exist in its classical North Indian form (Dasgupta, 2023), its underlying ethos finds a contemporary, *Hindutva*-infused manifestation in Assam. Leaders and cadres affiliated with the BJP and allied majoritarian organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), or Bajrang Dal actively cultivate an assertive and morally regimented masculinity. Frequently, these performances of masculinist authority translate into coercive and, at times, violent practices directed against Muslim men. These actions are justified through the rhetoric of protecting women, functioning as localized modes of moral policing and surveillance. Beyond this, BJP leaders cultivate a narrative of ordinariness that casts them as relatable masculine figures representing the common people, juxtaposed against an allegedly elitist and insular political establishment. Sarma consistently maintains that within the BJP, ordinary citizens achieve opportunities purely through hard work, a principle he contends is conspicuously absent within the dynastic structure of the Congress party. This rhetoric engenders a populist trope of the "self-made man," celebrating individual labor, discipline, and initiative—values celebrated within neoliberal ideology. So, it exemplifies a synthesis: while invoking an egalitarian and relatable persona, it simultaneously legitimizes neoliberal ideals of individual aspiration. This rhetorical maneuver allows the BJP to channel populist resentment against political elites into support for its own leaders.

BJP's Anti-Muslim Regulatory Practices and the Victimization of Women

Right-wing parties of western Europe, despite their lack of concern with elaborating concrete policies of gender equality and their masculinist political style, these parties have increasingly advanced their anti-Islam agendas in

[3] "Exercise arena" or "wrestling pit;" refers in ascetic content to armed regiment or branch of order (Pinch, 2006).

the name of women rights (Farris, 2017). A parallel maneuver operates within Assam, where the BJP elevates gender to a foundational axis for the articulation and consolidation of *Hindutva*. Within this contemporary political landscape, BJP's anti-Muslim regulatory practices systematically organized across several domains: regulating marriage, regulating reproduction, regulating sexual violence, and regulating space. This regulatory apparatus functions as a mechanism for the victimization of women.

Within the first regulatory domain, BJP heavily deploys the vocabulary of women's protection as a moral shield. This domain encompasses a spectrum of Islamophobic regulatory practices, including love jihad narrative, drive against child marriage, Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Act (2024), Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill (2025), and Uniform Civil Code (UCC) (2026). The ideational foundation of this regulatory domain emerged nationally in 2009, when right-wing Hindu activists began alleging that Muslim men were conspiring to marry Hindu women, convert them to Islam, and bear Muslim children (Strohl, 2018). According to these activists, love jihad threatens to both make Hindus a minority and, consequently, undermine the Hindu religion (Strohl, 2018). In Assam, however, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma rearticulates this narrative by giving it a legally neutral twist. He stated that deception in marriage constitutes a jihad regardless of whether a Muslim misleads a Hindu or a Hindu man deceives a Hindu woman, concluding that he rejects the selective use of the term (NDTV, 2021). Accordingly, the state government promised a law to curb the practice of individuals concealing their religious identity and personal information prior to marriage, framing it as an intervention that would be "equal for Hindus and Muslims" (NDTV, 2021).

Although Sarma frames the proposed law as uniformly applicable across all religious communities, the very articulation of the issue through a religious lens exposes its embeddedness in a majoritarian framework. Coded in the language of protective legal intervention, this engenders surveillance that governs the choices of women, rendering them objects of continuous monitoring and regulation. In this manner, surveillance operates not merely as a protective mechanism, but as a disciplinary tool that curtails autonomy and repositions women within a restrictive framework of government control.

Extending beyond the love jihad narrative, Sarma, launched a three-phases drive against child marriages (NDTV, 2024). Under this crackdown, men who marry girls under the age of 18 are charged under the Prohibition of Child Marriage (PCM) Act, 2006 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.[4] In defending the government's aggressive campaign against child marriages, Sarma warned that eradicating child

[4] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 20th March, 2023, p. 15.

marriages demands measures far stricter than those currently available under the POCSO Act.[5] Accompanying the extraordinary mass detentions aimed at curbing child marriage, critics contend that the crackdown is anti-poor and anti-minority, as most of the arrested people belong to the Muslim community (Boruah & Meharban, 2023). The targeted nature of these mass arrests of Muslim men has been widely criticized for fueling the BJP's polarizing agenda (Chowdhury, 2023; Arora, 2024). Through this mechanism, the BJP has constructed a narrative that attributes the persistence of child marriage almost exclusively to the Muslim community, alleging that such practices are intentionally perpetuated to produce a burgeoning progeny aimed at skewing the demographic equilibrium within society (Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

Within this crackdown, women have emerged as victims, as evidenced by numerous documented cases. A tragic case happened in Bongaigaon district, where a 16-year-old bled to death after giving birth at home, as her family fearing arrest amid the government's aggressive police campaign against child marriage, refrained from seeking medical assistance at hospital (Kalita, 2023). In another incident in the Karimganj district, a two-month-old child died as a result of the action against child marriage by the Assam Government. The child's mother carried the infant from home to police station and back on a cold night, and the child ultimately passed away (Ghosh, 2023). The punitive criminalization of child marriage disrupts existing family structure, burdening young girls who are already victims of early marriage also burdened with the severe economic and emotional fallout of losing male breadwinners.

Likewise, The Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Act, tabled in the legislative assembly on August 29, 2024 sought to supplant the colonial-era Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act of 1935.[6] Aminul Islam, an MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) from the opposition AIUDF (All India United Democratic Front) representing Mankachar, questioned the necessity of repealing the 1935 Act, suggesting that its objectives such as preventing child marriages could have been achieved through amendments to Sections 8, 10, and Rule 26–27 of the old law.[7] Islam highlighted that the 1935 Act, while initially voluntary, had already been amended in the year 2010 to make marriage registration compulsory.[8] In

[5] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 20th March, 2023, p. 15.

[6] See Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act of 1935 and Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Act, 2024.

[7] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 29th August, 2024 see intervention by Aminul Islam, pp. 45–46.

[8] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 29th August, 2024, p. 45.

response, Sarma argued that mere amendments were insufficient, as the government specifically sought to eliminate the role of *Qazis*[9] in the marriage registration process to prevent child marriage among Muslims.[10]

The secondary rationales provided for this new law included ensuring that marriages are consensual and curbing polygamy. To this end, the government passed the Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill, which penalizes individuals who enter into a second marriage without legally dissolving the first.[11] The bill was framed as a protective measure for women. In justifying this, Sarma claimed that polygamy is not a prevalent practice among Assam's non-Muslims.[12] However, during legislative discussions, he explicitly stated that in Islamic society, monogamy is the law, polygamy is the exception.[13] Citing historical religious accounts, he noted that Prophet Muhammad regulated and limited the practice of multiple marriages to a maximum of four wives under strict conditions, arguing that his line of thinking was not to promote polygamy but to curb excesses,[14] using this theological interpretation to justify government's intervention.

This legislative overhaul was widely viewed not as an ultimate destination, but as a foundational stepping stone toward the adoption of the full UCC in Assam, which mandates the registration of all marriages, divorces and live-in relationships, bans polygamy, criminalizes love jihad, prevent child marriages.[15] Instead of an immediate enforcement, the government executed a "phased strategy" to introduce the UCC. Defending the legislation, Sarma argued:

> The Congress party was worried about how the Bill would affect practices followed under the *Quran* and *Shariat*, pointing out that they failed to mention the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramayana* once, thereby accusing the opposition of being indifferent to Hindu sentiments. (The Hindu, 2026)

---

[9] A *Qazi* (or *Qadi*) is an Islamic judge who presides over a religious court system, handling matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, property, and other civil or criminal disputes according to Islamic law (*Sharia*).

[10] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 29th August, 2024, pp. 46–47.

[11] See Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill, 2025.

[12] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 29th August, 2024, p. 51.

[13] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th November, 2025, p. 86.

[14] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th November, 2025, p. 86.

[15] See UCC, 2026.

He again pointed out that the UCC gives a new life to Muslim women and provides the strongest safeguards for them.[16]

While ruling party members championed the Bill as a means to empower and honor women, opposition members countered that the legislation was entirely unnecessary and had been introduced without consulting the minority organizations, despite directly impacting Islamic religious practices and personal laws.[17] Opposition members challenge the adoption of a UCC by drawing attention to pre-existing laws that regulate child marriage, penalize polygamy, and oversee the registration of Muslim marriages and divorces.[18] They contend that the drive for a UCC conceals a clear hidden political agenda.[19] Within this critical framework, the push for legal uniformity and gender justice is widely viewed as an ideological Trojan horse, masking an aggressive majoritarian agenda that strips Assam's Muslim population of their legal and cultural autonomy.

In analyzing government overreach, it becomes evident that homogenization and uniformity constitute key components of the *Hindutva* political project (Chhachhi, 2020, p. 67). However, UCC often produce unintended consequences, shifting the issue from "equality versus religion" to a question of whether top-down uniformity can achieve gender justice. A primary critique of recent UCC blueprints is that the stated objective of protecting women devolves into government overreach. By transforming private choices into government-regulated milestones, UCC treat adult women as dependents requiring masculinist oversight and administrative permission, rather than as autonomous individuals. In Legislative Assembly debates, leader of Raijor Dal, Akhil Gogoi explicitly highlighted that while the code imposes mandatory registration of live-in relationships, it provides no statutory remedies for maintenance, property division, or inheritance during relational disputes, thereby prioritizing the RSS and BJP's viewpoints on moral policing over private choices.[20] Ultimately,

---

[16] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 26th May, 2026 see intervention by Himanta Biswa Sarma.

[17] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th May, 2026. On May 23, 2026, ten organizations met in Guwahati to collectively demand a voice in the government's upcoming legislative changes. Seeking formal stakeholder consultations before the Bill hits the Assembly floor, the organizations resolved to submit a joint memorandum. The organizations included two factions of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami, Ahle Sunnat, Muslim Petrsonal Law Board, Nadwatul Tamir, Milli Council, and the All Assam Minority Students' Union.

[18] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th May, 2026.

[19] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th May, 2026.

[20] Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings dated 27th May, 2026 see intervention by Akhil Gogoi, pp. 78–79. Raijor Dal is a regional political party in Assam.

criminalizing non-registered relationships strips away a woman's right to choose private cohabitation outside state policing, while a rigid, one-size-fits-all framework risks overwriting personal laws under the banner of "uniformity" or "standardizing."

Historically, personal laws provided accessible, immediate, and culturally navigable forums for negotiating maintenance, separation, and other marital disputes. When top-down uniformity delegitimizes these informal safety nets, women are forcibly pushed toward formal legal institutions that are heavily bureaucratized, time-consuming, prohibitively costly, and structurally difficult to access. Deprived of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, women lacking financial or familial backing lose their most practical safety nets. This transition is particularly hostile to socio-economically marginalized women, who lack the requisite legal literacy or financial capital necessary to navigate formal litigation. Consequently, this shift creates a precarious regulatory vacuum—leaving women unable to rely on personal laws, yet structurally excluded from state mechanism. Furthermore, the criminalization of husbands for polygamy inadvertently victimizes his multiple wives, driving them into acute financial precarity, social stigma, and legal isolation.

Beyond regulating intimacy and marriage, government expands its regulatory reach to women's reproduction. Invoking the spectre of an escalating Muslim birth rate as an existential threat to Hindus as "population jihad,"[21] senior leaders of the RSS, BJP Parliamentarians such as Sadhvi Pragya and Sakshi Maharaj, and various right-wing factions, have frequently demanded for Hindus to surpass the population growth rate of Muslims, fostering a narrative of demographic anxiety (Dash, 2021). Within this climate, the two-child policy functions as a demographic regulatory mechanism aimed at curbing population growth within the Muslim community. This intervention builds upon a pervasive discourse propagated by right-wing fanatic individuals and organizations who blame Muslims for the population explosion (Kavish, 2019). While India has yet to implement a uniform national directive on this matter, BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh and Assam have taken significant strides toward institutionalizing this demographic control measure (Ghosh, 2021). In Assam, Sarma announced at a press conference that the government would progressively enforce a two-child policy that disqualifies individuals from accessing government subsidies and state-sponsored welfare benefits upon exceeding a two-child threshold (Ghosh, 2021; Nath, 2021). He claimed that population control is the only way to eradicate poverty and illiteracy among the state's Muslims (Dash, 2021). In effect, this policy constitutes an aggressive government

[21] President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad termed.

control over women's reproductive autonomy, driven by Islamophobic fears that Muslims will demographically overtake Hindus.

Having established the government's regulation of women's reproduction, the analysis shifts to regulating sexual violence under the rubric of women's protection. Drawing on the constructed binary of Hindu and Muslim masculinities, the BJP government has repeatedly insinuated that rape is predominantly perpetrated by men from a "particular community" in Assam, thereby implicitly casting Muslim masculinity as deviant, threatening, and in need of government regulation. Such representations obscure the reality that sexual violence is a pervasive structural issue that transcends religious boundaries and remains embedded within wider masculinist power structure. By selectively attributing culpability, this narrative shifts public attention away from the systemic nature of gender-based violence and reinforces an Islamophobic understanding of the issue. In this process, women become symbolic figures through which communal anxieties are articulated, rather than subjects whose lived realities are meaningfully addressed by the government.

These patterns of communal targeting extend beyond and also take concrete form in the government-driven regulation of space. The BJP-led state government has expedited a calculated program of dispossession in predominantly *Miya* Muslim[22] areas of Assam through aggressive eviction drives. Presented as efforts to reclaim state land from illegal settlers, these campaigns disproportionately target Muslim community. These eviction drives are justified through a narrative that labels *Miya* Muslims as "outsiders" or "encroachers," serving *Hindutva* agenda aimed at consolidating majority dominance over land. By depicting *Miya* Muslim settlers as illegal occupants who obstruct regional development, the government mobilizes public sentiment in favor of dispossession, transforming eviction drives into an act of collective moral responsibility.

A particularly egregious instance occurred in Dhalpur, a cluster of villages in Darrang district, marked by its relentless severity and disproportionate targeting of the *Miya* Muslim community. The bulldozer has emerged as a symbol of swift justice under the new right-wing regime, selectively deployed against Muslim homes and properties (Mukherjee, 2024). Similar evictions at Baghbar in Barpeta (December, 2022), Batadrava in Nagaon (December, 2022), and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary in Sonitpur (February, 2023) further exemplify the displacement of *Miya* Muslims (Mukherjee, 2024). These eviction drives transcend mere land reclamation,

[22] "*Miya*" refers to Bengali-speaking Muslims who migrated from East Bengal and reside predominantly in the riverine (*char-chaporis*) areas. Although this population largely adopted the Assamese language (*Na-Asamiya*) in post-independence censuses, they remain a primary focus of regional citizenship verification policies and anti-immigrant political discourse.

functioning instead as brutal manifestations of exclusionary politics rooted in ethno-religious delineations. Critically, they intensify the gendered subjugation of displaced women, leaving them bereft of basic rights and security. Rendered economically vulnerable and socially insecure by state-enforced homelessness, these displaced women are systematically pushed into the lowest and most precarious tiers of the informal labor market.

Intersections of Masculine Power, Right-wing Populism, and Political Legitimacy

The contemporary consolidation of *Hindutva* relies heavily on a symbiotic matrix where masculinity, right-wing populism, and political legitimacy converge. As versions of right-wing populism from around the world has shown through mandates of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, right wing leaders have appreciated the relationship between politics and masculinity by remasculinizing the nation state by reviving traditional masculine roles, reinstating male privileges and patriarchal power and, disapproving gender equality measures (Chakraborty, 2025, p. 287). In the context of Assam, this global right-wing populist impulse is localized through a sophisticated dual strategy of the division between Hindu and Muslim masculinity and neoliberal women-oriented schemes to acquire political legitimacy. On one front, the BJP divides masculinity by positioning majoritarian male power as the rule-bound, protective guardian of society, while vilifying minority male power as an unruly, demographic threat that needs to be tamed. On the other front, it deploys neoliberal women-centric schemes.

The ideological fracture between Hindu and Muslim masculinity anchors itself in a hyper-masculine, ethno-religious nationalism that systematically constructs a "pure," and "martial" male identity in binary opposition to a "demonized" or "inferiorized," "hyper-sexualized," and "hyper-masculine" minority "others" (Kinnvall, 2019). Within this populist calculus, the BJP performs a highly performative mode of muscular nationalism, framing the collective nation as a vulnerable, domestic space under perpetual siege. To justify this permanent state of ontological insecurity,[23] Muslim men are pathologized not merely as political dissidents, but as existential and demographic threats. Their social presence is coded as predatory, unregulated invasions—discursively weaponized through many tropes to generate an urgent moral panic within the electorate. Ultimately, this rigid "us versus them" dichotomy serves as a primary driver of contemporary electoral mobilization in Assam, consolidating the majority voter base by convincing the public that protection of all women and Hindu culture is contingent upon Hindu leaders remaining firmly in power.

Consequently, the "us versus them" rhetoric functions as a potent engine for electoral victory. Sarma has frequently reiterated that the measures instituted by his government are intended to protect both Hindu and Muslim

[23] Ontological insecurity means the lack of a safe (imagined) haven in narrative terms (see Kinnvall, 2019).

women equally. Grounded in a protective rhetoric, he has reaffirmed a "zero-tolerance policy" toward crimes against women, urging the central government to mandate a strict six-month timeline for fast-track trials while praising Prime Minister Modi's focus on this matter (ANI News India, 2024). While credit was claimed for reducing these crimes to one-third since his tenure began, Sarma explicitly stated that the government's goal remains unfulfilled as long as a single woman faces victimization. Additionally, the mandate to protect "*jati, mati, bheti*" (community, land, and home) and *Sanatan* values, consistently invoked by both Sonowal and Sarma, operates through a logic where Muslim masculinity must be tamed. By performatively casting the ruling male leaders as the sole chivalrous vanguard capable of taming a pathologized minority masculinity, the BJP effectively transforms the ballot box into a site of civilizational defense. Voting for the majoritarian regime is thus repackaged for the electorate not merely as a political choice, but as an urgent moral imperative to safeguard the domestic sphere and protect women from perceived threats. This strategic weaponization of rescue politics ensures that existential anxiety is successfully converted into concrete majoritarian votes, cementing the protection narrative as a crucial, indispensable mechanism for achieving and retaining political power.

Right-wing populism can be understood as not contradictory to neoliberalism, but in many ways advancing it (Fischer, 2020, p. 379). Neoliberal social policy has served as a powerful magnet for both political rage and mobilization within the contemporary global context of rising right-wing populist and authoritarian politics, from the US and the UK to India, Turkey, Brazil and beyond (Fischer, 2020, p. 372). These policies are patriarchal in nature, yet systematically appropriate progressive and emancipatory language (Fischer, 2020). Across contemporary India, a growing body of scholarship (Chacko, 2018, 2020; Chhachhi, 2020) underscores the highly neoliberal-orientation of women-centric policies implemented during the nation's right-wing turn. The BJP crafts an authoritarian populist politics[24] of empowerment that systematically appropriates the vocabulary of neoliberalism (Chacko, 2020, p. 207). This populist politics basically reinforces or reconstructs patriarchal gender relations (Chhachhi, 2020, p. 51). The BJP-led state government of Assam exemplifies this trend. Terming *matri shakti*, *shrestha shakti* (power of mother is supreme), former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal asserted that if women are brought to the central stage, they can contribute immensely to the growth of the state, subsequently urging women to utilize these schemes to achieve empowerment (Chief Minister's Public Relations Cell, 2021).

[24] Some scholars use the term "authoritarian populism" to denote right-wing populism.

Post-2016, the state government has rolled out an expanded set of women-centric schemes such as the Arundhati Gold Scheme,[25] Orunodoi Scheme,[26] Kanaklata Mahila Sabalikaran Yojana (KAMS),[27] Vistarita Kanaklata Mahila Sabalikaran Yojana (an extension of the KAMS), Swanirbhar Naari-Atmanirbhar Asom Scheme,[28] Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan,[29] and so on, designed to integrate women into a market-oriented development agenda. This represents what Chhachhi conceptualizes as a structural departure from the rights-based entitlement paradigm characteristic of the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) era toward the institutionalization of market-based entitlements under the post-2014 BJP-led government in India (Chhachhi, 2020). In Assam, rather than functioning as emancipatory safeguard, these initiatives operate as an instrument that reorganizes women as subjects through the logics of consumerism, productivity, self-responsibilization, and competitive individualism. Consequently, the promise of empowerment becomes intelligible only through the idiom of market compliance, embedding empowerment within a broader project of neoliberal subject formation. Sarma has resolved to strengthen and empower the awakened women of Assam through entrepreneurship, transforming them into ideal examples of *Nari Shakti* (women's power) (BJP: Assam Pradesh, 2025).

This process is sustained by intense financialization of the domestic sphere, where government patronage manifests not through institutional services, but as liquid capital earmarked for immediate market consumption and micro-enterprise optimization. By routing cash directly into women's bank accounts, the BJP-led state government establishes a transactional relationship that compels subjects to convert state charity into consumer purchasing power and entrepreneurial livelihood initiatives. Crucially, this financialized model operates in tandem with existing patriarchal relations by completely evading the structural realm of social reproduction. Because these initiatives ignore the heavy systemic burden of care work which women perform in their household, they do not liberate women from patriarchal constraints; instead, they impose a stark double burden that is simultaneously

[25] To facilitate the parents of the girl child who are economically not very sound, but like all parents' desire to give some gold which is considered auspicious to them as gift daughters on her marriage.

[26] To provide monthly cash currently around Rs. 1,250 directly to poor women for household expenses.

[27] To increase self-reliance of women.

[28] To support indigenous weavers and promote their traditional hand-woven items. The scheme ensures direct procurement from weavers without the involvement of middlemen, thereby providing them fair market access and improved remuneration for their craftsmanship.

[29] Self-employment scheme.

social reproductive and productive. Under the celebratory banner of empowerment, women are disciplined to become productive economic agents in the market while remaining wholly responsible for the private sphere.

This structural convergence generates an acute psychological load, manifesting as chronic mental exhaustion and anxiety as women navigate a fragmented empowerment grid where state-led schemes provide loans and initial seed capital. Within these distinct schemes, subsequent financial mobility is structurally hooked to rigorous performance evaluations and fiscal risk-bearing. To unlock successive financial tranches or successfully transition from seed capital to larger, credit-linked financial structure, women face intense psychological pressure to optimize their micro-enterprises and continuously demonstrate market viability to state apparatus. Consequently, the constant anxiety of potential exclusion based on entrepreneurial performance, combined with the structural pressure to generate immediate revenue for debt servicing, forces these women into an escalating cycle of gendered self-exploitation where physical survival is disciplined by market metrics. Furthermore, by explicitly financializing the cultural requirement of gifting "auspicious" gold to a daughter upon her wedding under Arundhati scheme, the government effectively institutionalizes and sanctions dowry-adjacent practices. This reinforces the foundational patriarchal logic that links a female subject's value to material transactions at marriage. By pegging empowerment to gold, this scheme commodifies traditional Assamese customs, turning social marriage rituals into financialized transactions within a patriarchal marriage market.

Most significantly, this mechanism of financialized masculine tutelage deliberately transcends communal boundaries. By extending material transfers to both Hindu and Muslim women including *Miya* Muslim, the government maneuvers to project a narrative of universalizing empowerment. However, this inclusion does not signal a commitment to secular empowerment. Rather, it operates through a strategy of co-optive inclusion. While these transfers for Hindu and indigenous Muslim (such as *Goria*, *Moria*, and *Deshi*) women are celebrated as a rightful entitlement, their extension to *Miya* Muslim women confers no political belonging, functioning instead alongside political vilification, state-led evictions, and their persistent branding as "illegal outsiders." Consequently, this material distribution maps the government's division of society into the "deserving native" versus the "undeserving outsider." Furthermore, this incorporation of women operates as a primary institutional vehicle for right-wing populist mobilization, constructing political legitimacy through a logic of inclusion. By integrating women across communal divides into the empowerment apparatus, the state government maneuvers to capture a consolidated, cross-communal support base. This yields a highly stable, clientelistic electorate, as these neoliberal initiatives force vulnerable women into an asymmetric relation of absolute economic dependency on the government.

Ultimately, the "us versus them" narrative and empowerment drive in Assam must be understood as artifacts of post-truth politics, sustained by the irreconcilable chasm between the spectacular, affective rhetoric of male leaders and empirical material realities. Post-truth politics denotes a political communication culture that relies on misinformation and disinformation, also relevant as populism utilizes and catalyzes such practices which is very prevalent under *Hindutva* (Siddiqui, 2025, p. 648). The concept signifies a political environment in which empirical evidence and objective facts lose their explanatory power, overtaken by strategic appeals to emotion, shared cultural anxieties, and personal convictions to shape public perception. The "us versus them" narrative effectively positions the government's Hindu male political leaders as the ultimate protectors of vulnerable women and *Sanatan* values. Significantly, this projection of protective masculinity serves to manufacture a deeply affective form of legitimacy, emotionally mobilizing public alignment.

On the other hand, the BJP's empowerment drive presents these Hindu male leaders as universal benefactors who are uniquely invested in uplifting women across all religions. Empirical realities, however, fundamentally contradict this discourse. The women-centric schemes deployed in Assam ignore the structural constraints that actively hinder women's empowerment. Without addressing these barriers, BJP leaders weaponize these empowerment schemes to claim that their interventions ensure comprehensive liberation, thereby emotionally manipulating the electorate to secure political legitimacy. Furthermore, because material transfers to *Miya* Muslim women coexist with their ongoing political vilification and evictions, the government weaponizes empowerment rolls as an optical alibi to mask its majoritarian imperatives.

Flashpoints of Defiance: Mapping Women's Dissent against BJP's *Hindutva*-driven Masculinist Statecraft

Dissent against BJP's *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft in Assam remains largely confined to sporadic expressions in response to select interventions, thereby revealing the fragility of solid opposition. Women's dissent tends to be predominantly reactionary, fractured along communal divisions, and circumscribed by a coercive state apparatus. Most disquietingly, dissent to these practices has been articulated primarily by Muslim women, while Hindu women participation remains conspicuously absent. Moreover, these mobilizations are marked by a limited scale of participation, which accentuating their tenuous and episodic character. For instance, some women in the districts of Dhubri, Morigaon, and South Salmara-Mancachar[30] organized protests only after their male relatives

[30] The districts of Dhubri, Morigaon, South Salmara-Mancachar are all Muslim-majority regions in Assam. According to the 2011 Census data Dhubri has 79.67 percent, Morigaon has 52.56 percent, and South Salmara-Mancachar has 95.2 percent Muslims.

were arrested as part of the crackdown on child marriage (Scroll Staff, 2023; BBC News, 2023). These women expressed dissent over what they perceived as an aggressive government intrusion into domestic and familial life, primarily because they were entirely dependent on their husbands for financial support (Scroll Staff, 2023). However, no comparable expressions of women's dissent have materialized in response to other interventions in Assam. Equally troubling is the near-total absence of women's dissent to empowerment apparatus that sidesteps core feminist emancipatory concerns. This absence persists largely because the apparatus is enveloped in a deceptive aura of women's empowerment, which the government strategically cultivates to pre-empt critique.

This limited women's dissent is highly localized; it is directed at the sudden disruption of household stability rather than grounded in a sustained critique of masculinist control over women's lives. Consequently, there is an urgent need for sustained women's dissent that foregrounds consciousness-raising through counter-narratives. Creating spaces where women can voice their experiences of oppression is crucial to contest such ecosystem. Sustained dissent can assume multiple modalities, including physical demonstrations, legal challenges, digital campaigns, and so on. Within the ambit of sustained dissent, the substantive participation of Hindu women is imperative; since the BJP-led state government transgress women's rights and bodily autonomy across religious divides, and extending its masculinist control far beyond the Muslim community alone. However, much of the existing literature implicitly frames dissent against BJP's *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft as the burden of Muslim women (Kadiwal, 2023; Parveen & Sanyal, 2024; Khalid, 2024), thereby overlooking the necessity of Hindu women participation in dismantling this structure. Crucially, this ecosystem consolidates a gendered order in which women as a whole are subordinated to Hindu male dominance. Mirroring this necessity, Muslim men must also engage, as BJP's *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft engender their vulnerabilities. Cross-communal and intersectional participation is thus essential.

Furthermore, women often refrain from overt protest due to the fear of state reprisals. As Chopra argued, feminists must leverage their strengths, to develop new strategies of mobilization, dissent, and resistance capable of countering cyclical backlash from the state (Chopra, 2021, p. 481). Counter-narratives are vital to fostering a transformative paradigm, particularly in contexts where dominant or hegemonic ideologies shape both state actions and public consent. By presenting viewpoints that contest the prevailing statecraft, counter-narratives disrupt the monopoly of a single, authoritative truth and open up discursive spaces for diverse voices in Assam. Such interventions can transcend rigid ideological boundaries. By challenging oppressive government actions,

this paradigm enables a reimagining of women's roles and experiences, ultimately contributing to the dismantling of discriminatory structure.

Conclusion

Although national-level feminist studies critically unpack how gender is intertwined with *Hindutva* politics, a systematic analysis of these dynamics within Assam is largely missing. To contribute to filling this gap, we have shown that the contemporary political reality in Assam demonstrates that the institutionalization and legitimization of *Hindutva* politics depend fundamentally on highly gendered governance modalities. By critically examining the specific gendered mechanisms deployed by the BJP-led state government, this article reveals that gender functions as the linchpin of its political power. Central to this strategy is the production of politicized masculinity that systematically bifurcates male identity into Hindu and Muslim categories. Drawing inspiration from the national template of Modi's political persona, state-level leaders perform distinct traits of this Hindu masculinity. In public spaces, this manifests as a performance of strength and decisiveness for development, a deep patriotic duty to the state, a protective guardian over women, and the self-made man who relies on individual hard work and discipline to achieve success.

The BJP deploys anti-Muslim regulatory practices that deepen the vulnerability of women. Through a post-truth discourse, BJP leaders successfully deceive people into believing that their masculine power is absolutely necessary to control a pathologized Muslim masculinity and to guarantee development. Crucially, this quest for political legitimacy operates on two distinct levels: while the state government uses "us versus them" dichotomy to secure political legitimacy from the Hindu electorate, it simultaneously deploys neoliberal empowerment apparatus to extract legitimacy from both Hindu and Muslim sections. Ultimately, right-wing populism functions as instrument of reinforcing masculine power in Assam. However, women's dissent against BJP's *Hindutva*-driven masculinist statecraft remains episodic, disproportionately borne by Muslim women reacting to some immediate issues rather than structural critique of the government's masculinist control. To dismantle this ecosystem, dissent must transition into a sustained, cross-communal alliance with substantive participation from both Hindu women and Muslim men, carving out spaces for counter-narratives to disrupt the monopoly of authoritative truth. Ultimately, understanding micro-level *Hindutva* politics through a gendered lens in Assam yields vital analytical stakes across different state-level contexts.

References

Anderson, E., & Longkumer, A. (2018). 'Neo-Hindutva': Evolving Forms, Spaces, and Expressions of Hindu Nationalism. *Contemporary South Asia, 26*(4), 371–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2018.1548576

ANI News India. (2024, August 26). *"Zero Tolerance…" CM Himanta Biswa Sarma Calls for Law to Fast-track Trials in Crime against Women* [Video]. You Tube. https://www.youtube.com/shorts/W3NUkcIhJlQ

Arora, T. (2024, September 10). New Assam Muslim Marriages & Divorces Bill: Reform or Politics? *SabrangIndia*. https://sabrangindia.in/new-assam-muslim-marriages-divorces-bill-reform-or-politics/

Babur, A., & Akhtar, S. (2021). Hindutva and Islamophobia. *Strategic Studies, 41*(4), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.041.04.0041

Bacchetta, P. (1994). Communal Property/Sexual Property: On Representations of Muslim Women in a Hindu Nationalist Discourse. In Z. Hasan (Ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State in India* (pp. 188–225). Kali for Women.

Banerjee, S. (2006). Armed Masculinity, Hindu Nationalism and Female Political Participation in India. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 8*(1), 62–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740500415482

BBC News. (2023, February 6). Assam: Indian Women Protest against Child Marriage Mass Arrests. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-64495567

Bhattacharjee, M. (2016). Tracing the Emergence and Consolidation of Hindutva in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly, 51*(16), 80–87.

BJP: Assam Pradesh. (2025, October 8). *We will Empower Women through Entrepreneurship and Transform Them into Ideal Embodiments of Nari Shakti: Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma* [Press release]. https://assam.bjp.org/en/state-pressreleases/we-will-empower-women-through-entrepreneurship-and-transform-them-ideal

Boruah, M., & Meharban, M. (2023, February 21). Crackdown on Child Marriage Tears Families Apart in India's Assam. *Al Jazeera.* https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/21/crackdown-on-child-marriage-tears-apart-families-in-indias-assam

Chacko, P. (2018). The Right Turn in India: Authoritarianism, Populism and Neoliberalisation. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 48*(4), 541–565. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1446546

Chacko, P. (2020). Gender and Authoritarian Populism: Empowerment, Protection, and the Politics of Resentful Aspiration in India. *Critical Asian Studies, 52*(2), 204–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2020.1711789

Chakraborty, D. (2025). Men in the Making of Nations: Understanding the Nexus between Nation, Belonging, and Complicit Masculinity. *National Identities, 27*(3), 281–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2024.2421009

Chhachhi, A. (2020). Neoliberalism, Hindutva and Gender: Convergence and Contradictions in the Provision of Welfare. *Feminist Dissent,* (5), 50–93. https://doi.org/10.31273/fd.n5.2020.759

Chief Minister's Public Relations Cell. (2021, February 17). *CM attends Mahila Samaroh in Majuli* [Press release]. https://dipr.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/dipr_webcomindia_org_oid_4/menu/document/press_release_english_no_2_on_17.02.2021.pdf

Chopra, D. (2021). The Resistance Strikes Back: Women's Protest Strategies Against Backlash in India. *Gender & Development, 29*(2–3), 467–491. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.1981698

Chowdhury, K. (2023, February 23). Politics Drives Assam's Crackdown on Child Marriage. *The Diplomat.* https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/politics-drives-assams-crackdown-on-child-marriage/

Dasgupta, K. (2023). Between the Boundaries of Asceticism and Activism: Understanding the Authority of the Sadhvis within the Hindu Right in India. *Religions, 14*(9), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091100

Dash, S. (2021, September 8). Behind the BJP's 2-Child Policies, an Anti-Muslim Agenda that will Endanger All Indian Women. *Article 14.* https://article-14.com/post/behind-the-bjp-s-2-child-policies-an-anti-muslim-agenda-that-will-endanger-all-indian-women--613823097d3c5

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.

Farris, S. R. (2017). *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. Duke University Press.

Fischer, A. (2020). The Dark Sides of Social Policy: From Neoliberalism to Resurgent Right-Wing Populism. *Development and Change, 51*(2), 371–397. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12577

Ghosh, P. (2021, July 10). What is Two-Child Policy? What Assam and Uttar Pradesh have Proposed. *Hindustan Times*. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/what-is-two-child-policy-what-assam-and-uttar-pradesh-have-proposed-101625911705691-amp.html

Ghosh, N. (2023, February 14). Crackdown on Child Marriage Claims Four Lives, Including Three Women and One Child. *SabrangIndia.* https://sabrangindia.in/crackdown-child-marriage-claims-four-lives-including-three-women-and-one-child/

Gupta, C. (2002). *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India.* Palgrave.

Gupta, C. (2009). Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad and Conversions. *Economic & Political Weekly, 44*(51), 13–15. https://www.epw.in/journal/2009/51/commentary/hindu-women-muslim-men-love-jihad-and-conversions.html

Hansen, T. B., & Roy, S. (2022). What is New about 'New Hindutva'? In T. B. Hansen & S. Roy (Eds.), *Saffron Republic: Hindu Nationalism and State Power in India* (pp. 1–24). Cambridge University Press.

Jaffrelot, C. (2021). *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy.* Princeton University Press.

Kalita, K. (2023, February 10). Crackdown on Child Marriage: Fear of Arrest Forces Home Birth, Teen Bleeds to Death in Assam. *Times of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/crackdown-on-child-marriage-fear-of-arrest-forces-home-birth-teen-bleeds-to-death-in-assam/articleshow/97783269.cms

Kadiwal, L. (2023). Critical Feminist Resistance to the Politics of Hate in India. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 21*(5), 734–753. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2222074

Karat, B. (2024). *Hindutva and violence against women.* Speaking Tiger.

Kavish, P. (2019, October 30). Assam: New Criteria for Government Jobs Singling out Minorities? *SabrangIndia.* https://sabrangindia.in/assam-new-criteria-government-jobs-singling-out-minorities/

Khalid, I. (2024). New Forms of Anti-Hindutva Resistance: Critical Feminist Struggle and Diaspora Activism Against Hindutva in India and Abroad. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences, 5*(4), 618–629. https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024(5-IV)58

Kinnvall, C. (2019). Populism, Ontological Insecurity and Hindutva: Modi and the Masculinization of Indian Politics. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs.* https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1588851

Mukherjee, A. (2024, June 17). The Communal Politics of Evictions in Assam: Looking Back at Dhalpur. *The Wire.* https://m.thewire.in/article/rights/the-communal-politics-of-evictions-in-assam-looking-back-at-dhalpur/amp

Mukhopadhyay, N. (2023, February 6). Assam: Why Himanta Biswa's Child Marriage 'Crackdown' is a Pre-Poll Ploy. *News Click.* https://www.newsclick.in/assam-why-himanta-biswas-child-marriage-crackdown-pre-poll-ploy

Murty, M. (2009). Representing *Hindutva*: Nation, Religion and Masculinity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1990 to 2003. *Popular Communication, 7*(4), 267–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405700903211898

Nath, H. K. (2021, June 20). Assam to Soon Implement Two-Child Policy to Avail Govt Schemes: CM Himanta Biswa Sarma. *India Today.* https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/assam-implement-two-child-policy-avail-govt-schemes-cm-himanta-biswa-sarma-1817189-2021-06-20

NDTV. (2021, July 10). Assam Law Against Cheating to Marry to be "Equal for Hindus and Muslims". https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam-law-against-cheating-to-marry-to-be-equal-for-hindus-and-muslims-2483802

NDTV. (2024, December 22). Over 400 More People Arrested in Assam for Child Marriage. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/over-400-more-people-arrested-in-assam-for-child-marriage-himanta-biswa-sarma-7306800

Nielsen, K. B., & Nilsen, A. G. (2021). Love Jihad and the Governance of Gender and Intimacy in Hindu Nationalist Statecraft. *Religions, 12*(12), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121068

Nielsen, K. B., Selvaraj, M. S., & Nilsen, A. G. (2023). Hindu Nationalist Statecraft, Dog-Whistle Legislation, and the Vigilante State in Contemporary India. *Swedish Journal of Anthropology, 6*(2), 19–37. http://hdl.handle.net/10454/19787

Nigam, S. (2018). The Cult of 56-Inches and Toxic Masculinity. *SSRN Electronic Journal.* http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3201493

Pande, M. (2022). Gendered Analysis of Hindutva Imaginaries: Manipulation of Symbols for Ethnonationalist Projects. *Journal of Modern European History, 20*(3), 407–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/16118944221110725

Parveen, N., & Sanyal, U. (2024). Introduction. Place, Identity, and Politics: Muslim Women's Agency under Hindutva. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal.* https://doi.org/10.4000/136kl

Rajini, K. (2025). Language and Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Speeches. *International Journal of Social Impact, 10*(3), 480–491.

Rao, M. (2011). Love Jihad and Demographic Fears. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 18* (3), 425–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/097152151101800307

Scroll Staff. (2023, February 5). Assam: Women Protest Against Crackdown on Child Marriage, CM Says Drive to Continue Till 2026. https://scroll.in/latest/1043266/assam-women-protest-against-crackdown-on-child-marriage-cm-says-drive-to-continue-till-2026

Siddiqui, M. A. (2025). Framing 'Love Jihad': Nationalists' Discourse Construction in a Right-Wing Extremist Sub-Issue on Social Media. *Third World Quarterly, 46*(6), 645–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2025.2499092

Sonkar, S. (2022). Policing Interfaith Marriages: Constitutional Infidelity of the Love Jihad Ordinance. *Journal of Law and Religion, 37*(3), 432–445. https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.37

Strohl, D. J. (2018). Love Jihad in India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, and Citizenship in Late Liberalism. *Contemporary South Asia,* 27–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209

Subramanian, S. (2019). Is Hindutva Masculinity on Social Media Producing a Culture of Violence Against Women and Muslims? *Economic & Political Weekly, 54*(15). https://www.epw.in/engage/article/hindutva-masculinity-social-media-producing-violence-against-women-muslims

The Hindu. (2026, May 27). Assam Assembly Passes Uniform Civil Code Bill. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/assam/assam-assembly-passes-uniform-civil-code-bill/article71028836.ece