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A FINE BALANCE:  
RE-MAKING MUSLIM MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN DELHI  
AND NEW YORK CITY

By

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Louisa Schein

and approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION:

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How do middle-class Muslims make sense of their religion and of their own selves as Muslims, while occupying the position of highly stigmatized religious minorities? How do they live with and attempt to resolve the contradiction of an Islam that is the source of all that is good and worthwhile and an Islam that stands for backwardness, fanaticism, and terror? This dissertation, based on twenty four months of participant observation in India (Delhi) and the United States (New York City), focuses on how middle-class Muslims in these two sites are re-making what it means to be a pious Muslim and a modern person, as they live their everyday lives in ways that demonstrate that it is entirely possible to be both religious and modern in a world which routinely places Islam in an antithetical relation to modernity. I argue that given the insistent dominant representations of Muslims as anti-modern and backward, Muslims cannot help but engage with the discourses that produce them as such. This engagement in turn produces new understandings of what it means to be both Muslim and modern. At the core of this middle-class Muslim modernity, there is an emphasis on critical thinking that must be

brought to bear on all aspects of their lives including their religion. At the same time, in this process of re-presenting themselves as modern, middle-class Muslims are not setting aside their religion but presenting Islam as providing a means for a thoroughly modern way of being in the world in ways that enable us to rethink the tradition/modernity dichotomy. Having already been stigmatized as backward and anti-modern through various public discourses, middle-class Muslims often represent themselves as modern through drawing specific contrasts between their own religious beliefs and practices and those of less educated, lower-class Muslims whom they designate in turn as backward. The very religion of Islam, on account of which Muslims are marked off as non-modern, is thus transformed in the discourses and actions of middle-class Muslims into the site for performing and appropriating modernity.

## PREFACE

This project has been in the making for close to a decade, during which time I have crossed continents and time zones, met many wonderful people, and learnt to look at the world differently. It seems appropriate, therefore, to begin with a brief summary of the stimulating intellectual journey that this has been and to take this opportunity to thank all those who have made it possible.

I started graduate school at Rutgers University, New Jersey, in the Fall of 2000, having entered the Anthropology Program with an interest in researching African-American Muslim identities. My interest in African-American Muslims had been sparked while writing a paper on the ways in which religion had been used in the American civil rights movement, by the two very different figures of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. However, a summer of exploratory fieldwork and review of literatures on Muslims in the U.S. led to the realization that there was a large and understudied South Asian Muslim population in the tri-state area. I felt compelled to further understand this immigrant experience of being Muslim, situating it within the racial and immigrant politics specific to the U.S., as well as within the larger framework of transnational relations shaped by allegiance to the umma or worldwide Muslim community, and by ties to the different nation-states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

I conducted a year (2003-2004) of participant observation among South Asian Sunni Muslims in New York City, spending time in a variety of immigrant Muslim spaces such as Islamic schools, Muslim non-profit organizations, and Muslim-owned and run grocery stores and restaurants. During this time, I also became increasingly interested in understanding how South Asian immigrant experiences and understandings of being

Muslim were similar to and different from those of Muslims in India, who also constitute a minority subject to similar kinds of public misrepresentations and suspicion. Thus, my stay in New York City was followed by another year (2004-2005) of fieldwork with middle-class Sunni Muslims in Old Delhi, India. In this dissertation, I have chosen to focus primarily on the insights derived from research in Delhi. A relatively small selection of the data gathered in New York City is presented in chapter six and used primarily to provide a comparative perspective.

The longer the life span of a project, the longer are the list of debts accumulated. It is with great pleasure that I thank everyone who have been involved in any way with the making of this dissertation. My greatest thanks go to the many men and women in New York City and Delhi who befriended me, shared their lives, and opened their homes to me. While I cannot acknowledge each one of them individually, I would like to extend a special thanks to Mehmood and Faiza, Masood, Azra and their families for extending their friendship, cooking me the most delicious meals, and making me feel at home.

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special thank you to you for the excellent classes in research methods and for giving me a head start in writing a successful research proposal. Lila, thank you for taking such an interest in this project, for making the time to read this dissertation so closely, and for providing many helpful comments regarding both substance and structure. Laura, thank you for everything. I would also like to thank other faculty members at Rutgers University, especially Michael Moffatt, Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas, Jasbir Puar, and Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi. My thanks go out also to the wonderful staff members in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University, especially Vicky, Penny, and Ginny, for their warmth and ever readiness to help in every way.

I thank the Indian Government for granting me permission to conduct research in Delhi, the Department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics for providing academic affiliation, and Dr. Deepak Mehta for providing helpful guidance during fieldwork in Delhi. Purnima Mehta and the staff members at the American Institute of Indian Studies were extremely warm and helpful. I would also like to thank Mandeep Janeja and her family for taking such good care of me in Delhi.

Fieldwork in New York was made possible through a Teaching Assistantship from Rutgers University, while research in Delhi was funded by a Junior Research Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies. Preliminary research in Delhi and New York were funded by Princeton University's Program in Urbanization and Migration as well as Bigel Awards from Rutgers University. The writing of the dissertation was facilitated by a grant from the Taraknath Das Foundation at Columbia University as well as a Teaching Assistantship from Rutgers University. Portions of this work have been presented at annual meetings of the American Anthropological

Association and the Asian American Association. I thank fellow participants and audience members for helpful comments and suggestions.

I would like to thank my friends for their support throughout graduate school and the process of writing this dissertation. I am especially thankful to Amrita Bhaumik, Jessica Libove, Andy Bickford, Wendy Weisman, Noelle Mole, Dillon Mahoney, Debarati Sen, Emily McDonald, Drew Gerkey, Rebecca Etz, Purnima Paidipatti, Ellorashree Maitra, Ananya Dasgupta, Manjusha Iyer. A special thank you goes to Dillon Mahoney for his generous help in facilitating the submission of this dissertation.

None of this would have been possible without the love and support of my family. I would like to thank both sets of parents – Raghu Nath and Sunanda Chakraborty, Shiloo and Reeta Chattopadhyay - for their love and the support they have provided over so many years, in so many ways. And finally, Rono and Nikhil – thank you for being all that I look forward to coming home to every day.

#### *Notes on Language and Translation*

In most of the interviews I conducted in Delhi and New York City, as well as in casual conversations, respondents spoke in English, switching every now and then to Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali. This is how most of our conversations were conducted since English in combination with one or more local languages is what most middle-class Muslims use on a daily basis in both sites. For purposes of clarity, I have included (Appendix A) brief introductions to each of the main respondents who appear in the dissertation, noting the languages used in conversations with them. I have also italicized any Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali word the very first time it appears in the text and provided the meaning of the word in English, either in a footnote or in the main text itself. In



addition, a glossary (Appendix B) of foreign words has been attached for ready reference.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*I am working from the premise that faith is not a façade, not just a mystifying thing that we need to look past in order to understand what is “really” going on. Instead faith is what is going on, it is a very real thing in and of itself, located in practices, discourses, inner and outer states, relationships, and effects in the world.*

(Deeb, 2006, p. 40)

I am at Kabir *sahab*'s<sup>1</sup> home in Old Delhi, hovering in his kitchen as he makes us hot, milky tea. This is my second meeting with Kabir *sahab*; he appears more relaxed and in the mood for a chat. Encouraged by this and feeling somewhat less intimidated in the presence of this elderly professor, dressed today in jeans and a blue and white striped cotton shirt, sleeves rolled up as he pours the tea, and heats up home made *shammi* kebabs, I ask, “So, who is a Muslim?” He repeats my question, as if turning it over in his head before he says:

Whoever is born to Muslim parents is a Muslim. This is a compulsion, not an option. However intelligent and educated you are, you follow the same religion your parents were born into. Partly because religion is not only faith and belief, but it is the way of life, the ethos, the culture which is related with that religion. You see, I am basically an atheist. But my wife is a staunch Muslim. So we follow all those customs and traditions which Muslim families follow. Our relatives, our acquaintances expect us to behave like that.....

I offer *namaz* (prayer) only twice in a year, at Eid and Baqri Eid because it is a mass congregation and if you don't go for that then you are spotted out - this is the fellow who does not even go for an Eid *namaz*! I go for the satisfaction of my wife and (laughs) for the satisfaction of the people around me. People talk a lot about me. They say, Kabir *sahab* is a thorough gentleman but he is never seen in the mosque! This is a very strange thing for them. If this man is a thorough gentleman why is he not seen in the mosque?<sup>2</sup>

Kabir *sahab* is over seventy and recently retired as professor of Urdu at a well known Delhi university. He is an Old Delhi old timer, having grown up in the same house

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<sup>1</sup> Sahab is a deferential form of address usually attached as a suffix to proper names. I have retained its use in cases where the person was addressed in this way by most others.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated it should be understood that the conversation quoted was carried out in English, with words or sentences in Hindi/Urdu thrown, as in this conversation with Kabir *sahab*.

where he lives today with his wife. He is well respected and regarded warmly by his neighbors. Many neighborhood children come to his home for Quran reading lessons given by his wife. The backdoor of their home opens onto the courtyard of a school whose principal holds Kabir sahab in high regard. A few days earlier when I asked Mohsin, my key contact in Old Delhi, to introduce me to others in the community, Kabir sahab was one of the first people he took me to visit, presumably because he believed that the latter would be able to tell me much about what being Muslim in Old Delhi entails. But here was Kabir sahab telling me that he is “basically an atheist.”

This was one of those ethnographic “Huh?” to “Aha!” moments, only belatedly recognized as such, urging a stepping back to examine one’s own formative assumptions going into fieldwork and compelling a rethinking of the problem by raising more questions than answers. I had embarked on a scholarly study of Muslim identity in contemporary India. So what was I doing talking to a self declared atheist? And what was Mohsin thinking, introducing me to such a man to help me learn about Old Delhi’s Muslims?

Kabir sahab’s response was certainly not typical, and the answers I received were usually, at least initially, far more in line with the expected: Muslims are those who believe in one God or Allah, Muslims are those who offer namaaz five times a day, or Muslims are those who pay the zakat. And while most middle-class Muslims who befriended me in Delhi would not describe themselves as atheists, they would identify with Kabir sahab’s attempt (often entailing considerable internal struggle) to hold onto aspects of their identity – being Muslim and modern - they consider to be equally significant to their sense of self but that have been deemed incompatible by the world

outside. My decision to, therefore, choose to begin with my conversation with Kabir sahab is because his words get to the very heart of this study, which aims to highlight the diversity in Islamic practices and views shaped by class differences and to counter the currently popular view that Islam and modernity are incompatible and that Muslims are not and cannot be modern.

While diversity in Islam across sects (the primary division being between Shia and Sunni), genders, and cultures (e.g. Rouse 2004)<sup>3</sup> has been the subject of many studies, relatively little has been written about the variety of religious practices and views among Muslims of different classes within a particular site. Focusing on middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi, I show how their understandings and performances of the most basic Islamic rituals, like offering namaz or going on the Hajj pilgrimage, are shaped by their class position, within the context of their ongoing efforts to be both modern and Muslim in a world where these identities are routinely placed in an oppositional relation to each other. Middle-class Muslim subjectivities are thus shaped by the longing for the modern which leads them to “not only position themselves vis-à-vis modernity through multifarious practices but also struggle to *reposition* themselves, sometimes through deploying the very codes of the modern that have framed them as its others” (Schein, 1999, p. 364).

If identity is as much about sameness as difference from the other or multiple others (e.g. Jayaram 2004), then Muslims in late colonial and post-colonial India have not only been the quintessential other to a normative Hindu India but have also been denied identity in the sense of sameness as Indians, through discursive representations of Muslims as anti-modern and backward. Following the lead of Nehru, independent India’s

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<sup>3</sup> Rouse’s work (2004) deals specifically with the meanings of Islam for African-American female converts.

first prime minister, educated middle-class Indians saw modernity as a cherished goal and a crucial element of one's identity as citizens of the modern, democratic nation-state of India. Of course, not all Indians are 'modern.' The English educated, middle- and upper-class, urban Indian inhabits modernity most comfortably, while the vernacular-speaking rural farmer aspires to become modern. In that sense the popular model of modernity is still very much one that has been discredited by social scientists, entailing a linear notion of history in which all of us are on the same path towards a Western modernity with some of us having "progressed" further along the path than others.

Notwithstanding a trenchant critique by India's Hindu right-wing, which equates modern with 'the west' and therefore as corrupting traditional Indian heritage and values (think of the Hindu right-wing's protests against beauty pageants for instance), to be modern continues to be a cherished ideal in today's India with specific markers such as an English-medium education. While not all Indians are modern, their aspirations to become modern are recognized as legitimate and they are admitted within the imaginary of a modern India as potential participants. However, India's Muslims are seen to be not simply not-yet modern, but anti-modern – an important distinction, as Mahmood Mamdani (2005) points out, because it implies that Muslims may not even potentially be assimilated into an imagined modern India but must necessarily be placed outside it.

Secularization theory's projected decline of the significance of religion in modernity (e.g. Luckmann 1967; Wilson 1966) has been confounded by the growing influence of religious institutions in public politics and culture the world over (e.g. Casanova 1994, Hefner 1998, Wuthnow 1988). And yet in India and the West, it is primarily Muslims who continue to be represented in myriad ways as particularly



traditional and anti-modern, owing to their commitment to Islam, and hence also as against secular, liberal principles, essentially incapable of being modern, secular citizens. Some of the most common representations mobilized to make this point about Muslims in India are: Muslims do not want to obtain mainstream education and prefer to send their children to madrasas, where they are brainwashed into fundamentalist fanatics; Islam prohibits birth control, so Muslims do not engage in family planning and have many children, contrary to the modern Indian state's slogan of '*Hum Do Hamarae Do*', promoting the ideal of the two children family. My aim here is not to evaluate the extent to which Muslims are lagging behind others on the modernity scale, but rather to examine the discursive formations that present Muslims as backward and anti-modern, and the various ways in which Delhi's middle-class Muslims engage with such representations to produce new formations of Muslim-ness and modernity.

As Stuart Hall (1990) has argued, instead of thinking of identity as static, "we should think instead of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). Processual and emergent identities are shaped not only in opposition to multiple others but also through an engagement with others' representations of 'us'. For minorities in particular, like Muslims in India, the dominant discourses that produce them as the quintessential other wield enormous power in terms of real consequences that shape their everyday lives. I argue that given the insistent dominant representations of Muslims in India as anti-modern and backward, Muslims cannot help but engage with the discourses that produce them as such. This engagement, in turn, produces new understandings of what it means to be both Muslim and modern. Having already been stigmatized as backward and

anti-modern through various public discourses, middle-class Muslims often represent themselves as modern through drawing specific contrasts with the religious beliefs and practices of less educated, lower-class or lower-middle-class Muslims (and at particular moments and contexts in contrast to rural Muslims, lower caste Muslims, or Muslims from particular regions in India) whom they designate in turn as backward. Stacy Pigg (1996) has shown that while Nepalis across various social positions held a range of beliefs about shamanism, public denunciations of shamanism came to be associated with being modern and belief in shamans became a way of designating the nonmodern. Similarly, among the middle-class Muslims I interacted with the actual range of religious practices varied considerably but an attitude of critical and reflective engagement with Islamic norms and practices, associated with being modern and cosmopolitan, becomes a way of marking themselves off from backward lower-class Muslims who are described as devoid of such critical faculties vis-à-vis their religion.

Mohsin, who introduced me to Kabir sahab as a valuable resource for an anthropologist researching Muslim identities in Old Delhi, could not be completely unaware of the latter's unconventional views. Mohsin's choice, rather than being an ignorant one is more likely to be a well considered one. As a middle-class, elderly Muslim man and a retired professor, Kabir Sahab is the perfect antidote to representations of Muslims as backward - representations that Mohsin is well aware of, as he made clear on several occasions such as when recalling with indignation the derogatory comments made by a Hindu parent at his son's elite English medium school regarding Muslims and madrasas. In presenting Kabir sahab to me, the outsider/insider (anthropologist, Hindu/Indian) Mohsin perhaps seeks to contest the popular negative stereotypes of backward

Muslims. Kabir sahab on his part seems to take pleasure in the consternation he causes among his neighbors and fellow Muslims. But in laughing at others *with me* laughter here does the important work of creating identity or sameness between us, as educated, urbane, modern Indians, while distancing Kabir sahab and educated middle-class Muslims like him from those ‘other’ Muslims (read lower-class, less educated), who, as Kabir sahab would tell me later, follow and perform their faith “blindly” and without any critical reflection.

As I recall Kabir sahib’s quiet, wry laughter, his condescending attitude towards the religious practices of fellow Muslims, and his confident declaration of his own atheism, I also remember my own feelings of discomfort, stemming from the notion that I was probably wasting valuable research time talking to someone who was not quite an authentic Muslim. Yet, I find myself going back again and again to his words because they throw open a window onto the possibilities of sincerity amidst the demands for authenticity in the everyday, ongoing encounters that challenge and unravel attempts to fix meanings of Muslim-ness.

Jackson (2005), in his fascinating study of racial identity, offers up the notion of sincerity as a counter to authenticity which is more commonly used in academic discussions about identities. Because human beings are infinitely complex and the reach of language is limited, we create and use social categories like race, class, gender, and religion, which function as shortcuts to understanding and evaluating others, while also providing us with scripts telling us how to think and behave. Authenticity demands that we live these scripts exactly, right down to every comma and full stop. It thus reduces individuals to mere objects of scripts, to be authenticated by others. Sincerity, on the

other hand, enables us to talk about subjects and subjectivities by acknowledging the opacity of others, by accepting that “real” people jump out from the script at unexpected turns. Sincerity allows for possibilities, many of which we are unable to foresee or be fully aware of, let alone explain. Authenticity demands a fixing of meaning while sincerity allows their undoing and redoing:

With sincerity as a model, one still does not know if one can trust the other performances (a partiality and steely eyed skepticism it shares with authenticity discourse); however, one recognizes that people are not simply racial objects (to be verified from without) but racial subjects with an interiority that is never completely and unquestionably clear. (Jackson, 2005, p. 18)

Kabir sahab’s nonconformity to the scripts that define Muslim-ness - for instance, his absence at the mosque during prayer times - generates talk and compels him to show up for collective namaaz during Eid, because it is crucial to his performance as an authentic Muslim. However, if authenticity and adherence to scripts were the only story of identity, then it would be impossible to understand how different meanings of Muslim-ness emerge as shaped by extra-religious factors such as class, as for instance the notion held by many of Old Delhi’s middle-class Muslims that to be a Muslim is to be a thorough gentleman that is in turn related to particular notions of *sharafat* or etiquette. It would also be impossible to take seriously Kabir sahab’s contention that he is a Muslim *and* an atheist without acknowledging an “interiorized intent” which sincerity privileges, an interiority that we can never fully grasp, and the knowing of which entails the “inevitable acceptance of trust amid uncertainty” (Jackson, 2005, p.28). Listening closely to Kabir sahab, rather than writing him off as an aberration and writing him out of ethnographic existence, has been a crucial part of my effort to engage, in all “sincerity”, with the question of what it means to be Muslim in contemporary India, recognizing that

both authenticity and sincerity provide models we use to make sense of ourselves and the world around us “most often using one half of that dyad to challenge and confound the other” (Jackson, 2005, p. 28).

Talal Asad argues that “tradition and modernity are not really two mutually exclusive states of a culture or society but different aspects of historicity. Many of the things that are thought of as modern belong to traditions which have their roots in Western history” (1996, p. 2). Thus, for instance, liberalism may be seen as a ‘tradition’ central to modernity, but it is not less modern for that reason, and it may be reformulated without becoming inauthentic. In the same way, argues Asad, contemporary Islamic revival movements must be seen not as inauthentic but as “attempts at articulating Islamic traditions that are adequate to the modern condition as experienced in the Muslim world” (1996, p. 2). Building on Asad’s thinking, but going beyond Islamic revival movements, I focus here on reformulations of Islamic traditions emanating from those sections of Indian Muslims who are not part of any organized movements and argue that, in engaging with their discursive exclusion from Indian modernity and negotiating a place for themselves in modern India Delhi’s middle-class, Muslims generate new understandings of what it means to be Muslim, which, using the authenticity barometer, are often dismissed by both insiders and outsiders as inauthentic versions of Islam.

The Muslim minority in India, like the Hindu majority, is not a homogenous monolith but rather fissured along lines of class, gender, regional, and cultural differences. Therefore, as Old Delhi’s middle-class Muslims attempt to be both modern and Muslim in their everyday lives, they must simultaneously contend with demands for authenticity from fellow Muslims, and those who deviate significantly from the scripts of

Muslim-ness are often accused of being inauthentic Muslims, or even denounced as a *kafir*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for instance, people talk about Kabir sahab and their talk compels him to attend collective Eid namaaz.

For middle-class Muslims, moreover, as for their Hindu counterparts, the idea of modernity holds great value but it is also anxiety producing, expressed in the many negative images associated with being modern. Growing up in a middle-class Hindu family in India, I can recall several occasions when, having expressed disagreement with my mother over some issue, I would be told that I was too modern. Being modern is thus often associated with immodesty, especially in clothing, and many middle-class Muslim men and women in Delhi expressed similar sentiments and concerns, most often while talking about their daughters, wives, or other female family members. Ideas about the dangers of modernity are thus harnessed by middle-class Indians, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in their attempts to fix meanings of tradition and culture. Therefore, while I focus mainly on how a different sense of self emerges among middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi through their engagement with the modern and with their exclusion from the modern, it is important to keep in mind that for them being modern also entails engaging with a complex triangulation of discourses that have already constructed them not only as anti-modern (mainstream, largely Hindu representations) but also as too modern (conservative Muslim representations), as well as their own anxieties about the modern that stem from their acceptance of a rigid demarcation between modernity and tradition and the consequent fears of losing one's traditions to the onslaught of modernity.

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<sup>4</sup> Kafir means non-believer or one who does not believe in Allah.

### *Outline of Chapters*

Based on months of intensive fieldwork in Old Delhi, hours of recorded conversations and interviews, and the memories of myriad interactions they conjure, I attempt to tell several intertwined stories: the stories of middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi – stories that never quite reach us in the din of voices that insist that *all* Muslims are backward and fundamentalist, the story of modernity from the perspective of those who are consistently denied a place in that story, and, finally, the story of Islam, what it stands for, and how it must be lived day to day, as it is understood and told by Old Delhi's middle-class Muslims. In telling these stories, I attempt to answer questions such as the following: How do middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi make sense of their religion and of their own selves as Muslims, while occupying the position of a highly stigmatized religious minority within India? How do they live with and attempt to resolve the contradiction of an Islam that is the source of all that is good and worthwhile, and an Islam that stands for backwardness, fanaticism, and terror? In terms of everyday experience what does it mean to be a Muslim in contemporary India, where the secular ideal has increasingly come to be contested or appropriated by a dominant upper-class and caste Hindu elite?

Following the introduction, the second chapter—titled *Modern India and the Backward Muslim*—presents an overview of the historical context within which Muslims in India have come to be defined as the non-modern 'other'. If the Indian Muslim is characterized as steeped in religion and anti-modern and vilified on those grounds, as always suspect regarding their loyalties to the modern Indian nation-state, then what defines this Indian modernity? The meanings of what it is to be modern in India have

shifted in non-linear ways, from colonialism through independence and the Nehruvian era, followed by the economic liberalization of the 1980s to the present day India—glitzy, glamorous, confident and hopeful, yet ridden with contradictions. In the first part of this chapter, I trace the contours of this changing modern in terms of which the Indian Muslim is always characterized as a lack. In the second part of the chapter, I outline the various discourses that have constructed Muslims in India as a civilizational ‘other’, as savage conquerors, as backward, and as suspect citizens, and I argue that such discourses, in their cumulative effect, have served to stigmatize Indian Muslims as unfit for inhabiting that most modern of identities—citizens of a pluralistic nation-state.

The ways in which one is and experiences being Muslim are mediated through certain categories, such as understandings and practices of the body, knowledge, language, space, and time, which are fundamental to human existence. Chapters three, four and five are each framed around one or more such existential categories, and I examine how the encounter with modernity leads Delhi’s middle-class Muslims to reformulate their own representations of Islamic rituals and practices centering on the body, how it shapes their organization and experience of time and space, and how it leads to particular kinds of knowledge and learning being seen as more useful and practical. Thus, in chapter three—titled *Re-imagining Muslim Spaces*—I show how representations of Muslims as non-modern and backward shape Old Delhi’s middle-class Muslims’ uses and interpretations of the spaces they inhabit, moving from the public spaces of Mecca and the mosque to the innermost domestic spaces. In chapter four—titled *Learning to be Muslim, Learning to be Modern*—I examine why Delhi’s middle-class Muslims express a very clear preference for ‘modern’ English-medium education as opposed to ‘traditional’



Islamic education or Arabic literacy, seeing the former as crucial to being a socially and economically successful modern citizen and the latter as significant only for the transferring of ‘tradition’. In chapter five—titled *Mind/ Body Dualism, Hygienic Practices and the Fashioning of Modern Muslim Bodies*—I focus on two embodied practices, the offering of prayer or namaz and *halal* and *haram*<sup>5</sup> norms regarding food and eating. I show how the attitudes and practices of Delhi’s middle-class Muslims towards namaz are shaped in relation to Hindu representations of Muslims as unthinking and uncritical in their relation to their faith, as well as how middle-class Muslims’ understanding and practices surrounding the Islamic norms of halal and haram are shaped in relation to and in contention with Hindu perceptions of the Muslim body as dirty, volatile, and savage.

In these chapters taken collectively, I attempt to show how in multiple discourses and practices of the body, knowledge, language, space, and time, middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi are shaping identities that, most centrally, claim to be at once Islamic and modern. I argue that they do so in complex ways that not only challenge the identification of modernity with the West, through representing Islam as the source of modernity, but also validate and reinforce a Western hegemonic modernity.

In chapter six—titled *Reinventing the Umma*—using data collected through field work in Islamic schools, Muslim grocery stores, and community organizations in New York City, I argue that while South Asian Muslims in the United States are also deeply affected by American and Western representations of Muslims as non-modern and share some of the concerns of Delhi’s middle-class Muslims about the making and representation of Muslims as modern, they are far more concerned about how to live a

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<sup>5</sup> In the most general terms halal refers to all that is allowed and haram refers to all that is prohibited in Islam. I elaborate in further detail the meanings of these terms as the chapter unfolds.

life as a proper Muslim within a larger social environment that is non-Muslim and increasingly hostile towards Muslims. I argue that the central issues, responses, and strategies of middle-class South Asian Muslims in New York are different from those of Muslims in Delhi due to the specific location of the former as immigrants within the framework of racial politics in the United States. Within this context, I also examine how the fact of being Muslim shapes the experience of being citizens in democracies in which they are highly stigmatized minorities. In addition, I reflect on whether their experiences can provide us certain empirically grounded tools with which to interrogate the very concepts of modernity, secularism, and democracy. In the concluding chapter, I return to a discussion of how and why particular religious practices and attitudes towards religion have come to be associated with being modern for Delhi's middle-class Muslims and reflect upon the nature of the modern that emerges through this engagement.

### *Purani Dilli or Old Delhi*

This research was conducted in 2004 and 2005 in the area of Delhi known as Purani Dilli or Old Delhi. My first sense of Old Delhi was overwhelmingly one of chaos—lots of people milling around in narrow lanes crisscrossing each other in a maze, a din of voices and traffic, rickshaws, bikes, scooters and pedestrians, all jostling for space, shops and eateries by the dozen, their display of wares often spilling out onto the narrow lanes. The following excerpt from my field notes written on my first visit to Mohsin's house in Old Delhi attests to my amusement and amazement at the chaos and energy of this city that was to be the site of my research in the year to come:

The packed-ness of Old Delhi starts right at the Turkman gate. As Mohsin and I walked past the gate, we dodged scooters, rickshaws, cycles, and people, everyone trying to get somewhere first yet moving with what seemed to me like

an almost other worldly unawareness of one's surroundings, walking or riding as if one were the sole occupants of the crowded lanes, seemingly oblivious to the stream of people and things jostling around and into one.

On most days a hot, dusty autorickshaw<sup>6</sup> ride would bring me from my rented apartment in a South Delhi neighborhood to the Turkman gate on Asaf Ali road built in 1658, one of the four gates to Emperor Shahjahan's city that remain standing today. As I paid the auto driver, I would steel myself to plunge into the chaotic streets and try to follow directions taken over the phone—walk towards Chitli Qabar, look out for Naushad Bakery, take the left right next to it, follow the street going uphill, then make a right just before the street goes downhill—and more often than not stopping at several shops to ask for clarifications. Mohsin or Mushtaq, long time residents of Old Delhi who generously introduced me to many relatives and friends, would sometimes meet me on the main road at Turkman gate, or in front of the Golcha movie theater, and walk or take a rickshaw (hand pulled or attached to a cycle) with me to our destination for the day. Gradually, the chaos of Old Delhi began to settle into the background and a sense of ordered space emerged with familiarity. I began to walk confidently to homes that I visited often, no longer stopping to ask for directions. I began to recognize the maze of lanes as distinct neighborhoods or *mohallas*, many of them carrying names that in earlier times denoted the specialized occupation of the majority of people residing there—for instance, Churiwalan got its name from the *churi* or bangle sellers, while Katra Neel was named after the indigo (*neel*) manufacturers or traders who lived and worked in that locality.

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<sup>6</sup> An autorickshaw, a covered three wheeler, is a common form of public transport in most Indian towns and cities. It is easily available in Delhi and much cheaper than taxis. Within the old city the lanes are so narrow and congested that cycle rickshaws, cycles (bikes), and scooters are the most convenient and favored modes of transport.

Old Delhi—also known as Purani Dilli, the Walled City, or Shahjahanabad—has remained through many changes *the* quintessential Muslim space within Delhi. Some scholars trace the origin of Delhi as far back as the Indus Valley civilization, while others find circumstantial evidence in the epic Mahabharata, linking Delhi to Indraprastha, the capital of the Pandavas. However, starting with Mohammed Ghori's invasion and capture of Delhi in 1191, it became the center of Turkish and Muslim power in India (Spear, 2002, p.7) and subsequently the seat of the Mughal Empire when Emperor Shah Jahan chose Delhi as the site of his new capital and built, between 1639 and 1648 A.D., the city of Shahjahanabad that is now known as Purani Dilli. As historian Percival Spear writes:

During the period of the Mogul Empire Delhi reached the pinnacle of its glory, politically, economically, and artistically. Humayun's tomb, the Fort and the Jama Masjid, the pomp and majesty of Aurangzeb's court, the fifty-two bazaars and thirty-six mandis which supplied the city's needs, all testify to its greatness (Spear, 2002, p. 24).

The grand scale and opulence of the city that Emperor Shahjahan built can be gathered from the descriptions provided by historians like Samsam-ud-Daula writing in the eighteenth century:

At a cost of sixty lakhs of rupees [the fort] was completed in nine years, three months and some days. The lofty fort, which is octagonal according to the Baghdad style, is 1,000 yards long, and 300 yards broad. Its walls are built on the red stone of Fathpur... Its area is six lakh yards, which is double of the great fort of Akbarabad (Agra) and its perimeter is 1,650 yards. It has twenty-one bastions, seven circular and fourteen octagonal; four gates and two windows... The royal mansions, consisting of the Shah Mahal with a silver roof, Imtiyaz Mahal with the bedroom known as the Burj-i-Tala (the Golden Chamber), and the private and public Daulat Khana (Palace), and the Hayat Baksh garden cost twenty-eight lakhs of rupees... (quoted in Khushwant Singh, 2004, p. 27).

Even as late as 1852 the number of Europeans living within the walls of Delhi was very few, so contact between European and Delhiwallahs was scant. As a result, notes William Dalrymple:

Delhi remained a profoundly self-confident place, quite at ease with its own brilliance and the superiority of its *tahzib*, its cultured and polished urbanity. It was a city that had yet to suffer the collapse of self-belief that inevitably comes with the onset of open and unbridled colonialism. Instead, Delhi was still in many ways a bubble of conservative Mughal traditionalism in an already fast-changing India (Dalrymple, 2006, p 34).

The year 1857, however, marked the end of Mughal rule in Delhi and the British-led destruction of the city the Mughals had so lovingly built and nurtured. In 1857, mutinous sepoy or Indian infantry privates employed by the British East India Company rose in revolt against their colonial masters. Although the revolt broke outside Delhi, in cantonments in Barrackpur, Meerut, and elsewhere, Delhi soon became the focal point of the uprising, with mutineers pouring into Delhi in large numbers and proclaiming their loyalty to Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, declaring him to be their leader. Entering the gates of Delhi on the morning of May 11<sup>th</sup> 1857, the mutinous soldiers went on to slaughter all Christians they could find, not sparing British women and children, and they took control of Delhi as the remaining small numbers of British officers and families fled the city. For various reasons that I shall not go into here, the uprising ended eventually in British victory, not least because Bahadur Shah Zafar, by then eighty-six years old, with a depleted exchequer and no real authority was hardly in a position to provide able leadership. Re-occupying the city after a long and arduous siege, the British proceeded on a plan of “mass destruction and colonial remodeling”, which the poet Ghalib describes in anguish:

Here it seems as if the whole city is being demolished...Some of the biggest and most famous bazaars—the Khas Bazaar, the Urdu Bazaar, and the Khanum ka Bazaar, each of which was practically as a small town, have all gone without a trace. You cannot even tell where they were. Householders and shopkeepers cannot point out to you where their houses and shops used to stand. (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 454)

Through Ghalib's letters and other first hand accounts, Dalrymple traces the large scale destruction of Delhi, including much of the Red Fort and large areas of the city around it, as well as beautiful mosques, magnificent palaces, royal gardens etc. While Hindu residents were gradually allowed to re-enter the city walls, Muslims continued to be banned from the city and even when they were allowed to return, many found themselves without homes and in extreme poverty. As Dalrymple also points out, 1857 thus exacerbated the transfer of power in Delhi from the dominant Muslim elites to the richest Hindus, the bankers and the traders. The situation of Muslims in Delhi was so miserable that it led a British paper in India, the *Mofussilite* (June 1860) to write in sympathy:

When will agitation of European nerves subside? There is no reason for it...The people are abject because they are starved out, banished and plundered. Thousands of Muslims are wandering houseless and homeless; the Hindus, pluming themselves on their assumed loyalty, strut about the streets giving themselves airs. Let not the public think that Delhi has not been punished. Wend through the empty grass-grown streets, mark the uprooted houses, and shot-riddled palaces (quoted in Dalrymple, 2006, p. 461).

Also etched onto the landscape of Old Delhi and adding to its spaces a temporal depth are reminders of the horrors and trauma of the Partition of 1947, in the form of large mansions or *havelis* abandoned by wealthy Muslims who fled their homes and crossed the newly formed border into Pakistan. As historian Gyanendra Pandey writes:

In Delhi, already by September 1947, there were numerous elements that felt that there could no longer be any place in the city or its environs for Muslims; on occasion they suggested (hopefully?) that the vast majority of Muslims themselves preferred to leave. Such proponents of a wholesale Muslim emigration were to be found at every level of society and government (2001, p. 38).

On a rickshaw ride through the crowded lanes of Old Delhi, going to her sister's house in the neighborhood of Ballimaran, Suraiya, sitting squeezed in next to me on the

narrow rickshaw seat, pointed out a fragment of a large house that could be glimpsed through an arched stone doorway, saying that it belonged to a wealthy Muslim family that migrated to Pakistan at Partition.

Later, at her sister's home, Suraiya talked in detail about the effects of Partition in Old Delhi as experienced directly by their father, a young man at the time, and handed to them through his rememberings of "those times":

In this area (Old Delhi) mostly all the people were Muslims. But in 1947 it became totally empty, everyone left because they felt unsafe. They left Abbaji (father) in charge and gave him the keys (to their homes). The elders of the neighborhood told him, you keep whoever you want to here because it's not ours anymore as we are leaving. These were good, well built houses and people had left most of their belongings behind. Abbaji would open the locks and let people stay. He himself took two houses - one house ahead, where our aunt lives and this one (where we are now sitting and where Suraiya and her sisters grew up). There was someone by the name of Hisamuddin Sahab, and the haveli (large mansion) is known by the same name. As you enter Ballimaran (an Old Delhi neighborhood), you might have noticed that there is a large gate to Haveli Hisamuddin. There are several gates and about a hundred rooms, all owned by one person. Earlier it used to be this way. The people here were very rich.

One feels sad, when one thinks about how they had to leave their homes and go, isn't it? Think about how difficult it must have been. It is true that we take nothing with us when we leave this world. But in life, it is very difficult to part with things, to give one's favorite things to someone else, to leave behind one's home, one's business. And these were very rich people, who had to leave behind their large mansions, called *haveli*, with a minimum of a hundred rooms, owned by one man. And they had to leave it all behind, poor things. It was the same there (in Pakistan) we are told - people who left everything behind, worrying only about saving their own lives. We hear all this from our father.

The decline of Old Delhi, which began with the destruction of the city during the revolt of 1857 and the end of the era of the Mughals, continued through the British colonial era as the locus of power shifted from Old Delhi to the British-built New Delhi, which continues to function as independent India's seat of government and political power. Through decades of state neglect and overcrowding, Old Delhi has fallen into decay and is today a picture of stark contrasts, such as the grand and imposing Jama

masjid, surrounded by a maze of overcrowded, narrow lanes, spilling over with shops, eateries, people and an endless stream of rickshaws, autorickshaws and bikes.

*Geographies of Fear*

The history of 55 years of grievous anti-Muslim violence in India shows that in townships and villages, where Muslims are 20% or more of the population, not much harm happens to them in communal riots....To live in pockets where Muslims are 20% or more of the population, does not mean that those localities become ghettos...Better be alive than an esoteric idealist and get burned alive. Harmony between Muslims and Hindus is the only way out for Muslims in India. But a dead man or a man whose house has been burnt down cannot practice harmony.

The paragraph quoted above was written by one Kaleem Kawaja, presumably in refutation of the often leveled charge that by living in Muslim “ghettos” like Old Delhi, Indian Muslims resist assimilation into mainstream society and it appeared in December, 2002 in *Milli Gazette*, a Muslim news magazine. Growing up in a Hindu, middle-class family in urban India, I was more than familiar with Hindu-Muslim tensions and recurrent ‘communal riots’. Until I started fieldwork in Old Delhi, however, I had never really considered what it must be like to live in fear. Mohsin, a long time resident of Old Delhi, recalled the time when a former neighbor, Abdul sahab, who had moved to a middle-class predominantly Hindu neighborhood in West Delhi, came to visit Mohsin following the demolition of the Babri masjid in 1992. He confided that he was very scared living in a non-Muslim locality, he feared for the safety of his family, and as a precaution he had removed, from his front door, the nameplate bearing his distinctly Muslim last name. As anyone familiar with the anatomy of ‘communal riots’ in India will know, Abdul sahab’s fears and precautions are not unfounded. In India, a Muslim last



name-like Ahmed or Kidwai—engraved on a brass plate and hung on the front door<sup>7</sup> or Muslim names of businesses are the first and most visible signs that mark these spaces as Muslim spaces. During the most recent large scale anti-Muslim violence in the Western state of Gujarat in India in 2002, it was through Muslim names that homes and businesses were targeted, burnt, and looted by members of a Hindu right-wing party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), as the following excerpt from a report will make clear: In towns across Gujarat, Muslim shops, offices and mosques were attacked by Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other like-minded people. Cars burned in the streets, Muslim shops were looted and set on fire. 70 people have died so far (report published on March 1, 2002, in *The Hindustan Times*, a leading national daily). The Sangh Parivar-led mobs did their homework well. In Himmatnagar (Sabarkantha), they managed to burn the fireproof showroom of Harsoliya Motors which was owned by Bohras who had been in the town for nine generations. In Saifee Society, Ahmedabad, 65 solidly built bungalows were destroyed using acid and explosive chemicals: “The mobs had detailed computerized lists of Muslim houses and shops, which they used to precise, devastating effect. Except for a few instances, even neighboring Hindu establishments were not damaged”. (Sundar, 2002, p. 95)

If, as Gyanendra Pandey (2001) and others have argued, violence and community are constitutive of each other, then, in Delhi, as other places where Muslims are a minority facing actual physical violence, or the ever present possibility of violence, a Muslim dominated area like Old Delhi is inevitably perceived as a safe space—that is, a space within which one feels safe to be Muslim. In Old Delhi, people complained

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<sup>7</sup> The use of such ‘name plates’, as they are called, is a common practice among middle- and upper-class families in urban India.

constantly to me about the miserable conditions of the narrow, congested, potholed roads, the illegal extensions of shops spilling over from the sidewalks onto the roads, the constant honking of the numerous cycle rickshaws ferrying children to and from schools, fumes from small factories polluting the air, and the list goes on. Yet, many Muslims, including middle-class educated professionals or wealthy elites who have both the financial and cultural capital to move out of the old city, choose to stay on - a decision that has much to do with feeling safe and comfortable within a familiar, largely Muslim environment, in a city that is largely non-Muslim.

Over the months as I got to know Mohsin's wife Firoza well, she expressed the kind of conflicting emotions that were all too common among middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi - a desire to leave behind the congestion of Old Delhi at odds with the unwillingness to give up the comfort of familiarity and the feeling of safety in numbers. For instance, after lunch at my apartment in a South Delhi middle class neighborhood, as Mohsin, Firoza, and I sat chatting over tea, with the late afternoon light streaming through the large windows, Firoza let out a long sigh and said that she often urged Mohsin to move the family out of their cramped quarters in Old Delhi. But Firoza also told me on several occasions, including late one night when we were returning by rickshaw to their house from a family wedding close by, that she felt safe in Old Delhi.

It is important to clarify here that safety is to be understood more broadly than just bodily safety. That is, Old Delhi is perceived and experienced as a safe space, not simply because Muslims, living among other Muslims, feel better positioned to prevent bodily injury to themselves or damage to their property. Rather, it is a safe space also in the sense that here Muslims feel free to be Muslim and to conduct themselves in

accordance with Islamic norms. For instance, most of my informants find it much easier to eat out in Old Delhi because they can be assured that the meat they eat will be halal or slaughtered in accordance with Islamic norms. Many of them therefore told me that when they eat at restaurants in non-Muslim areas, or during travel, they stick to a vegetarian diet. Similarly, Old Delhi's Muslims can conduct qurbaani or sacrificial slaughter because the homes in Old Delhi are often built around a central courtyard or smaller open space apart from being located in a Muslim dominated locality. For Muslims living in non-Muslim areas of Delhi, particularly in apartments, it is impossible to conduct qurbaani in their homes, both for the lack of space and due to the fear of offending their non-Muslim neighbors. Thus Kabir sahab explained, "We have a family friend, a doctor. She lives in the New Delhi area. Goats cannot be slaughtered there. And she also lives on her own. So her goat is also slaughtered here."

Let me clarify here that I am not suggesting that Muslims live in Old Delhi out of fear alone. As with any choice, there are several factors that go into the choice to stay. In many cases it is a decision shaped by practical considerations, such as relatively low rents or living rent free in homes that have been family owned for decades. For long time residents like Kabir sahab, who have grown up in Old Delhi and lived here all their lives, emotional bonds and memories keep them anchored to the old city. Throughout his tenure as professor of Urdu at a well known South Delhi university, Kabir sahab had never considered moving outside the walls of the old city and into university accommodations. He explained that for him living on the university campus was like living in a "sanctuary" where one was surrounded only by people like oneself, which was hardly as vibrant or fulfilling as living within a "community" composed of people of different classes and

having diverse occupations, as was the case in Old Delhi. For others, Old Delhi is a safe space because it provides access to family support structures that function as safety nets. For instance, Firoza's sisters, Suraiya and Humra, both live with their respective families in different mohallas of Old Delhi and all the sisters are a short rickshaw ride away from each other. All three of them, their children reported gleefully, are very scared of being alone at home. So whenever Firoza's husband Mohsin travels for work she summons her sisters and their children to spend the night at her place, to "guard" her as they jokingly said.

Aside from these advantages, many Muslims feel that Old Delhi and other Muslim dominated areas are safe spaces within the larger city - a feeling only reinforced during times of crisis such as periodic, recurrent Hindu-Muslim conflicts. As Razia put it:

And the moment you start building your confidence, something like Gujarat happens and everything goes back to square one. So we have to do away with communalism. I'm not saying that Muslims are not communal. They are too. Communalism as a disease has to be removed. And majority communalism always has greater power than minority.

Many different threads, such as family bonds, commerce, and in some instances religion, tie Old Delhi to other Muslim areas in Delhi. For instance, Nazia, who lives with her parents in the area of Nizamuddin, used to visit her grandmother often when she lived in the family home in Matia Mahal in Old Delhi. Jamshed, a resident of Okhla, said he often goes to the Jama masjid area to eat at the many restaurants that serve some of the best kebabs and biryani in the city. During the month of Ramzaan, after the fast is broken at sundown, Muslims (and non-Muslims) from various parts of the city flock to the numerous eateries in Old Delhi, which do brisk business late into the night, serving up staples such as savory fried pakoras, spicy fish fry, and kebabs. Another important

Muslim neighborhood in Delhi, Nizamuddin, draws Muslims (and non Muslims) from various parts of the city, to visit the shrine of the Sufi saint after whom the area is named.

While these networks connect different Muslims areas in Delhi, among my informants many work and live within the walls of Old Delhi and most members of their extended family as well as friends live within close reach, so they may go for days without stepping outside Old Delhi's boundaries or they may venture out to other areas for brief periods daily. For example, Mushtaq runs a small catering business from his one room office in the neighborhood of Ballimaran. Most of his clients are Old Delhi residents, as are the chefs he employs, the butcher he buys meat from, and the *halwai* who makes the sweetmeats. His home is a five minute dusty, noisy scooter ride from his workplace, and at lunch time he often gets together with friends who work close by, such as Yasin who runs a workshop making artificial jewelry for export or Dilawar who owns a small printing press. Mushtaq is, of course, familiar with the larger, non-Muslim city of Delhi - the upscale South Delhi neighborhoods, shopping malls, and multiplex movie theaters, the business and shopping area at Connaught Place in central Delhi, his eldest son's English medium school near the five star Oberoi hotel. But for all practical purposes, most of Mushtaq's everyday life, and those of many others like him, is spent within the confines of Old Delhi, where he enjoys a different, much stronger sense of claim, belonging, and familiarity or comfort than he does elsewhere in Delhi. The very first time I met Mushtaq, we chatted at a new coffee shop in Connaught Place, filled with young college kids, talking and laughing loudly, music playing even louder. Mushtaq seemed fidgety and stiff throughout the hour we sat there, although he talked non stop. Every time since, I have met Mushtaq in Old Delhi and have noticed a distinct difference

in the way he carries and conducts himself. A tall, well built, handsome man in his mid thirties, he clearly enjoys showing me that this is *his* space, in the way he strides down the narrow, crowded lanes confidently, in the way men stop and greet him ever so often as we walk or rickshaw ride through the streets, in the fact that he is able to take me, a stranger, into the homes of friends and acquaintances who talk to me and treat me with great hospitality, simply because I've been introduced to them by Mushtaq.

Importantly, it is not merely Muslim anxieties but also Hindu fears and prejudices which do the work of keeping Muslims largely confined to Muslim-dominated areas within the larger city of Delhi. On a crisp early winter morning, perched precariously on a rickshaw with Mushtaq, we were slowly weaving our way through the congested, narrow lanes of Old Delhi, making our way to the home of one of Mushtaq's friends. As we passed a row of shops, Mushtaq waved and shouted out, "How are you?" to a young man standing outside one of the stores, who waved back and returned the greeting. As we moved on, Mushtaq told me that this young man, Naresh, a Hindu, was a close friend of his. He and his family had lived in Old Delhi for generations, in their family home close to where Mushtaq lives. During the curfew imposed in Delhi after the riots following the Babri masjid demolition, Naresh's father made the fatal error of looking out of a window to see what the commotion on the street was about, and was hit by a stray police bullet that killed him. Following this incident, Naresh's family sold their house and moved to a predominantly Hindu neighborhood in North Delhi, despite repeated assurances from Mushtaq and others in the neighborhood that Naresh and his family would be safe within the walls of Old Delhi, as they had been for decades.

Hindu fears and anxieties about Muslims also become apparent in less dramatic but more persistent ways that are equally effective in keeping Muslims in ‘Muslim areas’. In interactions with my own extended family and acquaintances, there have been many instances of Hindu landlords refusing to rent to Muslims, Hindus refusing to employ Muslim maids, Hindus complaining about the *azaan* (call for prayer) being broadcast on loudspeakers, or expressing disgust at the way in which Muslims ‘occupy’ public roads to offer prayers. The ultimate denial of the legitimacy of Muslim existence in India comes with Hindus referring to Muslim neighborhoods as ‘mini Pakistans’. As Rowena Robinson writes:

In the brutal communal discourses we have been made to countenance...the Indian Muslim is a Pakistani, a scorned being who should ‘go to Pakistan.’ Indeed, as the social geography of Indian cities manifests, the Muslim in fact lives in Pakistan, *many* Pakistans, *mini* Pakistans (Robinson, 2005, p. 13).

As for the place that Pakistan occupies in the Hindu imaginary, here is a telling anecdote:

We are sitting in infamous Bombay traffic, trying to get to a dinner party, when my father-in-law receives a text message on his mobile phone. It is a ‘joke’ sent by a friend, and it goes like this: Musharraf (erstwhile Pakistani President) has died and gone to Hell. He asks Yamdoot (Hell’s gatekeeper) if he can make a call to Pakistan. When Yamdoot grants him permission, he asks how much the charges will be. Yamdoot replies, “No charges. Hell to Hell calls are free.”

In Old Delhi many Muslims do indeed have links with Pakistan, largely through their ties with family members (often entire branches of a family) who moved there during Partition. These ties are maintained largely through phone calls, emails, and occasional visits, which become especially difficult whenever tensions between India and Pakistan escalate and fewer visas are issued on either side. For instance, Kabir sahab has been to Pakistan only a couple of times, most recently in 1989 to attend his elder sister’s

son's wedding. His visits have been few despite the fact that his entire family, aside from himself and his father (now deceased), live in Pakistan. Zareen, whose family has lived in Old Delhi for generations, also has family in Karachi, Lahore, and other parts of Pakistan, but she has never visited Pakistan. As Aijaz, now in his mid-40s, put it:

In my life the effect (of the 1947 Partition) is that we have been cut off from a section of our family for ever. Family members from both my paternal and maternal grandparents are in Pakistan. But I have not to date been to Pakistan, and none of my close relatives, like my brothers, sisters, or uncles are in Pakistan. There are some relatives, but distant ones. So there isn't a lot of coming and going, but they have visited. They live in Karachi and Lahore.

Among my respondents, those who have visited Pakistan have been struck as much by differences as by similarities, even when the visits have been dominated by socialization with Pakistan-based family members. Thus, on her first visit to Pakistan to attend a cousin's wedding Zeenat traveled by road with cousins, going via Amritsar and stopping more than once on either side of the Indo-Pak border for security checks. On arriving in Lahore, she found that the city reminded her of Delhi, her hometown, while Karachi seemed more like Mumbai. When asked what differences, if any, she noticed in the *mahaul* or social environment in India and in Pakistan, she said, "Yes, it is a little bit different. They're too much into showing off their own selves, you know, not genuine. And a lot of Punjabi effects are there. The way they speak is very different."

It is ironic that during the heyday of the Muslim Mughal Empire, when Old Delhi was the seat of the Emperor, it exemplified Hindu-Muslim coexistence as neighbors, particularly under rulers like Shah Jahan and Bahadur Shah Zafar who employed many Hindus in important positions in their courts and marriage between Mughal emperors and Hindu women was common. Starting as far back as 1857, however, with the British destruction of Mughal Delhi and the way of life it had nurtured and ending with the



exodus of many educated and elite Muslims during the Partition of India in 1947, the spaces in Delhi (indeed in India) where Hindus and Muslims come together have steadily shrunk, and despite the fact that some Hindu areas within Old Delhi continue to thrive (Sitaram Bazaar, for example), in popular perceptions Old Delhi has been reduced to a Muslim ghetto, symbolic of the inability and unwillingness of Muslims to assimilate into mainstream Indian society owing to their intrinsic backwardness and anti-modern sentiments.

One of the most important ways in which Old Delhi's Muslims talk back to such negative representations of their space is by turning, time and again, to a particular past, to the glory days of Delhi during the reign of the Mughals. Fascinated and captivated by Delhi, William Dalrymple writes:

Above all it is the city's relationship with its past which continues to intrigue me: of the great cities of the world, only Rome, Istanbul and Cairo can even begin to rival Delhi for the sheer volume and density of historic remains. Crumbling tomb towers, old mosques or ancient colleges intrude in the most unlikely places, appearing suddenly on roundabouts or in municipal gardens, diverting the road network and obscuring the fairways of the golf course (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 8).

This history is kept alive in the guided tours taken by thousands of foreign and domestic tourists each year, visiting landmarks like the Jama Masjid. It is also kept alive by the average Muslim resident of Old Delhi, who, as I found, is always eager to show one around the old city, takes enormous pride in narrating this heritage and reminisces about this glorious lost past in nostalgia. For instance, Zareen, a young woman whose extended family has lived in Old Delhi for many generations, recalls stories of Old Delhi heard from her paternal grandmother:

Delhi was very neat and clean. There was a bazaar nearby, especially for begums (wives of wealthy nobles) you know, the Meena bazaar. It was much more

beautiful in those times than now. When she tells me, I just try to imagine, lots of begums around, with covered hands, sitting in the dolis (covered palanquins).

This pride in Delhi's rich history also manifests itself in a particular parochialism and regionalism exhibited by some of Old Delhi's Muslims, who would take great pride in telling me that their families were "originally" from Delhi, as distinct from many others who moved to Delhi from other areas of India, especially the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. For instance, while talking about her grandmother's memories of Old Delhi, Zareen made it a point to tell me, "We are originally from Delhi....Since during the British period we are living there." Similarly, Sameena said, "We are from Delhi, original. Our grandfather, and his father - their graves are here, in graveyards towards Azadpur".

It must be mentioned in this context that although the majority of Old Delhi's inhabitants are Muslim, it is by no means an exclusively Muslim area and many Hindus continue to live and work in Old Delhi. For instance, many businesses and stores in the old city are owned and run by Hindus. Walking through particular neighborhoods or streets like Sitaram Bazar or Nayee Sadak (New Street), I would notice several stores selling saris and dress materials that were clearly identifiable as Hindu-owned from their names such as Kapoor Company or M/S Kailash Textiles and many of the store keepers could be identified as Hindu from the *puja tilaks* or sacred marks on their foreheads. In various discourses and representations, Old Delhi is held up by Hindus and Muslims alike as the symbol of a Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb – in other words, as the cradle of a rich culture that results from the confluence of Hindu and Muslim cultures. Famous Hindu Bollywood stars like Akshay Kumar proudly proclaim their roots in Old Delhi and the old city has been the subject of a recent Bollywood film (Delhi 6) that seeks to highlight

the coexistence of and friendships among Hindus and Muslims in Old Delhi as well as the underlying socio-political tensions.

*Who Talks and Who Gets Heard: Delhi's Middle-Class Muslims*

In October 2001, the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama masjid, Ahmad Bukhari, verbally attacked a well known veteran actor in the Bombay film industry and then Rajya Sabha MP, Shabana Azmi, in a popular prime time television talk show aired on the news channel NDTV. In brushing aside Azmi's strong criticism of his call for *jihad*, Imam Bukhari referred to her as a *nachane gane wali* or dancing girl. Following the incident *The Hindu*, a mainstream English language newspaper with a large circulation in North India, published a report titled *Muslims Condemn Shahi Imam's Remarks*, questioning Imam Bukhari's position as the voice of Indian Muslims:

The popular view that the Shahi Imam, Mr. Ahmad Bukhari, speaks for the Muslims of India, is challenged by members of the community itself. The Imam's crude personal attack on the Rajya Sabha MP, Ms. Shabana Azmi, has clerics, women activists and even ordinary members of the community condemning the man and his message. What appears to have particularly irked people is the intemperate use of language and Mr. Bukhari's penchant to appropriate for himself the role as the sole spokesperson of the community.... Reacting to the incident, which took place on a TV talk show, the renowned Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan too found the remark distasteful and contrary to the spirit of Islam. "Yeh to na Islam ki zubaan hai na insaniyat ki" (This is neither the language of Islam nor of humanity), said the mild mannered maulana....Mr. Irshad Khan, an engineer turned businessman based in Delhi, told *The Hindu* that the Imam had misrepresented Indian Muslims. "He is a desperate man and every time he says something he gives all Indian Muslims a bad name. He is not the voice of all Muslims," said Mr. Khan (*The Hindu*, October 24, 2001).

The reactions to this incident, as reported in *The Hindu*, point to the fissures within the Muslim community in Delhi, underlining the fact that Indian Muslims must be seen as a differentiated, stratified segment of society rather than a homogenous, well-knit

religious community (e.g. Hasan 1997; Mayer 1981). It also highlights the particular line of fissure that I am interested in – that between those who see themselves as modern, progressive Muslims (like Shabana Azmi) and those who see themselves as the true upholders of the faith, guarding it from potentially corrupting modern influences.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately it is primarily the latter who, having appointed themselves as spokespersons for the entire community of Indian Muslims, hold forth on various ‘Muslim’ issues in the public sphere and further fuel mainstream views of *all* Muslims as being backward and anti-modern.

The multiple ways in which world religions have refigured themselves in response to modernity has been the subject of academic debate (e.g. Hefner 1998), but Islam’s encounter with modernity has been analyzed primarily through new Islamic movements and the multiple authoritative discourses, generated by saints (Sufis), religious clerics (*ulama*), and lay preachers, which such encounters have given rise to (e.g. Werbner, 1996, p. 103). In this study, however, I have attempted to make audible the voices of middle-class Muslims who are not religious authorities or experts, nor part of any organized Islamist movements, as they attempt through their everyday practices and discourses to make sense of intersecting histories, memories, and experiences of being Muslim, particularly in the context of their encounter with Western modernity, in contrast to which Muslims are persistently constructed as the quintessential ‘other’. I have focused in particular on urban, middle-class Muslims, because of the special role played by the middle class in India’s encounter with modernity.

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<sup>8</sup> Given her celebrity status as a film star, Shabana Azmi is certainly not a middle-class Muslim, but she embodies many of the values and traits cherished by the middle class Muslims who are the focus of this study. My informants, like Azmi, are urban, fluent in English, but also steeped in the Urdu language and culture (Azmi’s father was a well known Urdu poet and she is married to one of the most sought after lyricists in the country).

*Modern India and the Middle-Class*

To facilitate administration of India, British colonialists, following Lord Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education, sought to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (quoted in Varma, 1998, p. 2). By making English education crucial to securing employment in government administrative positions and in the legal professions, this colonial policy created an English speaking Indian middle-class that drew its membership primarily from families which had traditionally been employed in the government services (Varma, 1998, p. 4).

The Indian National Congress, formed in 1885, also drew its membership largely from these English educated upper and middle-classes that aimed not to challenge British rule but to create a space for negotiations with their British rulers. Nehru, who himself belonged to this class, recalls the 1912 Congress session as being, "very much an English- knowing upper-class affair where morning coats and well pressed trousers were greatly in evidence" (Varma, 1998, p. 8). Despite mass involvement following Gandhi's lead, the leadership of the nationalist movement remained very much in the hands of the English educated middle-class which wielded enormous influence even though it was small in numerical terms.

In an overt romanticization of tradition, Nehru finds in the "masses" of village India "a certain stability and potential strength", which he attributes to "the old Indian cultural tradition that was still retained by them in a small measure" (Nehru, 2004, p. 50). He goes on to contrast these masses with the urban middle -classes, of which he is both a member and a forceful critic. He describes the middle-classes as only superficially

modern and too much a product of British rule to challenge and overthrow it. Yet, Nehru admits that it is the educated, urban middle-class that he looks to for leadership, and it is this class which wholeheartedly supports and carries forward Nehru's particular vision of a modern India. Indeed, in post-colonial India, civil society is "the metropolitan (versus the provincial), the English speaking and reading (versus the vernacular), and the religiously neutral or 'secular' (versus the 'fundamentalist')" (Srivastava, 1998, p. 2).

Estimates of the size of the Indian middle-class vary enormously, ranging from tens of millions to 250 million (Fernandes, 2006). In contrast to both proponents and critics of liberalization who have viewed the middle class in its entirety as a force of consumption benefiting uniformly from the economic changes ushered in by globalization, Fernandes emphasizes that the middle class is internally differentiated in terms of economic abilities and "internal social hierarchies such as caste, region, religion, and language" (Fernandes, 2006, p. xviii). Economic liberalization in India since the 1990s has led to the emergence of a "new Indian middle class" and "its newness refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claims to the benefits of liberalization" (Fernandes, 2006, p. xviii).

Many of the internal differences of the Indian middle-class are salient among middle-class Muslims in Delhi. Thus, while middle-class Muslims in Delhi may certainly be defined like other middle-class Indians by consumption habits and abilities, there are significant differences among them in terms of financial capacities ranging from Farhan who draws a large salary as an employee of a well known television station, Mushtaq whose earnings from his small catering business are unpredictable and vary seasonally (greater incomes during times of the year when there tend to be more weddings for

instance), Mohsin who draws a regular but modest salary as a college professor, Kabir sahab whose income has shrunk considerably since he retired from his job as a professor, and Saba who is a widow and a mother of four with no income and is supported by her siblings whose joint contributions form her safety net. In terms of social differences too the Muslim middle-class is segmented by regional ties and caste differences. Thus many respondents would often take care to point out that they are “original Dilli-walas” or those whose have always resided in Delhi as opposed to those who have migrated to Delhi from other parts of India, mainly from the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). They would go on to draw specific contrasts between the refined Delhi Urdu used by them in contrast to the more crude diction of the UP-walas, as well as pointing to differences in cuisine, rituals etc. While caste differences are less salient in the everyday context in an urban setting like Delhi, awareness of caste differences continues to persist and they often come to the forefront during specific live events like marriages. For example, Ayesha mentioned that at the time of her marriage her husband’s family had expressed some hesitation stemming from their anxiety that they might unknowingly do something to offend Ayesha’s family who belonged to the higher Sayyed caste.

Among my respondents only a few belong to the new Indian middle class, as defined by Fernandes, while the majority belong to a larger middle and lower-middle-class whose members have moderate incomes from steady white-collar jobs or from small self-run businesses. However, as Fernandes points out, given the internal diversity of the Indian-middle class “the identity of the new Indian middle class provides a kind of normative standard to which this larger group can aspire” (Fernandes, 2006, p. xix). Thus, while Farhan is confidently part of the new middle-class due to his media sector

job and fluency in English, Mohsin aspires to be part of this new middle class largely through the hopes he places in his sons for whom he has ensured education in elite English-medium schools. The possibilities for inclusion in the new middle class produces both hope and frustration stemming from the gaps “between lived realities of the middle class or upwardly mobile social groups and the idealized representations of the new middle class” (Fernandes 2006: xix). While some markers of middle-class identity such as education (high school, college and beyond) and familiarity with the English language (an absolute must for admission to middle-class status in India) are valued and actively acquired, others such as private sector employment are more difficult to access for Muslims in Delhi<sup>9</sup>. New desires as well as new anxieties were evident among the middle-class Muslims I interacted with, expressed for instance in the desire on Firoza’s part to buy a microwave oven or Zareen’s decision to have her waist-length thick black hair cut into a stylish short bob, along with the numerous complaints I heard about the increasing number of car and two wheeler owners on the already congested roads of Old Delhi or the undesirable influence of television soaps in shaping a more flashy culture of consumption in the old city. Whatever anxieties the culture of consumption associated with images of the new middle class may produce, for many of my respondents, middle-class status also provides a certain bourgeois respectability and a possibility for inclusion in the new and rapidly progressing India within which they face exclusion in so many ways. Thus, inclusion in the middle-class and particularly in the new Indian middle-class

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<sup>9</sup> The Indian government has recently instructed the private sector to improve workplace diversity voluntarily as it attempts to lay the groundwork for implementing the diversity index which is one of the key recommendations of the Sachar Committee (*Hindustan Times*, July 15, 2009). The Sachar Committee report published in 2007 stated that “Muslims are among the most deprived of India’s social groups and communities and their social, occupational and economic profile is appalling. Marginalization, discrimination, violence and social exclusion have further depressed Muslim aspirations and pushed down levels of achievement” (Hasan 2008).



is not taken for granted by most of them but often acquired painstakingly, through much effort and held on to tenaciously.

*Looking Back at Myself in the Field*

Although I worked with South Asian Sunni Muslims in both New York City and Old Delhi, my experiences of doing fieldwork in these two sites were, not surprisingly, very different from one another. These differences have as much to do with how I was perceived differently in the two cities, as with the very air in the cities at the times I was there. When I began my year long fieldwork, in 2003, New York was still a city recently recovering from the trauma of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the people I was trying to get to know - South Asian Muslims, especially men - felt particularly vulnerable as potential targets of suspicion and surveillance, interrogations and deportations. Plagued by anxiety, but also often in denial of the effects of 9/11 on their own lives, the reactions of South Asian Muslim men were not far removed from those of Changez, the narrator and central character in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly I wanted to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream...

I ignored as best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. I reasoned that these stories were mostly untrue; the few with some basis in fact were almost certainly being exaggerated; and besides, those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year (Hamid, 2007, p. 93).

In the aftermath of 9/11, as Muslims in the United States attempted, like Changez,

to carry on as usual in circumstances that were extraordinary and distinctly unfavorable to South Asian Muslim men, it is hardly surprising that South Asian notions of hospitality were temporarily suspended and replaced in some cases by outright hostility and suspicion. For instance, when I explained my research agenda and asked the owner of a popular Bangladeshi eatery in Jackson Heights if I could spend some time at his restaurant, helping his staff while I chatted with them, he responded in the negative and explained that my presence would be bad for his business. Then again, in one of the Islamic schools I worked in, I was able to sit in on classes, primarily because the principal had very kindly agreed to it. However, through many small instances it became clear to me that my presence in the classrooms was not welcome by all the teachers, such as when a teacher would casually ask me why I was in her class and not in some other class. But no one made his or her displeasure as evident as did the Koran teacher, an elderly gentleman from Bangladesh. I was in the fifth grade class one day when he walked in to teach. He saw me and without any greeting asked, "Oh, you're still here! You haven't finished yet? How many more days will you need?" I smiled, "I'll need a few more days." Rather abruptly, he pointed to the note book on my desk and said, "Why don't you read me some lines from what you write in there?" I was taken aback but managed to mumble, "Oh, you can read it yourself" and handed him my notebook. He took it to his table, pored over it for a few minutes and said that he could not understand what I had written. I apologized for my bad handwriting. He insisted that I read him a few lines. So I walked over to his table, explained that I was just writing down whatever was happening in the classroom, and read aloud a few disjointed sentences. He nodded and asked, "What are these numbers for?" I explained that they were numbers written on

the blackboard during the mathematics class. Finally he was satisfied enough to let me return to my chair and stay on in the class.

Like New Yorkers, Delhi-ites have had their share of traumatic events such as the anti-Sikh riots that brought the city to a halt in 1984 and the more recent terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament located in the heart of New Delhi. None of this, however, seemed to dampen the spirit of hospitality that Old Delhi's Muslims take great pride in. Newly arrived from my experience in New York, I was overwhelmed as, time and again, families opened their homes to me, fed me and fussed over me, and shared their life stories and experiences with me. While it is understandable that a city that had recently undergone a trauma on the scale of 9/11 and a group that felt itself to be under suspicion would be less receptive to a nosy anthropologist, the differences in my experience in the two cities with groups that are very similar in many ways calls for further reflection.

The differences stem, I argue, not simply from events outside of me and beyond my control, but also from my own different positions in relation to Muslims in Old Delhi and those in New York. In New York, most of my informants were people whom I approached on my own, without introductions from anyone, making it more difficult for people to trust me immediately, especially at a time when the air in the city was vitiated by deep suspicions about Muslims or those who were mistakenly thought to be Muslims (such as Sikhs in turbans). Interestingly, in more than one instance, I found the surveillance that Muslims were chafing under turned upon me by the very people whose stories I was trying to hear. Thus, the first time I met Rafiq *bhai* (brother) and explained to him that I would like to help out at his grocery store, if he would allow me to spend time there, he asked me to come back the next day with my passport and other documents

proving that I was in the U.S. legally.

In Old Delhi, in contrast, my first contact was with Mohsin, a college professor, to whom I was introduced by one of his colleagues. Subsequently, Mohsin and his brother personally introduced me to their large network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances in Old Delhi, often accompanying me on first visits to a family home. These people in turn introduced me to others in the community, so that almost everyone I met knew me from the first moment as a friend of someone they already had a relationship with. This made it much easier for them to open up to me, and for us to build, over the months, relations based on trust, warmth, and friendship.

Other important factors shaping my experiences were my class position and status as a graduate student at an American University. In Old Delhi, my middle-class family background, my education and fluency in English, and most importantly my association with America instantly made me a person of some consequence. This is not to indicate that those who welcomed me into their homes did so with any expectations of profiting from the interaction, but simply that my class, education, and American connection made me a more interesting person in the eyes of those I was meeting. In New York, although my education clearly marked me as belonging to the middle class, I was also a recent immigrant and a student and, therefore, clearly not someone to whom too much importance was attached.

*“You’re Just Like Us!”*

Given the tense environment in New York City following the events of 9/11, my access to South Asian Muslim spaces and people was greatly facilitated by my own identity as a South Asian. Thus, awkward first conversations would often turn into long

chat and chai sessions covering a range of topics that had little to do with my research, but this would contribute immensely to creating a relationship based on familiarity with and attachment to shared cultural symbols, such as silk saris, Hindi films, Tagore's songs, this or that Calcutta street, kebabs and fish curries, occasional lapses into Hindi or Bengali. Thus, for instance, teachers from Bangladesh who were initially hostile towards my presence in their classrooms would soften their stance, when they realized that I was Bengali and could talk fluently in Bengali.

In the tense environment of New York City, being a woman also proved to be an advantage. This was not only because I had greater access to women, but also because men, especially beyond a first meeting, were less suspicious of my intentions and less inclined to consider me as a possible covert government agent of some sort. In Delhi too, it was undoubtedly my gender that gave me access to women, even within the most private domestic spaces, as I quickly moved from being a 'foreign' researcher and object of curiosity to someone who was *Arpita baaaji* (sister) to the children in the family, as well as someone who made others (especially women) feel important as they were both surprised and flattered by the idea that they had things to say that were of interest to me.

#### *Representation and Responsibility*

Like Rowena Robinson, I have attempted to "create the space to talk about Muslims" (Robinson, 2005, p. 23), and, more significantly, to listen to what they have to say and also what they do not or cannot say, particularly middle-class Muslims in Delhi and New York whose voices are rarely heard in the public sphere—whether in mainstream media or in scholarly literature. Talking and listening to the many different people who crossed my path and chose to stop for a while, I did not always agree with what I heard

and, indeed, did not always understand what I was told, but I hope that in my interactions and in my writing I have succeeded in always being a “sincere” ethnographer in the sense of the term used by Jackson (2005).

In writing about what I saw and heard, I have followed closely the idea that “all knowledge is interpretation, and that interpretation must be self-conscious in its methods and its aims if it is to be vigilant and humane, if it is also to arrive at knowledge” (Said, 1997, p. 172). Like Said, I believe that precisely because Muslims today are the object of misrepresentation, those of us who study Muslims must be willing to make the choice of using our research and our writing to formulate forceful critiques of discourses that emanate from and serve the interests of power.

CHAPTER 2: MODERN INDIA AND THE BACKWARD MUSLIM

*Can the designation of something or some group as non- or pre-modern ever be anything but a gesture of the powerful?*

(Chakrabarty, 2002, p. xix)

If the figure of the Indian Muslim is characterized as steeped in religion and anti-modern, and vilified on those grounds as always suspect regarding their loyalties to the modern Indian nation-state, then what defines this Indian modernity? The meanings of what it is to be modern have shifted in non-linear ways from colonialism through independence and the Nehruvian era, followed by the economic liberalization of the 1980s, to the present day India that is glitzy, glamorous, confident, and hopeful, yet ridden with contradictions. In the following pages, I shall trace the contours of this changing modern in terms of which Indian Muslims are always characterized as a lack.

*Colonialism and the Modern Indian*

As Chakrabarty (1996) has pointed out, if Europe or the West is today universally perceived as the seat of the modern then this is made possible only through a long history of colonialism and violence within which narratives of a modern Europe play a crucial role. A European modernity defined by the nation-state and citizenship has long been posited as the end of all history and signifies a condition that post-colonial states should aspire to and attempt to catch up with. With such a modern in view, the Indian—like the colonized elsewhere (Fanon, 1968)—was always defined as a figure of lack by British colonialists, and later in the nationalist imaginary as well (Chakrabarty, 2000). Crucial to imperialist ideology was the idea that the native could never adequately be a modern citizen. As Chatterjee (1993) has shown, Indian nationalists in turn projected these

inadequacies on to the subaltern classes. Nationalist reformers like Rammohun Roy and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay thus saw British rule as a period of learning for Indians, and for colonized Indians becoming a modern individual was to become a European (Chakrabarty, 2000).

### *Nehru and Modern India*

Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first prime minister, is generally held to be the architect of India as a modern, secular, and democratic state. However, in his epic work *Discovery of India*, although expressing a deep faith in the vitality of Indian culture in several instances, Nehru expresses skepticism about Western modernity and criticizes his own inability to know India on her own terms rather than through the West:

India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India? I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage? There was a great deal that had to be scrapped; but surely India could not have been what she undoubtedly was, and could not have continued a cultured existence for thousands of years, if she had not possessed something very vital and enduring, something that was worthwhile. (Nehru, 2004, p. 41)

Despite such doubts, Nehru's firm belief in the project of modernity and the making of a modern India, as a worthy and desirable goal, was shaped, as for many others of his generation, through his complex experiences as a colonized subject raised in British colonial India and educated in England, at Harrow and Cambridge. Nehru's idea of modernity was, thus, crucially shaped by such elements as an emphasis on a scientific approach, secularism, and democracy. Following Nehru's lead and encouraged by the discourse of development economics, Indian intellectuals sought to replicate the



processes of secularization, industrialization, and institutionalized democracy that had unfolded in the West (Khilnani, 2004, p. 65).

### *Science and Technology*

Nehru attributed India's 'decay' and her 'falling behind Europe' to a lack of scientific and technological progress. He was impatient with what he identified as an Indian tendency to attempt to understand the universe through religion and championed, instead, a scientific and objective approach even while admitting the limits of such a position: "I realize that there can be no such thing as true objectiveness. If the subjective element is unavoidable and inevitable, it should be conditioned as far as possible by the scientific method." (Nehru, 2004, p. 16)

With his emphasis on a scientific and rational outlook, Nehru's economic policy making drew heavily on the expertise of scientists and economists who formed the core of the powerful Planning Commission set up in 1950. The main thrust of economic policy in the Nehruvian era, designed to enable India to step into modernity, consisted of state directed and regulated development of heavy industry, isolated from international competition through state protection. Moreover, as Khilnani (2004) points out, Nehru saw both economic development and democracy as central to modernity so that economic development was not only about growth but also about economic and social redistribution.

### *Secularism*

For Nehru, secularism both as a temperament and as state policy was central to the project of becoming modern, since religion belonged to the domain of magic and

superstition rather than science:

Religion, as I saw it practiced, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism, or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural. Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief.... It had given a set of values to human life, and though some of these values had no application today, or were even harmful, others were still the foundation of morality and ethics (Nehru, 2004, p. 13).

Critical of the hold of religion and yet unable to reject it completely, Nehru advocated that religion should be confined strictly to the private domain while stressing the equality of all religions in the eyes of the state. Thus, while secularism in its Western incarnation denotes the separation of religion from public life and its relegation to the private sphere, Nehruvian secularism denotes equal respect for all religions. Secularism understood in this latter sense, and enshrined in the Indian constitution, was crucial to promoting peace and integration in the aftermath of the horrific violence of Partition.

In more recent times, the ideal of secularism has been threatened by the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India and its usefulness or adequacy has come to be questioned by some Indian scholars, such as Ashis Nandy who describes himself as an "anti-secularist" since "the ideology and politics of secularism have more or less exhausted their possibilities" (Nandy, 1998, p. 326). Others (e.g. Chatterjee, 1998) have argued that the ideal of secularism continues to be as central to the project of democracy, in contemporary India, as it was in the initial decades after independence. Historian Mushirul Hasan has also specifically rejected the view that secularism is a foreign concept, imposed on the Indian masses by westernized elite leaders, arguing that those

who deny the significance of secularism in India “are blind to the fact that millions of poor and illiterate Indians nursed both democratic and secular aspirations” (Hasan, 2004, p. 11). As the rise of Hindutva ideology and politics shows, the crisis of secularism in India is not confined to academic debates. Arjun Appadurai links this crisis of secularism to the politics of the 1947 partition of India which “produced a permanent state of war between India and Pakistan; spawned the apparently unsolvable crisis of Kashmir; created an alibi for the identification of India’s Muslim citizens with its major cross-border enemy, Pakistan” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 66).

Numerous conversations with middle-class Muslims in Delhi suggests that while many of them question the secular credentials of particular politicians or political parties and are critical of the manipulation of religious sentiments for vote bank politics, they have not quite given up on secularism as an ideal central to the Indian democracy. Thus Razia, a retired professor of Economics who came to age in Nehru’s India has no doubts about the value of the secularist ideal:

I am convinced that there is a very large group of communal forces (in India), which are very strong, and which are doing their bit. I always say - I’ve repeated this so often to my Pakistani friends and relatives - that we are sitting with our heads high on account of the very small percent of secular Hindus in India. Secularism has really helped and has provided that confidence. I remember, in the ‘60s, when I was just in college, when Jawaharlal Nehru died, we felt suddenly insecure. I had never realized I was going to feel the way I did. This is an experience. This is not something I’m generalizing or I’ve heard about, or which has been written about. I’m talking about my own experience. I suddenly felt that now (after Nehru’s death) anything could happen.

Clearly, for Razia and many others like her, secularism is not, as Nandy claims, a redundant concept but an ideology whose presence or absence has very real consequences for their lives as Muslims in a largely non-Muslim country. Talking about events like the Babri mosque demolition and communal riots in Bombay, Razia’s son Adnan recalled

this period as “the height of insecurity after Partition”. He initially described this as “a tough period for Muslims”, but almost immediately revised his statement to say: “I won’t say that it was a tough period for Muslims. I would say that it was a tough period for secularism, democracy, and constitutionalism in India. And of course the victims were Muslims at that time.” Thus, like Razia, Adnan understands that even if the usefulness of secularism is subject to debate in present day India, it continues to provide an safeguard for minorities like Muslims, so that a “tough period” for secularism is also and inevitably a “tough period for Muslims in India”. Going beyond Muslim interests, Adnan recognizes that divisive communal forces and violence in the name of religion does not simply weaken the secular ideal but threatens the very fabric of democracy in a country like India, which is home not only to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world but also to many other religious minorities.

### *India after Nehru*

In Nehru’s India, large scale state-funded or state-supported projects like the building of dams and steel and power plants were central to the vision of a modern India, extending the promise of transforming India into an “industrial giant” on the world stage (Khilnani, 2004, p. 62). In reality, Nehru’s economic and developmental policies led only to moderate growth but economic stability was also maintained through prudent fiscal management. While this is not the place to narrate the story of how the Indian economy went from moderate growth to economic crisis, suffice it to say that poor fiscal management and stagnation in the state’s productive capacities led to a fiscal crisis in 1991 with the Indian government having foreign exchange reserves to cover two weeks worth of imports (Khilnani, 2004) in place of financial reserves that should be sufficient

to cover at least six months of balance of payments needs, as recommended by economists (Luce, 2007). This moment of fiscal crisis was also a moment of change in economic policies, and the introduction of new measures centering on trade and industry (e.g. relaxation of state restrictions on imports and restrictions on foreign investment in India) with economic liberalization becoming the new buzz word. While change came fitfully, today India's gross domestic product is rising by 7.5 per cent a year and the level of investment has gone up from 25 per cent of the GDP in 2002-03 to 40 per cent of the GDP in 2006-07. India's foreign reserves today exceed \$ 140 billion compared to just \$1 billion in 1991, and the number of people living below the poverty line has fallen from 36 per cent of India's population in 1991 to 22 per cent of the population in 2007 (Tharoor, 2007, p. 6). As Tharoor points out, 22 percent is still 250 million people living in wretchedly poor conditions so there remains much work to be done, but the economic liberalization of India since the early nineties has undeniably brought about significant changes in the lives of Indians and in particular for the upper- and middle-class urban Indian. With economic changes, there have been changes in the lifestyle and consumption habits of upwardly mobile urban Indians, and while some of the earlier symbols of modernity have remained in place (such as fluency in the English language and college education) other new symbols have been added to the list, as for instance the IT industry which has become the global symbol of a modern India.

*Muslims: The Quintessential Non-moderns*

*Musalman ke do hi sthaan, Pakistan ya kabristan* (Muslims can be in only two places, Pakistan or the grave) - this was one of the slogans widely used during anti-Muslim violence following the Babri masjid demolition (1992) and during the Gujarat

pogrom (2002) and it places Muslims unambiguously outside the Indian nation-state (Pandey, 2006). In this section I take a closer look at various discourses in their histories and contemporary forms as they work to exclude Muslims from the body of the Indian nation. I argue that each of these related discourses feed into and shape a larger narrative of Muslims as non-modern or anti-modern and hence unsuitable to be citizens of a modern secular democracy.

*Muslims as a Civilizational 'Other'*

Islam arrived in India through conquest as in northern India, as well as through trade connections, as for instance, in the southern Malabar coast. Muslims ruled over India for thousands of years through various dynasties and left behind a vast legacy, the imprints of which can be seen today in India's culture, architecture, cuisine, etc. Needless to say, the coming of Islam and the years of Mughal rule transformed India in numerous and fascinating ways and produced wonderfully rich, syncretic cultures, a good example of which is the way in which Sufism flourished in India. In this section, however, I want to direct our attention to the way in which this period in India's history is remembered and represented by Indologist scholars and by the ideologues of Hindutva, such that Hindus and Muslims are represented as two distinctly different and incompatible civilizations.

Peter van der Veer shows how Indian Indologists, taking the lead from the works of German Orientalist scholars like Max Muller, produced critical editions of Hindu epics and Puranas to serve as the basis for constructing a national past that was Hindu and effectively excluded the Muslim presence in India's past (van der Veer, 1999). Such constructions of Islam and Muslims as a civilizational 'other', produced in the colonial

context through the consolidation of discrete and fixed ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ identities, were taken up by Hindu nationalist ideologues and have persisted, albeit in new forms in post-colonial India, reinforced particularly by the Hindu right-wing (e.g. Goel, 1983; Golwalkar, 1980). The Hindutva movement has drawn selectively “on the historiography of the past two centuries” as part of its “modern search for an imagined Hindu identity from the past” (Thapar, 2000, p. 966), which becomes the basis for a new history of India as a Hindu nation. Such constructions of an exclusively Hindu national past are crucial to placing Muslims outside the Indian nation-state. Similar narratives place Muslims outside Europe through positing an “essential civilization-al difference” between Muslims and the West, such that Muslims “may be *in* Europe but are not *of* it” (Asad, 2000, p. 14), their very adherence to Islam making it impossible for them to be *of* the West.<sup>10</sup>

As Charu Gupta (2001) has pointed out, Hindu and Muslim identities were not created only by the British. Divisions between Hindus and Muslims had long been present, in the form of the purity-pollution rules of the caste system and specific restrictions regarding marriage for instance. These identities were not all-embracing or fixed over time, however, and Hindus and Muslims shared many activities and spaces in the public realm while remaining segregated in the private realm in the medieval period. However, in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century colonial India, British colonial policies as well as the efforts of some Hindu publicists ensured that the public sharing between Hindus and Muslims came to be severely curtailed and “there increasingly arose sharper and broader categories that encompassed all Hindus and Muslims by definition”

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<sup>10</sup> The notion that Hindus and Muslims constitute two distinct and incompatible civilizations has also been articulated by Muslims in India at different historical junctures and for different strategic purposes. For instance, when Jinnah publicly made a case for partition and proclaimed the two nation theory in 1940, he clearly stated that Hindus and Muslims belonged not only to two different religions but to two different civilizations.

(Gupta, 2001, p. 272).

*Muslims as Conquerors*

The conversion of millions of Indians to Islam has often been explained through stereotypes of Islam as an aggressive religion driven by war and conquest. Some British colonial officials in India, like Sir William Muir, put forward representations of war hungry Arabs and a militant Islam (Muir, 1898) as reasons for vast Muslim conquests in India. Contemporary historians like Eaton (2000) have argued that such explanations reveal more about European colonizers' fears about uprisings of Muslim subjects than about the subjects themselves. They have attempted to provide more historically grounded socio-economic explanations showing, for instance, how in the Bengal and Punjab areas of India the emergence of large Muslim communities beginning in the fourteenth century and continuing through the Mughal period (1526-1858) is related to the settlement of agricultural peasant communities through land grants and through integration into an agrarian social life centered on the mosque and veneration of Sufi saints, as also to the fact that the influence of Hindu values and rigid hierarchies was considerably less in these "frontier societies" (Eaton, 2000).

The reaction of Indian Muslims toward Indian culture was also deeply ambivalent, "ranging from an enthusiastic embrace of Hindu philosophy (for example, by Dara Shikoh, d. 1659) to an outright rejection of Hindus as 'worshippers of idols and cow-dung' (Zia al-Din Barani, d. 1357)" (Eaton 2000: 36). Muslims in India had to contend with accommodating India's rich cultural heritage and the existing Hindu and Buddhist religions and philosophies. While Francis Robinson makes the point that the syncretism of Islam in India is not unique, since all Islamic societies contain a mixture of



local pre-Islamic practice and high Islamic culture (Robinson, 1983), others have noted that “mutual stimulation and synthesis between Islam and Hinduism reached its peak during Mughal rule in India” (Ahmed, 2002, p. 73). This interaction produced far reaching changes in both Islam and in Indian culture, seen today, for instance, in the syncretism between Islam and Hinduism, perhaps best evident in the strong Sufi tradition within Islam in South Asia.

However, in multiple public discourses circulated by a section of Hindus (especially those from the Arya Samaj sect) in colonial India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Muslim rulers were re-presented in a negative light as being immoral, debauched, and corrupt. For instance, a government-authorized history textbook published in the early 1860s contained vivid descriptions or insinuations of immoral conduct by various Muslim rulers of the Khalji dynasty and the Mughal era and these were upheld as truthful portrayals by British officials (Gupta, 2001). Through the vernacular press of the period and various polemical tracts, stories, and essays, such negative representations were extended to Muslim nawabs of the colonial era, all Muslim men in general, as well as to the Prophet and Islam.

In post-colonial India, Muslims have been widely represented as aggressive conquerors, forcibly converting Hindus to Islam and destroying and plundering Hindu temples. For instance, the Qutb Minar and mosque in Delhi that was constructed in three different phases in the twelfth century by Muslim rulers is now an important tourist site receiving thousands of visitors annually. The only ornate elements in this otherwise sparse mosque are columns with Hindu and Jain iconic motifs plundered from temples. As historian Sunil Kumar writes:

The presence of plundered sacred “Hindu” material within a “Muslim” mosque “confirms images of Muslims as conquerors, iconoclasts, fanatics – impressions further reinforced by the Archaeological Survey of India’s tourist literature, which reminds visitors that much of the mosque rests on the plinth of a demolished temple (Kumar, 2002, p. 4).

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly works on the Qutb complex and tourist guides based on them highlight the reuse in the mosque of materials taken from Hindu and Jain temples, suggesting that this was meant to symbolize Muslim victory over an infidel population. So strong was this idea of a conquering, powerful Islam that these historians noted that the mosque was initially known as “Quwwat al-Islam” or the “Might of Islam”, when in fact Kumar points out that this name is not to be found in any inscription within the mosque or in any Sultanate chronicle (Kumar, 2002, p. 9). Both the secular histories of this period—attempted in the 1960s—as well as anthropological interpretations of the 1990s—focusing on the Islamic architectural elements (such as the saracenic arch and the corbelled dome)—adapted by Hindu craftsmen working on the mosque, conclude that the mosque was a celebration of Muslim conquest and power, and an assertion of the “unity”, “cultural uniqueness”, and “superiority” of “Muslims” as distinct from their “Hindu” subjects (Kumar, 2002, p. 12). As Kumar argues, these histories largely ignore the multiple divisions and conflicts *between* Muslim rulers and therefore fail to consider that, as a large congregational mosque, the Qutb was meant to impress Muslims rather than Hindus with the power of one Muslim ruler among other contesting powers, including Sufi saints like Nizam al-Din Awliya, whose charisma threatened the authority of Delhi’s rulers. In ignoring this aspect and stressing the presence of plundered Hindu temple remains in the mosque, historians have reinforced images of Islam as a destructive conquering force—images that have real consequences in

present day India when they are used to justify acts like the destruction of the centuries old Babri masjid in Ayodhya.

Images of Muslims, as aggressive conquerors bent on destroying Hindu places of worship, are also to be found in school textbooks in India. While this trend has been exacerbated in recent years, with the rise of the Hindu right wing in India, Yoginder Sikand (2003) reports that a survey of text books undertaken by a non-governmental organization reveals that such negative representations are to be found not only in the state level text books prescribed in BJP-ruled states but also in several books recommended by the central ICSE board of education. Sikand cites, as an example, the following paragraph from a history text book for third year B.A. students in the Shiv Sena- ruled state of Maharashtra:

The advent of Islam might have been a boon to the Arabs who got united under its banner and were enthused to carry on conquests in Asia, Africa, and Europe, but it has been a curse for the people outside the Arab world, because wherever the Islamic hordes went, they not only conquered the countries, but also killed millions of people and plundered their homes and places of worship, and, above all, their art works (quoted in Sikand, 2003, p. 20).

Counter representations are also to be found in textbooks used at some madrasas, the traditional centers of Islamic education. For instance, a fourth grade social studies text book taught at the Jamia Hamidia Rizvia madrasa notes the following about the Jama masjid in Varanasi (a city holy to Hindus as well):

This Jama Masjid was built approximately 315 years ago in 1070 hijri (c.1664 C.E.) by the renowned emperor of Hindustan, Alamgir. Hindus claim that it was built by destroying a temple on this site. This is wrong. The foundations of this mosque were laid by the great grandfather of Emperor Alamgir, Akbar, and Alamgir's father, Shah Jahan, had started a madrasa in the mosque in 1048 hijri that was named "Imam-e-Sharifat (from Maulana Abdus Salam's *Geography: District Varanasi*, p.15, quoted in Kumar, 2002, p. 344).

As Nita Kumar argues, while such textbooks used in some madrasas "create a

history and consciousness on questionable premises” (Kumar, 2002, p. 344) they do not or cannot impose their views in a way that majority histories are able to.

### *Colonialism and the Backward Muslim*

British colonization of India following a century of Muslim rule, as indeed the worldwide political hegemony of European colonial powers along with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, meant for many Muslims of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries a crisis of the very notion of *umma* or a worldwide Muslim community. In India, the Mutiny of 1857 is considered to be a defining moment for British-Muslims relations (e.g. Dalrymple, 2007; Robinson, 2004). Till 1857, the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar continued to be regarded by Indians as their legitimate ruler, although his actual powers and authority had been steadily curtailed by the agents of the British East India Company who collected taxes and governed in the Emperor’s name.

Even as late as 1852, the number of Europeans living within the walls of Delhi was so limited that it was common for Delhi’s inhabitants to point out an European when sighted, and the widespread belief that “Englishmen were the product of an illicit union between apes and the women of Sri Lanka (or alternatively between apes and hogs)” led Delhi’s leading theologian, Shah Abdul Aziz, “to issue a *fatwa*<sup>11</sup> ‘expressing his opinion that such a view had no basis in the Koran or the Hadiths and that however oddly the firangis<sup>12</sup> might behave, they were none the less Christians and thus People of the Book” (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 33). In an India that was already changing fast under the British, Delhi, at least partly because of its lack of widespread contact with Europe:

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<sup>11</sup> Fatwa, also spelt as fatwah, is defined as ‘a formal legal opinion or decision of a religious scholar on a matter of Islamic law’ (Armstrong, 2002, p. 204).

<sup>12</sup> Firangis (singular firang) is a term used in India to denote a white foreigner.

...remained a profoundly self-confident place, quite at ease with its own brilliance and the superiority of its *tahzib*, its cultured and polished urbanity. It was a city that had yet to suffer the collapse of self-belief that inevitably comes with the onset of open and unbridled colonialism. (Dalrymple, p. 34)

While many Muslims, including some ulema, were involved in the Mutiny against the British, in some areas Muslims did not participate in the revolt, leading Lord Canning, the then governor-general, to remark that “the Mahomedans have, I think, behaved better than might have been expected....and that the result, far from bringing to light a chronic Mahomedan conspiracy, has been to show that we have not in that class of our subjects that formidable danger that has been sometimes apprehended” (quoted in Hardy, 1972, p. 67). Canning’s view notwithstanding, the Mutiny was seen as a Muslim instigated event and severe British retribution followed, writ large on Muslim bodies and in the destruction of the cities of Delhi and Lucknow, both nodal points of Muslim culture in northern India. As Robinson (2004) notes, many Muslims, particularly in northern India, suffered tremendous losses in the aftermath of the Mutiny and these events forced a new realization among them about the end of Mughal-Muslim power and the reality of British domination. More than the mutiny itself, it is the tragic ending and the ravages and destruction that Old Delhi suffered that is remembered and mourned even today by some of my respondents, especially the older among them. For instance, Riyaz Ahmed, a wiry old man with boundless energy and a ready sense of humor, caught me by surprise when in responding to my questions about Old Delhi his eyes welled up with tears and his voice shook as he told me that nothing was left of the old glory of the city, and if I really wished to understand the nature of the disaster that had befallen Old Delhi I should read the novel *Twilight in Delhi* set in the years just before and following the mutiny and first published in 1940. The depth of emotion that is still generated among

older Muslims, by talk about Delhi after the mutiny, must be understood not only in terms of a loss of Muslim power but a mourning for the passing away of a whole way of life that was intimately tied to and nurtured by the city of Old Delhi itself as it stood at the center of the Mughal era. As the novel's author, Ahmed Ali himself writes in the preface:

My purpose was to depict a phase of our national life and the decay of a whole culture, a particular mode of thought and living, now dead and gone already right before our eyes...Already, since its publication, the Delhi of the novel has changed beyond recognition. For its culture had been nourished and born within the city walls which lie demolished today (Ali, 1966, p. vii).

Muslim responses to British rule in India ranged from resistance to acquiescence. Muslim resistance to British power was expressed in myriad ways, such as through fatwas and resistance to the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries. Many Muslims, however, were in favor of accommodation to British rule, and there are examples of Anglo-Muslim cooperation as for instance through military assistance. Moreover, for some time the British continued with Mughal administrative patterns and Muslims in Bengal and Punjab, for instance, continued to hold lower level judicial and revenue positions well into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While the Muslim landed class suffered in some areas due to changes in land holdings made by the British, in other areas like Uttar Pradesh they continued to exercise considerable power (Hasan, 2004). British-Muslim cooperation is also personified in figures, like Mirza Abu Talib who served as a revenue official. Describing his travels to Europe under Company patronage, Mirza Abu Talib wrote that "the customs, inventions, sciences, and ordinances of Europe, the good effects of which are apparent in their countries, might with great advantage be initiated by Mohammedans" (quoted in Hasan, 2004, p. 87).

As with all power regimes, British colonial rule in India sustained itself not merely through force but also crucially through the manufacture and dissemination of discourses that produced the colonized native as inferior and animal-like, to be uplifted and saved by the colonizer. It is within this field of representations that the figure of the backward Muslim took shape:

Following the introduction of Western education in India by the British colonial government in the first half of the nineteenth century, the figure of the 'backward Muslim', falling behind his Hindu counterpart in educational attainments and hence in employment and influence, became a persistent theme and object of concern of the colonial government and of some Muslim organizations. Subsequently, he has figured as a controversial and contested explanation for the communal divide (Seth, 2001, p. 130).

In the colonial context in India, such constructions were extended to all natives but were attached to Muslims in particular for a number of reasons such as the greater need to denigrate their claims as erstwhile rulers of the Indian subcontinent, as well as due to the long standing perception of Islam as a threat to Christianity.

In keeping with colonial policies of divide and rule, colonial instruments of control such as the survey produced 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as well defined distinct categories of identity (e.g. Sikand, 2005). When British colonialists first introduced elections to provincial legislatures through the Morley-Minto constitutional reforms, in 1909, political representation was given not to territorial constituencies but to Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Parsi religious communities that were identified as the eternal elements of Indian society: "Defined as majorities and minorities, they were shepherded into communal electorates whose interests the British had to protect from one another" (Khilnani, 2004, p. 25). In this context, it is particularly significant that the backward Muslim was defined in relation to his Hindu counterpart rather than in relation to the

British colonizer (Seth, 2001, p. 131).

The most forceful and influential British colonial articulation of Muslim backwardness came from W.W. Hunter, chairman of the Indian Education Commission appointed in 1883. In the reports of the Commission and in his book titled *The Indian Musalman*, published in 1871, Hunter concludes that Muslim educational backwardness was due to the fact that the latter had failed to come to terms with their new status as colonial subjects rather than rulers, and hence were unwilling to comply with the requirements of the colonial rulers, one of which was proficiency in Western education. Moreover, the decline in the importance of Persian and Arabic languages and the secular nature of education imparted in government schools further deterred Muslims from obtaining Western education.

As Seth (2001) points out, the figure of the backward Muslim created a new way of thinking of and being Muslim while also fostering a desire for its opposite - the 'forward' or modern Muslim, particularly among some Muslim elites and organization, such as Sayed Ahmed Khan and the foundation of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. Realization of the end of Mughal power in India triggered different responses among India's Muslims. For instance, Muslim reformers like Hazrat Nanautavi responded by founding institutions like the madrasa of Dar al-Ulum in Deoband in 1866, aimed at protecting and preserving, through education and guidance, Islamic ways of life that were threatened by Western modernity. Others, like Sayed Ahmed Khan, saw the building of closer ties with the British as necessary in order to maintain some degree of Muslim influence and power and embraced the goal of producing modern Muslims, resulting in the Aligarh movement and the founding of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental



College at Aligarh, designed to provide modern, Western education for Muslims. These divides between Islamic modernists and reformers continue to be of great significance in contemporary India as both Aligarh and Deoband, radically different but important centers of learning, continue to be significant symbolic centers for many Muslims in India today.

Despite attempts made by Muslim leaders and educators, like Sir Sayed Ahmed (Aligarh University) and Dr. Zakir Hussain (Jamia Milia Islamia University), to build Muslim centers for modern education, stereotypes of backward Muslims persist in contemporary India. For instance, erstwhile Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as recently as in 2000, in a speech launching schemes for promoting education among Muslims, urged the latter to do away with their educational backwardness, saying, “Education is capital for development and progress....It should not be confined to religious education alone. Minority communities, especially Muslims, should not remain educationally backward.”

#### *Morally Corrupt Muslim Men and Helpless Muslim Women*

Growing up in a largely Hindu middle-class urban environment in Calcutta, I was made aware early on by family members that Muslims are not like ‘us’ because Muslim men take several wives each and have many children, since they refuse to practice family planning as good, modern citizens should. Moreover, Muslim men mistreat their women, force them to wear *burqas*, and keep them at home, depriving them of education. Various mainstream discourses in India have, thus, constructed Muslims as backward by pointing to the alleged inferior position of Muslim women and the related constructions of Muslim men as morally corrupt, lustful and therefore dangerous for Hindu women who must be

guarded against them. Such discourses, in making the neglect and abuse of women a 'Muslim' problem, divert attention away from the real plights of women across religious communities in India and also reinforce stereotypes of Muslims as backward, overly religious and, thus, unable to function as responsible citizens in a democracy.

Images of the debauched and lustful Muslim men began to appear and proliferate in late nineteenth century colonial India, in tracts, stories, and essays written by a section of Hindus belonging mainly to the Arya Samaj sect:

Lechery, abduction and conversion were no longer limited to rulers, the Prophet and villains. They were not just extraordinary events or a thing of the 'bad' medieval past. Now, average Muslims were depicted as being involved. The image of the violent and virile Muslim thus gained current significance, strengthening shared prejudices...It was argued that abduction campaigns demonstrated the 'lack of character of Muslim men for they showed scant respect for Hindu women. Muslim virility was seen as uncontrollable, and therefore censured (Gupta, 2001, p. 248).

Importantly, accusations of sexual depravity were leveled not only against Muslims of lower castes and classes but also at educated and well to do Muslim such as Raza Ali, the Deputy Collector of Kanpur, who was accused in 1924 of abducting, seducing, and forcibly converting a Hindu girl (Gupta, 2001, p. 248). Widespread circulation of such characterizations of Muslim men led to public harassment of Muslims, while the portrayal of Hindu women as potential victims enabled new restrictions to be placed on their mobility, and the virility of Hindu men came to center on their ability to defend the honor of Hindu women (Gupta, 2001). As Gupta argues, the construction of Muslims as the absolute 'other' enabled the Hindu middle classes to submerge caste and other social differences in order to then construct a coherent and unified Hindu community. Thus, in this period the separation of Hindu women from Muslim men was of far greater concern to Hindu publicists than the separation of high-caste Hindu women

and low-caste Hindu men, since lower-caste Hindus were much better than any Muslim. However, “even as Hindu publicists were arguing for religious unity, they were doing this by imposing a uniformity based on the universal validity of ‘superior’ upper-caste values and practices” (Gupta, 2001, p. 323).

In post-colonial India, the construction of Muslim men as morally corrupt and irresponsible and Muslim women as weak and in need of protection has come to center on the issue of Muslim Personal Law versus the imposition of a Uniform Civil Code. In the efforts to formulate and implement a Uniform Civil Code, Muslims have been presented as causing the main hindrance because of their insistence on being governed by Muslim Personal Law in matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The issue was brought to national attention with the case of Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman who filed an application against her husband, asking for maintenance of Rs.500 per month, under section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The case reached the Supreme Court, when Shah Bano’s husband, Mohammed Ahmad Khan, contested her claim to monthly maintenance on the grounds that he had already paid the amount due to her in accordance with the norms of Muslim personal law. The Supreme Court upheld the High Court decision that Ahmed Khan was indeed liable to provide maintenance, since section 125 was applicable to him. Various Muslim leaders voiced protest, asserting that in civil matters of family and marriage Muslims must be governed by the laws of the *Shariah*<sup>13</sup> alone.

Without going into further details of the case, I want to emphasize that it became yet another tool used to provide ‘evidence’ that Muslims are religious fundamentalists,

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<sup>13</sup> Shariah refers to the body of Islamic sacred laws derived from the Quran, as well as from the customs and teachings of Prophet Muhammad recorded by his companions.

unwilling to submit to a common law. And rather than focusing on the real issue of how the rights of women could be best protected, the case provided an occasion to berate Muslims for their backwardness by holding up Shah Bano as a symbol of the ill treated Muslim woman. Thus, for instance, in his judgement granting maintenance to Shah Bano, Justice Chandrachud stated specifically the Muslim husband enjoys the privilege of being able to discard his wife whenever he chooses to do and without good reason. As activist Madhu Kishwar points out, statements such as these ignore the fact that women in all communities, and not Muslim women alone, have little legal protection against the whims of their husbands. Moreover, in accusing Muslims of being disloyal to the nation by refusing a Common Civil Code, what is also hidden from view is the assumption that such a common code will be based on the Hindu Personal Law, which, even after being codified and reformed in the 1950s, leaves much to be desired for in providing adequate protection of women's rights. Thus, as Kishwar rightly argues:

When Haryana or Punjab Jats continue the customary practice of karewa marriages (marrying a widow to her late husband's brother), sometimes involving bigamy in defiance of the Hindu Marriage Act, the state governments even support those measures. The Hindu and Sikh Jats are not assumed to be disloyal to the Indian nation by committing bigamy. But a Muslim defending polygamous marriages is seen as threat to national unity – not just as another propagator of gender injustice (Kishwar, 1998, p. 237).

It is crucial to recognize that the systematic othering of Muslim men and women through characterizations of them in various discourses as debauched, licentious, oppressed, and mistreated has been instrumental in making possible the kind of horrific violence directed against them by members of the Sangh, as seen most recently in the 2002 Gujarat massacre. However, it is equally important to note that such discourses did not originate with the Sangh but have a much longer discursive history as traced for

instance by Mahua Sarkar (2008) who shows how:

The nation-centeredness of history as a discipline and the intellectual politics of liberal feminism have together produced Muslim women as the oppressed, mute, backward, and eventually invisible “other” of the normative modern (read conscious and/or rights bearing, Hindu/liberal, citizen/feminist) subject within the written history of colonial Bengal, even when they (Muslim women) exercised all kinds of agency – whether as subjects who should have been easily recuperable within the terms of nationalist or feminist accounts or as subjects who refused the lures of a modernity that exceeded the limits of their comfort or perceived abilities (Sarkar, 2008, p. 2).

*Suspect Citizens in Post-colonial India*

In the terms of mainstream Hindu discourses Indian Muslims are not and cannot be modern, not merely due to their backwardness in education or the ill treatment of their women but also because of their inability to place loyalty to the Indian nation over and above their unusually strong attachment to the religious community of Islam. Starting from the critical event of the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Muslims who remained in India have been suspect citizens, accused of harboring greater allegiances to the Muslim nation-state of Pakistan rather than to the Indian nation-state.

*The Partition of 1947*

*Partition is the unspeakable sadness at the heart of the idea of India: a memento mori that what made India possible also profoundly diminished the integral value of the idea. It conceded something essential in the nationalist vision, the conviction that what defined India was its extraordinary capacity to accumulate and live with differences.*

(Khilnani, 1997, p. 202)

India’s independence from British colonial rule in 1947 was accompanied by the Partition of India, which entailed the division of the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal to create the new, independent nation-state of Pakistan for Muslims, resulting in the separation of families and the mass scale migrations of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims (Pandey, 2001). As Khilnani notes, “To the departing British the religious

sentiments of the subcontinent were backward and superstitious; yet these were the very principles used to create two modern nations” (Khilnani, 1997, p. 199).

Studies of the roots and effects of Partition in specific regions within undivided India (e.g. Bengal: Chatterjee, 1995; Punjab: Jalal, 1998) have shown why and how the two-nation theory and a powerful campaign for a Muslim state emerged. Some have traced the beginnings of Muslim separatist politics to the Aligarh movement headed by Sayed Ahmed Khan and supported by Muslim elites who felt threatened by British educational policies, bureaucratic reforms, and powerful Hindu revivalist campaigns (Hasan, 2001). Colonial policies, in keeping with the divide and rule policy, also actively fostered separatist politics and communalism (e.g., Chandra, 1984; Pandey, 1990; Freitag, 1989). However, the transformation of separatist politics into a demand for a separate Islamic nation-state did not occur until much later, with Mohammed Ali Jinnah publicly propounding his two nation theory and the demand for partition and Pakistan only in 1940 in his Presidential Address of the Muslim League session at Lahore.

This call for a separate Muslim homeland did not however find support among all Muslims, such as Muslim members of the Congress, and other Muslim groups like the ulama in the Jamiyat al-ulama, the Shias, the Khudai Khidmatgars, and the Momins, all of whom, for different reasons, envisioned a united India. For instance, in the presidential lecture at the meeting of the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-I-Hind [The Union of the Ulama of India], delivered by Maulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri at Peshawar in 1927, the Maulana assures his non-Muslim countrymen of the love that Muslims have for India:

The Muslims have as much love for India as any true lover of his country should, and why not, because they have before them the glorious example of their blessed master, the Holy Prophet [may peace and Allah’s blessings be upon him]...Because of the great love that the Holy Prophet had for his land, it is

impossible that a Muslim can be a true Muslim if he does not have love for his country. That is why you should rest assured, Muslims have love for their country [India] (Maulana Kashmiri, 2000, p. 5).

Scholars challenging the idea of Muslim unity fostered by colonial and national narratives have also pointed to the differences and complexities *within* the Muslim League (e.g., Hasan 1997, 2001; Roy 2001), with many Muslim League members expressing unhappiness over the prospect of partition, and others voicing the opinion that the demand for Pakistan was nothing more than a strategic bargaining move on Jinnah's part. Interestingly, this is also the view presented by recent revisionist historiography, in contrast with the orthodox historiography that places responsibility for Partition squarely on the shoulders of Jinnah and the Muslim League. Both traditionalist (e.g. Wolpert, 1984) and revisionist perspectives (e.g. Jalal, 1985) concur that until Jinnah's resignation from the Congress in 1920, both Jinnah and the Muslim League were focused on working *with* the Congress, towards safeguarding the well-being of the Muslim minority within an independent and united India. However, a particular set of historical conditions led to a decline in Jinnah's and the Muslim League's influence in India politics. Jinnah's influence within the Congress was undermined with the rise of Gandhi, and the Muslim League became increasingly irrelevant faced with the increasing influence of Muslim provincial leaders, communalist tendencies in Indian politics following the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, and the collapse of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement in 1922. Jinnah's return to Indian politics after a temporary withdrawal to London was facilitated by the League's need for a leader as well as the British realization of the League's potential as an ally in the post war (World War II) years, particularly given the Congress's confrontational stance towards the British government. Jinnah's

turn to a demand for a separate Muslim homeland is thus explained by revisionist historians (e.g. Roy, 2001), not as an inexplicable and illogical move, but as perfectly consistent with his political goals of safeguarding Muslim minority interests in a united India through a power sharing arrangement with the Congress. The responsibility for the actual outcome of Partition, in the revisionist view, rests with the Congress leadership, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, who too readily accepted Partition as a solution. Indeed, Nehru admitted, in 1960 that “The truth is that we were tired men and we were getting on in years....The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it....” (Mosley, 1961, p. 248).

My aim here is not to judge the accuracy of arguments assigning responsibility for partition but to point to the multiple factors leading to this outcome, the confusions and contradictory feelings it was shrouded in, and the violence it generated. Looking back, it seems that nobody knew exactly what partition would come to mean, such that even political stalwarts like Nehru and Azad appear to have nursed the hope that partition would be a temporary event. At Partition, no one seems to have envisioned the now decades long relations of bitter enmity that India and Pakistan have come to be locked into. Even less expected was the extent and scale of violence between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims that accompanied partition.

While the violence and trauma of partition is revealed eloquently in numerous literary works (e.g. Bhalla, 1994; Hasan, 1995; Hosain, 1992; Manto, 1989; Memon, 1998), historian Gyanendra Pandey is critical of nationalist historiography’s tendency to separate partition and violence through marking such violence as non-narratable, through distancing themselves from the event by focusing on the history of its causes and origins



rather than the event itself, or through localizing the violence in time and space. Pandey emphasizes that for those who underwent the experience, partition *was* violence, arguing that in India and Pakistan, as elsewhere, “violence and community constitute one another” (Pandey, 2001, p. 4). Communal violence and the continuing conflicts between India and Pakistan are perhaps the most lasting legacies of partition.

Partition, for my own and subsequent generations of Indians, is a horrific but distant event, learnt of rather fleetingly from school history textbooks, novels, and sometimes through stories reluctantly told by family elders. The effects of Partition, however, continue to be felt today, particularly in its legacy of violence and increasing divisions among Hindus and Muslims. In terms of more everyday consequences, the large scale migration of Muslims to Pakistan, particularly from among the wealthy and elite sections, led to a decline in the influence of Muslims in the political and public sphere. Moreover, as Parikh notes, “For many Hindus, the creation of Pakistan left a lingering suspicion that Indian Muslims were more attached to Pakistan than to India” (Parikh, 1998, p. 43). Such suspicions are expressed daily, in subtle and overt ways, in many different spheres in India today. For instance, Rowena Robinson writes, “In the north Indian plains, it is common to hear a man going to the toilet...refer to his visit as ‘going to Pakistan’” (Robinson, 2005, p. 13).

In my own fieldwork, the most common accounts of being subject to such suspicions centered around the game of cricket, which when played between the Indian and Pakistani teams becomes a highly charged, volatile event. For instance, Tariq, an energetic, talkative, enterprising man in his mid-30s decided to start his own business in clothing rather than join the small family-run jewelry business. While he lives in a

Muslim dominated section of Old Delhi, Tariq regularly goes into Hindu areas of Old Delhi to buy cloth from Hindu shopkeepers. He told me that he has good relations with all of them but on one occasion he realized how he was viewed primarily as a Muslim when he happened to ask one of the Hindu shopkeepers what the score was in an ongoing one day cricket match between India and Pakistan, and was told that India was losing, followed by the comment that Tariq must therefore be happy. On multiple occasions and across different cities in India, I have heard complaints from Hindus (including members of my middle- class family in Calcutta) that firecrackers are set off and Pakistani flags are waved in celebration in Muslim dominated localities whenever India loses a cricket match with Pakistan. Such complaints almost always end in a questioning of Muslims' loyalty to India, followed by demands that 'they' should go to Pakistan. Faced with such accusations of disloyalty, Muslim responses I encountered ranged from hurt and bewilderment to laughter edged with awkwardness, as when Razia told me that during an India-Pakistan match she and family members would often ask jokingly how "our boys" are playing, meaning the Pakistani cricketers but that it was all in good humor and did not mean anything more.

In an interview with Farhan, who is in his early thirties, he described his first visit to Pakistan and traced his "negative" feelings towards Pakistan to the experiences he had during that visit:

I went Pakistan when I was ten years old. Then I didn't know that Pakistan was once a part of India. I went there in December, and in October Indira Gandhi was murdered. It was my cousin's wedding, and there was music and lots of people. One of my cousins came up to me and said hello. She was five or six years older to me. She must have been fifteen or sixteen. She said, "You know, we celebrated on Indira Gandhi's death." I didn't know how to react. Was it a joke? I had no clue. I didn't know what she was talking about. But she was smiling, and the environment was a happy one, so I just kept smiling. I didn't understand. Then

my uncle asked her, “Why did you do that?” She said, Oh, Indira Gandhi was like this, was like that, and from then started the Indo-Pak thing. I remember cousins who were working then, they must have been twenty-five or more and I was ten. They used to come and bully me, say, “You Hindustanis (Indians) are like this, like that (derogatory remarks). In Hindustan Musalmaans are treated like Biharis, just like Biharis are treated in Delhi<sup>14</sup>. But look at Pakistan, we have so many things, and we will attack you and plant our flag there. They bullied me to the extent that one day I actually locked my room and cried, thinking, why was I born in India, why did my parents stay back? .....I have a very negative space in my heart for that reason. I cannot support Pakistan. For example, I would say that Wasim Akram (Pakistani bowler) is one of my all time favorite bowlers, but I would not join his team, or cheer for his team. I would still want him to lose. It’s like, once you get hurt, that’s it. I have worked hard with my cousins on accepting that there are good things there and bad things here, and whatever. But in my heart I know I would call myself anti-Pakistan.

Arpita: And is that because you disagree with the idea of Pakistan? Or is it just because of the way current relations are?

Farhan: Now, since I’ve read more and I’ve seen what Pakistan is like, and I know more about the world than I did back then, I feel sad for them. Everyone knows that because of politics the Partition happened. Other countries were also divided, but they did pretty well, but Pakistan couldn’t. They still can’t. They’re still living on what I would say the VHP is living on. They have a distorted sense of history, and they are heading towards some unachievable, stupid aim which is maybe to conquer India or something. I mean, they still want that.

Unfortunately, there is little room in mainstream discourses for Muslims to express their views or sentiments about Pakistan, and Indian Muslims continue to be routinely accused, directly or indirectly, of being loyal to Pakistan, particularly at charged moments like India-Pakistan cricket matches, or at times of crisis such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008 when Pakistan is assumed to be the aggressor, when each Muslim neighborhood becomes a mini Pakistan, and each Muslim a potential Pakistani loyalist. Thus Zeenat told me, “In school I was asked why I wasn’t in Pakistan, because I was a Muslim, and why I don’t support the Pakistani team during India-Pak matches”. She stressed that even *friends* said, “Oh, you must be supporting Pakistan”. Following the

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<sup>14</sup> Biharis refers to people from the state of Bihar in eastern India. Bihar is one of the most economically backward states in the country and many migrant laborers go to different parts of India in search of work. Negative representations of Biharis abound in India, such that Biharis are deemed to be corrupt, dirty, criminal, etc.

recent (2008) terrorist attacks in Mumbai, *The Hindustan Times*, a leading national daily carried this report on December 5, 2008, headlined *Insults, Snubs: Muslims Feel 26/11*

*Heat:*

On December 1st, a Class 9 student who wears a headscarf walked in late to class in a prominent Central Delhi convent school. “You Pakistani,” said the teacher. “Excuse me, ma’am, I’m not a Pakistani,” the stunned student replied. The seventeen year old student, requesting anonymity, said she complained to the principal, who was sympathetic. “I was told the teacher would be spoken to,” the student said.

### *The Rise of Hindutva and Communal Violence*

Since the 1980s India has witnessed a steady rise of *Hindutva* or Hindu fundamentalism (e.g., Andersen & Damle, 1987; Basu et al, 1993; Graham, 1990; Sarkar & Butalia, 1995; van der Veer, 1993; Varshney, 1993), with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main Hindu right wing party, along with others like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) continuing to be major players in Indian politics today. As Peter Van der Veer writes, “The term *Hindutva* equates religious and national identity: an Indian is a Hindu – an equation that puts important Indian religious communities, such as Christians and Muslims, outside the nation” (van der Veer, 1994, p. 1).

The roots of Hindutva ideology are commonly traced to the writings of M.S. Golwalkar and Veer Savarkar, both of whom were heavily influenced by German notions of racial purity and race based nationalism. In *We, or our Nationhood Defined* published in 1939, followed by *Bunch of Thoughts* in 1966, Golwalkar elaborates on themes that have come to form the core of Hindutva ideology – Hindus alone are true Indians, Muslims and all other non-Hindus are foreigners, they constitute internal threats and can remain in India only if they live by the terms set by Hindus:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation, and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen's rights (quoted in Varadarajan, 2002, p. 16).

For Savarkar, too, Hindus are the only true Indians because for them alone the country is both “fatherland” and “holy land”, whereas for Muslims and Christians India is only fatherland but their holy land is in Arabia or Palestine. Savarkar goes on to explain that because Muslims are foreign to India, “Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes, are not the children of this soil. Consequently, their names and their outlook smack of a foreign origin” (quoted in Varadarajan, 2002, p. 19). While Golwalkar and Savarkar's engagement with the construction of Hindutva ideology and a Hindu India is explicit and central, it is important to note that the notion that an Indian is a Hindu was implicit in the works of many Hindi literary writers of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial India who often portrayed “Lecherous behaviour, a high sexual appetite, a life of luxury, and religious fanaticism” as “the dominant traits within Muslim characters” (Gupta, 2001, p. 243). Within Hindutva ideology, religion and nationalism are thus “recast as a crusade against Christians and Muslims. At the same time, religion and nation are fused into a single entity whose lifeblood is vindictiveness for alleged past wrongs committed by Muslim rulers” (Sarkar, 2002, p. 7). Since Hindus are united within this framework through their antagonism against non-Hindus, it also serves to elide the caste, class, and gender based inequalities and injustices within Hindus themselves

As historian Gyanendra Pandey writes, “...what we have had in India recently is intolerance, not so much of particular religious practices or beliefs as of the very

existence of people belonging to other religious denominations” (Pandey, 2006, p. 189). Religion-driven violence and riots have plagued independent India (e.g., Akbar, 1991; Brass, 1997; Das, 1990; Engineer, 1984, 1995; Jaffrelot, 1998; Kakar, 1995; Parikh, 1998), most such violent conflicts involving Hindus and Muslims, with the exception of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi (van Dyke, 1996). *The Hindu*, a leading Indian English language newspaper, relayed Amnesty’s criticism of the Indian government’s human rights abuses with regard to religious minorities: “Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, were increasingly targeted for abuse,” the report says, and adds that the Indian authorities “failed to protect the minorities from the communal violence which killed hundreds of people in Gujarat last year” (The Hindu, May 29, 2003). While the particularly venomous anti-Muslim rhetoric of right wing parties makes them stand out, I found among Muslim informants and non-Muslim acquaintances the widely held cynical view, stated as fact, that political parties across the board and not just the BJP or the RSS instigate communal violence to further their own narrow political goals. Indeed, in a study of Hindu-Muslim riots in North India, Paul Brass describes the region as having developed “institutionalized riot systems”, where “communal riots are....undertaken mostly by “specialists” who are ready to be called out on such occasions” (Brass, 1997, p. 9).

Most recently, the two events that have resulted in Hindu-Muslim violent conflict and caused national uproar are the destruction of the Babri masjid in 1992, and the organized riots targeting Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, both events orchestrated by the forces of Hindutva. The destruction of the Babri masjid is described by Mehta & Chatterjee in the following terms:

Situated in the temple town of Ayodhya, the Babri masjid (mosque) was built in 1528 by Mir Baqi, a noble of the Mughal emperor Babur...In 1990 members of “ultra Hindu” organizations, claiming that the *masjid* was built after desecrating an ancient Ram temple, succeeded in partially damaging it by performing *kar seva* (religious work as service). Two years later (6 December 1992) more than two hundred thousand *kar sevaks* (religious workers) congregated at the Babri Masjid and demolished it. This congregation, the result of careful planning, came from every part of India...Following the destruction, mobs of *kar sevaks* in Ayodhya killed Muslim men and children, burned their homes, and damaged mosques...Less than twenty-four hours after the demolition, large parts of India experienced communal violence (Mehta & Chatterjee, 2001, p. 203).

A plethora of works have emerged around the Babri *masjid* (mosque) issue (e.g. Chaturvedi & Chaturvedi, 1996; Gopal, 1991; Mandal, 1993; Mukhopadhyay, 1994; Nandy et al, 1993; Padgaonkar, 1993; van der Veer, 1996). Through a narration of the events, as they unfolded in Ayodhya, culminating in the destruction of the Babri masjid and the riots and enormous destruction of life and property that followed, Nandy, Trivedi, Mayaram & Yagnik (1993) present a vivid portrayal of Hindu nationalism, the role of the Indian state in the development of such religious nationalisms, as well as the resistance to such inter-religious violence that is offered by Hindus and Muslims on the ground.

In Gujarat, on the morning of February 27, 2002, several activists and supporters of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) were traveling aboard the Sabarmati Express train, on their way back from a political ceremony organized to construct a temple to Lord Rama at the site of the destroyed Babri masjid. As the train pulled out of Godhra station, it was stoned by an angry mob and within minutes a coach was burned down, resulting in the deaths of fifty eight passengers. The incident was promptly followed by televised warnings from Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi stating that the culprits would be made to pay and a highly organized pogrom was launched against Muslims in the state. Members of the RSS, BJP, VHP, and Bajrang Dal, equipped with arms, gas cylinders,

transportation, and voters' lists identifying Muslim homes and businesses set about systematically killing Muslims, looting and destroying their property, all with the active help or quiet sanction of the state administration, including the police. By the time the army was belatedly deployed, "over 600 Muslims had been killed (the unofficial death toll today is 2,000), more than 200,000 had been displaced because their homes had been looted and burnt, and Muslim property worth several thousand crores of rupees destroyed" (Varadarajan, 2002, p. 9). The killings were explained by various RSS leaders as a "reaction" to the Godhra incident, and were even touted by VHP leader Praveen Togadia as a "Hindu awakening" (Varadarajan, 2002, p. 23). At a RSS meeting in 2002 a resolution titled "Godhra and After" was adopted in which Muslims were clearly warned that their safety in India would depend on their ability to win the "goodwill" of the majority Hindu community (Varadarajan, 2002, p. 21). Tanika Sarkar (2002) makes the important point that while the Indian electorate has never been overwhelmingly in support of the representatives of Hindutva, events like the Gujarat pogrom are made possible not due to the failures of the state but because of the large scale infiltration and enormous control exerted over the state apparatus and grass roots institutions by members of the Sangh Parivar, so that, for instance, the police refused help or participated in the anti-Muslim violence and hospitals turned away Muslim victims.

Going beyond a simplistic conflict and resistance approach, recent studies have examined how such violence results in the remaking of Muslim identities, spaces, and practices in India (e.g. Das, 1990; Mayaram, 1997; Mehta and Chatterji, 2001; Robinson, 2005). Focusing on what happens after riots and ritual violence, Mehta and Chatterjee (2001) for instance argue that, "What remains after the riot is not a coherent moral and



local world but a multiplicity of fractured communities, each charting, through rehabilitation work, its strategies of survival and coexistence” (2001, p. 202).

Sarkar (2002) predicts that such cycles of violence are likely to continue because they are a “structural necessity” that produces Hindu unity as envisioned by the ideologues of Hindutva:

By producing violence, it holds aloft the threat of Muslim reprisal, terrorism, war. The originary or dominant source of violence is overshadowed by fears of Muslim retaliation to such an extent that further terror against Muslims becomes a perceived necessity in large Hindu circles, especially in places where Muslims have been butchered. For people fear the consequences of the evil that they themselves have done, and, fearing that, they externalize their own deeds as a revengeful Other. As always, the fear of Muslim who have been killed, is embodied in the living figures of terrorists and Pakistanis. Once that living shape becomes available, further violence against Indian Muslims is seen as fully legitimate, entirely necessary, for the Sangh teaches that each Muslim stands in for all possible Muslims. And, so it goes on (Sarkar 2002: 12).

#### *Limited Citizenship*

The Indian Constitution, along with the 1955 Citizenship Act, defines the boundaries of citizenship in India. Despite the tense relations between Hindus and Muslims, in the aftermath of Partition, and despite the apprehensions expressed by some Assembly members, the Constitutional provisions of 1948 adopted an “an inclusive and generous approach towards citizenship, qualifying territorial location with a stress on associational belonging” (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 212), so that Indian citizenship would be extended not only to those who were born on Indian soil but also to those “whose ancestry lay there in the appreciable past” (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 213). As per the provisions of the Constitution therefore, “Members of all communities and other entitled members, including Muslims, living in the Pakistan side of the territory of India, could move into India and claim themselves citizens” (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 213). However, over

the years Indian citizenship has come to be defined more and more narrowly as the prerogative of the majority community which claims to represent the nation. As such citizenship has come to be defined increasingly by descent from parents who are Indian citizens, making it extremely difficult to obtain Indian citizenship through naturalization.

As Rodrigues writes:

In spite of the overriding concern accorded to ethnic ties, judicial pronouncements, by and large, were unfavorable to Muslims with divided families in India and Pakistan. The closure of citizenship in other societies, such as in the UK following the agitation launched by Enoch Powell against Asian migrants, had immediate repercussions in India in not only reinforcing the ethnic slide in considerations of citizenship, but also in fuelling the ethnic divide, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus were ascribed a superior claim on citizenship as compared to other communities as reflected in the pronouncements and slogans of the rising tide of the Hindutva wave of the period. Such a tendency went along with the greatly enhanced role of the central government in shaping citizenship provisions as reflected in the various amendments that were carried out to the Citizenship Act, as well as in the Citizen Rules and Orders. On the whole, India attempted to construct a uniform national identity through its intervention in the demarcation of citizens (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 222).

Thus, the construction of India as a Hindu nation has meant the ascription of superior claims to citizenship on the part of Hindus, leading to a narrowing of understandings of citizenship in India over the years since independence. It is important to note that while such tendencies have taken on a new intensity with the rise of the Hindutva movement, a regressively narrow understanding of citizenship has characterized state policy formulated or endorsed by parties of all political colors (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 235). This becomes evident for instance in the context of new laws like the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). TADA was enacted in 1985, when the Congress was in power, and remained in effect till 1995, while POTA was brought in by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 2002 (Kannabiran, 2004). In both India and the United States the

association of the Muslim with the shadowy figures of the alien, the illegal migrant, the refugee, and the terrorist, have enabled the enactment and enforcement of special laws such as the TADA, POTA and the PATRIOT Act, which have strongly undermined the civil rights and liberties of citizens, and especially of Muslims who have overwhelmingly been the targets of surveillance, arrests, detentions, and deportations. As scholars across disciplines (e.g. Chimni, 2005; Bosniak, 1998) have pointed out, aliens and refugees provide the much needed 'other', against which a modern nation state defines itself. In India, the anxieties of the nation-state around its own identity, in combination with the spread of Hindutva ideology, has led in recent decades to much greater attention towards the 'problem of 'illegal migrants' from Bangladesh, almost all of whom are Muslims. Literally concrete evidence of the anxiety of the Indian state about such 'illegal' migration, is the wall being built for miles along India's eastern border with Bangladesh to prevent the flow of 'illegal' migrants from Bangladesh into India, much like the walls and border patrols at the United States-Mexico border.

Muslims have overwhelmingly been the targets of laws like TADA and POTA (Verma, 2004), both of which have led to the suspension of basic civic liberties and abuse of human rights. Such laws have undermined the rights of citizens through provisions that allow confessions of the accused before a police officer to be admissible as evidence in a court of law, which enables police officers to use torture to obtain signed confessions, which in turn makes it impossible for the accused to obtain bail. Thus, any person accused under these laws may languish for years in jail without a trial, making preventive detention, rather than conviction through evidence, the core strategy used by law enforcers (Gonsalves, 2004).

In March 2004, a People's Tribunal was held in Delhi which heard detailed testimonies by family members of those accused under POTA, as well as lawyers and activists speaking out against POTA, telling of arrest and detention of juveniles, illegal custody, detention, torture, forced confessions, sexual and religious humiliation, encounter killings, and disappearances. One of the issues that the Tribunal sought to address was the 'selective use of the legislation against minority communities' (Verma, 2004, p. 11), given that in Gujarat POTA had been used against Muslims alone (barring one Sikh) and POTA charges had not been leveled against any person involved in the post-Godhra pogrom against Muslims (Verma, 2004, p.19). As testimonies of Muslims at the Tribunal showed, "torture can take very extreme forms where prejudices against the religion and culture of the person work to completely degrade and demonise him or her" (Verma, 2004, p.17).

The Tribunal concluded that the POTA had been widely misused, and called for its repeal. At the time when I was conducting fieldwork in Delhi (2005-2006), the POTA was scheduled to be discontinued but not retroactively, meaning that those who had already been arrested under POTA and were languishing in prison would not benefit from the repeal. Indeed, many victims and activists expressed their cynicism and hopelessness, when they stated, "POTA *jayega toh aur kuch aayega* - even if POTA goes, another draconian law will take its place." (Verma, 2004, p. 12).

As Gonsalves (2004) and others have pointed out, laws like TADA and POTA that are prone to be misused by police officers would not have been received well by the masses had they not already been prepared to think about such measures as necessary for protecting national security interests. One of the primary ways in which this has been

done over the past few decades is through linking national security to the threat of terrorism, as senior police officers appeared on television denouncing the slack approach of the judiciary in dealing with terrorists and politicians held forth on the terrorist threat. For instance, in an address to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, titled *Democracies Against Terrorism: India-U.S. Cooperation*, delivered in 2003 by L. K. Advani, the Deputy Prime Minister of India, described India as being situated in a “tough neighborhood”, referring specifically to Pakistan’s alleged role in spreading terrorism in India:

In spite of being a target of relentless terrorism from across the border, we have once again offered the hand of friendship to Pakistan. We hope that it sincerely implements its own promise of putting a complete halt to cross-border terrorism against India and dismantles the terrorist infrastructure, which it has fostered over many years.” Describing POTA as “a comprehensive piece of legislation, designed specifically to tackle terrorism”, Advani compares it specifically to the US Patriot Act, urges cooperation between India and the U.S. in fighting terrorism, and cites as a model, the Joint Working Group in Countering Terrorism, established by India and the U.S. in early 2000 to facilitate ‘intelligence sharing’.

It is not surprising then that an Amnesty International report on the link between the recent worldwide war on terror and government suspension of civil liberties is critical of the Indian government’s human rights abuses with regard to religious minorities. It faults the India government for “misusing new anti-terrorist laws to target political dissent in areas of armed conflict....It also says that the constitutional right of the minorities in the country to live as equals was increasingly undermined by both government and non-state actors during 2002” (*The Hindu*, May 29, 2003).

### *Muslim Terrorists*

In conversations with urban, educated, middle-class Hindus, I have often heard a connection made, quite casually and confidently, between Muslim poverty or lack of

education and widespread criminal tendencies among Muslims. It is a link that is also made with alarming regularity by state and central administrative officials. Commenting on the communalization of the Gujarat state administration prior to the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2001, Siddarth Varadarajan points, for instance, to the following notice sent in 1999 to all police commissioners and district police officers, by the director general of police (intelligence), in which a close link is posited between Muslim individuals and schools, Pakistanis, and criminal acts like rioting, murder, and smuggling:

You are asked to intimate the details of persons (Muslims) involved in communal riots....how many Darul Ulams (sic) are functioning in your districts and cities....the details of existing Muslim organizations in your district with their address and who are the leaders working for their organizations, their names, addresses, total members, telephone numbers, etc....Please intimate about the numbers of Pakistani nationals in your districts/cities....Please intimate the details of Muslims in your cities who are involved in narcotic and smuggling activities....Please open the dossier of Muslim individuals who are involved in the offence of assault with knives or scissors, rioting and murder with their names and the copy of the same to be sent here...(Varadarajan, 2002, p. 13).

Laws like POTA, especially in the way they are implemented, also point to the overt linkages made in state discourse between Muslims and terrorists. It is a link that has been articulated particularly strongly in relation to cross-border terrorism, where Pakistan and Bangladesh, standing in for Muslim are the suppliers of terrorists and Hindu India the victim of terrorist violence. As Robinson notes, "Categorized as 'Other', taunted as Pakistani if not vilified as terrorist, the Muslim in India today is an anonymous and frightening figure. Fear and anonymity are, of course, crucial to the maintenance of cultures of hostility and violence" (Robinson, 2005, p. 23). Immediately following the train attack in Godhra, for instance, both the Gujarat state and central governments, prior to any investigation, unambiguously stated that this was "a pre-meditated, well planned act of terrorism" by Pakistan's ISI infiltrators or by people influenced by what Gujarat

Chief Minister Narendra Modi called the ‘jihadi mentality’ (Varadarajan, 2002, p. 5).

Although such charges were later retracted they had already served the purpose of casting suspicion on all Muslims, because, in terms of BJP and Sangh Parivar propaganda, Indian Muslims are “disloyal citizens and willing agents of the ISI and Pakistan”, and “words like ‘terrorist’, ‘fanatic’ and ‘fundamentalist’ are subliminal signifiers for Muslims”. In a television program following 9/11, Narendra Modi clearly stated that, “All Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims” (Varadarajan, 2002, p. 7).

Reacting to such charges, Rafiq Zakaria, writing in *The Asian Age*, (an English language newspaper with a small national readership), makes an urgent plea to ‘Stop Distrusting Muslims’:

For the sins of Pakistan, Indian Muslims should not be victimized; they should not be made to feel alienated in their own homeland. Pakistan is sponsoring terrorism against Muslims as well....(Indian Muslims) now regret that their ancestors foolishly helped to bring Pakistan into existence. It has not only brought the greatest disaster on them but all the ignominies to Islam and unbearable social and economic conditions for Muslims men, women and children who are being shunned and isolated in many countries (*The Asian Age*, 9th January, 2003).

Similarly, in the *Milli Gazette*, a newspaper which positions itself as telling the Muslim side of the story, Shakil Ahmed writes that Muslims are being blamed for the misdeeds of others:

The 16 “Muslims fundamentalist” organizations The Pioneer talked about in its April 14, 2002 issue, is nowhere to be found in the list of 99 militant groups the Government of India has given to Bangladesh. Out of the 99 training camps in Bangladesh, which Indian authorities say are run by various insurgent outfits in the north-east, only two are run by a Muslim organization called Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MALTA).... (*The Milli Gazette*, 1-15 Dec, 2002). With the figure of the Muslim terrorist gaining renewed prominence after the

most recent attacks in the Western city of Mumbai in November 2008<sup>15</sup>, Muslims are once again under scrutiny in India, and fearful of a backlash. On March 23, 2009, the *Hindustan Times*, a leading national newspaper, carried a report by Naziya Alvi, headlined ‘Battling Identity Crisis: Azamgarh, Atankgarh (Town of Terrorists)’, which shows how fear has been changing the shape of the lives of young Muslim men from Azamgarh in the state of Uttar Pradesh:

When Mohammed Nasir was five years old, a boy called Ahmed sat across from him in class at the local school in Azamgarh, a small town in eastern Uttar Pradesh... Two decades on, Ahmed is on a fairly long list of Azamgarh natives suspected of terror links. And because Mohammed sat across from him in school all those years ago, the software engineer has quit his job with a multinational in Gurgaon (Delhi) and is now tilling his family’s paddy field back home. Such is the fear of being branded a terrorist for those born in the nursery of terror. “My parents saw Ahmed on TV and panicked,” says Mohammed. “I’m an only son. They didn’t want me picked up as well.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Muslims Claim Citizenship*

To present Muslims as non-modern has been one of the main mechanisms by which they have been placed outside the boundaries of modern, secular democratic nation-states like India and the United States. In other words, having constructed Muslims as essentially anti-modern it then becomes easy to argue that it follows logically that Muslims must also be incapable of being patriotic and loyal to the modern nation-states within which they reside because of their allegiance to the larger transnational community of Muslims or the *umma* or to other Muslim majority nations such as Pakistan or Bangladesh in the case of South Asian Muslims. In contexts such as these, in which

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<sup>15</sup> A group of well armed terrorists, all of them Muslim, attacked and killed several people at various locations in Mumbai, including the busy Victoria Terminus station and two well known hotels in South Mumbai.

<sup>16</sup> Despite its sympathetic tone the report, with its sensationalist language (‘nursery of terror’), juxtaposed with a photograph of Muslim boys reciting from the Quran at a class in an Azamgarh madrasa serves to reinforce stereotypical images of Muslims.



Muslims' loyalties to the nation-state are brought into question, how does the fact of being Muslim shape the experience of being citizens in democracies in which they are highly stigmatized minorities, especially when citizenship is closely tied with national belonging? What empirically grounded tools can their experiences provide us with which to interrogate the very concept of citizenship and what resources can their experiences provide with which to envision a more "inclusive" citizenship (Kabeer, 2005)?

While Muslims in both New York and Delhi turn to the state and the law as guarantors of their rights, they also express acute awareness of the failures of the state in this respect and compel us to look beyond the law as a site for constructions of the citizen. From these perceived failures of the state emerge understandings of citizenship that are more "inclusive" (Kabeer 2005), in the sense that they are based on building relations among citizens rather than between the state and the citizen. Such notions of citizenship are also inclusive, in the very fact that they emerge from groups (Muslims, immigrants) that are treated as suspect citizens. Speaking about the need to "do away with communalism", Razia for instance stressed the role of every ordinary citizen in creating greater "awareness" and told of the following incident in which they brought together Muslims and Hindus in their neighborhood in Delhi and took action to prevent communal violence:

I have a very small example, but a very good example of how it (communal problem) was prevented during the time of the Babri masjid, when Khurana (senior Congress politician) had come and decided to rid this area of all the 'Bangladeshis', which were essentially Muslim slums. There was a group of a few persons among us, which grew into a large group, which was able to go door to door, to convince people, that *bhai* (brother), there is no such problem, we have to get together, and it's our responsibility to not allow this kind of thing to happen. And it grew into an effective movement.

When the Sikh riots happened, they happened here, in New Friend's Colony. And there was a lot of looting going on after that. People were just carrying away

things, because *rich* families had just left their homes and gone. And suddenly we realized that people from here (from her neighborhood) were doing the looting. So it was citizens - no party, no group, just conscious citizens - who came together and said that we are going to see that no one carrying any goods from those areas is allowed to enter this area. And it was prevented.

Arpita: So you were actually out on the roads stopping people?

Razia: Yes, yes. Not me but my husband and many others. There have been witnesses who have said that the police say, I'm looking the other way, you go and loot and run away quickly. But if you don't do it, what will they (police) do? It was prevented here, in a small way, but nonetheless, there was an effort, and it did succeed to a certain extent. And the moment there was a kind of fear that (riots) will happen here, all these people, they came up and told their Hindu brothers, first something will happen to us, and only then to you. How dare anyone come into this area! There are always *others* who come in. But if you're strong, if you're not a coward, if you don't go into your homes, then nothing can happen. How did it happen in Gujarat? It happened because there was no one to help. Everybody was so afraid. That's what happens. Suddenly something happens and you're unable to combat it because you're not prepared.

Razia is thus quite clear that it is responsible citizens and not the state machinery (especially the police), which can make the difference and prevent riots and communal conflict from happening or escalating. Notably, it is the fact of being in the moments of a crisis such as when standing at the edge of a riot that propels Razia, her husband, and other middle-class Muslims in her neighborhood into action to perform their roles as "conscious citizens". Thus, while such critical and often violent events are always a reminder of the precariousness of their own positions as suspect citizens it is also these experiences that open up opportunities to claim their roles and assert their rights as citizens. And if citizenship is one of the primary modes of being modern (Chakrabarty, 2000), then every performance of their roles as conscious citizens is for middle-class Muslims in Delhi also an assertion of their own modernity.

### *Conclusion*

While what it means to be modern in India has itself undergone significant changes, Muslims have since the British colonial era consistently occupied the place of the 'other' in a modern India. Having outlined various discourses that have constructed Muslims as a civilizational 'other', as savage conquerors, as backward, and as suspect citizens, I argue that such discourses, in their cumulative effect, have served to stigmatize Indian Muslims as unfit for inhabiting that most modern of identities, that of citizens of a democratic nation-state.

As the nation-state became idealized and universalized as the most desirable form of political community (Chakrabarty, 2000), the citizen became the most modern identity against which all others were defined as non-modern or anti-modern (Srivastava, 1998, p. 18). Of course, not all of these others are equally non-modern. Some, like Muslims in India, are defined as more anti-modern than others, such that it becomes perfectly plausible to be Hindu and a good, upright citizen of India, but almost impossible to be Muslim and model Indian citizen at the same time.

This study, based on field work in Old Delhi, enters deeply into the everyday lives of middle-class Muslims to understand how they repeatedly come face to face with accusations, overt or subtle, of being non-modern (and its correspondents, like fundamentalist and unpatriotic) simply because they are Muslim. Burdened with such mainstream representations, Indian Muslims have no choice but to engage with them. Myriad responses range from an embracing and internalization of the notion of Muslims as backward, to counter representations that claim modernity as intrinsic to Islam, through arguments such as Islam is modern because it encourages thirst for knowledge,

questioning, and exploration, or the norms of halal and haram are rooted in the most modern scientific understandings of hygiene. Whatever the response, these encounters lead to a continual making and remaking of what it is to be modern and what it is to be Muslim so that neither category emerges through the process intact and unchanged.

### CHAPTER 3: RE-IMAGINING MUSLIM SPACES

#### *Introduction: Beyond the Sacred Word*

Scholars across disciplines have argued that Muslim space is made and defined by the presence of the sacred word and ritual or everyday practices shaped by the sacred word (e.g., Metcalf, 1996). Thus, Arabic utterances like *Bi'smi'llah* (In the name of Allah), Arabic calligraphy of sacred words adorning walls in mosques and homes, and the performance of ritual practices that engage with sacred words, such as recitation of the Quran (Metcalf 1996:5) or chanting the *zikr* or remembrance of Allah (Werbner 1996), make and mark Muslim spaces.

As the quintessential Muslim space within the larger North Indian city of Delhi, the walled city of Old Delhi is certainly defined by the presence of the sacred word and ritual. For instance, no matter where one happens to be in Old Delhi one can hear the *azaan* or call for prayer wafting across the air at given times of the day, sounded from the *Jama masjid* (mosque) and many other mosques in the old city. Walking through the narrow lanes with Mohsin or Mushtaq, we would often be greeted with *salam aleikum* and stop briefly to return the greeting with *aleikum salam*.

However, moving beyond a scholarly emphasis on the centrality of the sacred word and practice and bringing a temporal dimension into the analysis, I argue in this chapter that what makes Old Delhi a quintessential Muslim space has much to do with its rich past as a center of Muslim Mughal power in India, and a history that permeates the old city and provides to it a spatio-temporal depth through many built structures ranging from the grand *Jama masjid* and Red Fort to old *havelis* or mansions (see Goel, 2003). If Old Delhi today is synonymous with Muslim space, it is in large part because built spaces

within the walls of the old city, dating centuries back, allow a journey back in time to an era of Muslim dominance and power.

An overemphasis on the sacred word also leads to inattention to the significance of other kinds of visual and oral cues and senses, like that of smell in marking Old Delhi as a distinctly Muslim space. For instance, during the month of *Ramzaan* when Muslims fast during the day and may eat and drink only before daybreak and at sundown, a watchman responsible for particular *mohallas* (neighborhoods) visits every house in that area, knocks on the doors, and calls out to male members of the household in order to wake everyone in time to eat before dawn and offer the *fajr namaz* or the first prayer of the day. The watchman's calls in the early morning half darkness during the month of Ramzaan, as well as the smell of fragrant biryani<sup>17</sup> filling Firoza's small kitchen, or the smell of smoky kebabs or fish fried in a spicy batter inhaled with pleasure as I walk by cramped restaurants lining the lanes, are, I argue, just as crucial in making Old Delhi a Muslim space as are framed pictures of the Kaba on the wall in Firoza and Mohsin's home.

More importantly, I argue that an over emphasis on the sacred word and practice provides little insight into how Muslim spaces are differently organized and experienced by Muslims themselves, shaped for example by their different class and gender positions. In the first section of this chapter, I shall focus in particular on how Muslim understandings of the modern, formed in the context of mainstream Hindu representations of Muslims as non-modern and backward, shapes the ways in which middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi use and interpret the spaces they inhabit, ranging

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<sup>17</sup> Biryani is a dish prepared with rice, meat and various spices. It is one of the most well known and loved items of Mughal cuisine, and there are many varieties of it prepared and consumed in India today.

from the public spaces of Mecca and the mosque to the innermost domestic spaces. Time and space “as categories of experience and understanding” are overlapping, rather than absolutely different (Madan, 1991), so that the environments in which one lives shape the ways in which time is understood and experienced. In the second half of the chapter, I will show that in contrast to popular stereotypes of a homogenized Muslim everyday shaped centrally by the five prayer times, for middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi the extent to which Islamic time is woven into the secular work day depends on a variety of factors such as an individual’s occupation and age.

### *Mecca and the Mosque*

On one of my trips to India from the United States, I had a stop over at Amsterdam. While walking to my boarding gate at Schipol airport, I passed a large group of Muslim men and women on their way to perform the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are duty bound to perform. As they waited for their flight some of them were offering namaz on prayer mats they had spread on the floor facing in the direction of the Kaaba. For a short while, one small section of Amsterdam airport was transformed into a Muslim space. Or, as many of my informants would explain, Muslims can ritually cleanse themselves, spread a prayer mat, orient themselves in the direction of Mecca, and offer namaaz anywhere - in the home, in a school classroom, on the pavement, or at an airport - precisely because all of the earth is Allah’s creation.

Although many respondents explicitly stated that the earth as a whole is Allah’s creation, and as such sacred, two particular places - the mosque and Mecca (particularly the Kaaba in Mecca) - have come to represent Islam for both Muslims and non-Muslims. A mosque or masjid is a place where one offers namaz or prayers before God, ‘in the

context of canonically fixed movements and verbal repetitions’ (Slyomovics 1996: 205). A pilgrimage to Mecca or the Hajj, undertaken at least once in a lifetime, is one of the five main duties of a Muslim laid out in the Quran. Mecca is also a “transcendent center” (Metcalf 1996) in the direction of which every Muslim must face when he or she prays. In this section, I want to show how these quintessentially Muslim spaces are not uniformly experienced by all Muslims. In the case of middle-class Muslims from Old Delhi, these sacred spaces evoke multiple and sometimes contradictory feelings and actions stemming from their own understandings of themselves as ‘modern’, and, in turn, shape different notions of who is a “real” Muslim (Jackson 2005). Focusing on the narratives of middle-class Muslims, I will show how their complex emotions about the Hajj and the mosque are closely linked to their struggles to be both modern and Muslim in a world where modernity and religion (especially Islam) are seen to be antithetical. This struggle, I argue, crucially shapes middle-class Muslims’ aspirations about and experiences of the Hajj as well as their views and practices regarding the mosque.

### *The Hajj Pilgrimage*

I cannot describe with what feelings I actually pressed my hands against the earth where the great Prophets had trod four thousand years before.

*Malcolm X, on his Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca*

One of the five pillars of the faith, the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca is one that every Muslim ideally should undertake at least once in his or her lifetime. While the Hajj can be undertaken at one particular time of the year, visits to Mecca and other holy landmarks at other times and entailing fewer rituals are known as the Umra. Razia, who undertook the Umra with her husband, described her experience thus:



Razia: We flew from Delhi to Jeddah. From there you have to wear these special clothes. Women just have to have themselves covered, with face and hands uncovered. You can wear any color but you have to cover. Men have to wear white unstitched clothing. It's to remind you that you are going to die and wear something like this when you are buried. So it's a reminder of the end to your life. When you go there, you have to make an intent first and then read namaaz. Then you go to Mecca and make seven rounds of the Kaaba.

Arpita: How long does that take?

Razia: It depends on where you find the place to make the rounds, because the circumference varies immensely from the inner circle to the outer circle. So I chose a time when the rush would have been minimal, and I took a very small circle, seven times. It's still quite a bit. Then you have to do three and a half kilometers between Safa and Marwa, the two hillocks between which Ibrahim's son's maid ran up and down searching for water. So you have to make seven rounds of that and then read the namaaz.

While the act of reading the namaaz, central to both the Umra and Hajj, engages most directly with sacred word, all other activities described by Razia also engage with the sacred tradition in that they symbolically replicate the actions and sufferings of the Prophet and his descendants. It is this set of practices, engaging with the sacred word and traditions, and performed collectively by millions during the Hajj and Umra, that animates Mecca and constantly renews it as a Muslim space of particular significance.

Scholarly analyses of the rituals of Hajj (e.g. Eickelman & Piscatori 1990) as well as first hand accounts of the pilgrimage are available in many different genres. However, relatively little is written about the feelings invoked by the sacred spaces traversed on this journey, perhaps because these are taken to be self-evident given the enormous significance of this transcendent center to Muslims. Most of us have probably seen television images of thousands of Muslims, clothed in white, surrounding the Kaaba in Mecca during Hajj - images that have come to be indelibly associated in our minds with Islam. The power of such media images to unidimensionalize what Mecca and the Hajj mean to Muslims was brought home to me only as I listened to informants talk about

their feelings, desires, plans about the Hajj, and their experiences of performing the Hajj.

Yasmeen, a married woman in her thirties and mother of three, lives with her husband and in-laws in Old Delhi. As Yasmeen and I sat in the relative quiet of an afternoon when all the family members had been fed, the dishes cleared, and the children put down for a nap, the fan whirring lazily over our heads, she told me about her plans for going on the Hajj:

Arpita: Have you been on the Hajj?

Yasmeen: No, I haven't been on the Hajj, but I want to go this year. I have made lots of dua<sup>18</sup> so I may go....My husband and I will go together. The kids will stay here, or with my mother or my sister. Recently my uncle's daughter in law had gone. Believe me, she left her three month old daughter with her sister. And she goes every year. She's done it six times already. So everyone said we should take a lesson from her. A three month old baby who obviously couldn't even feed properly, and still she left her and went. I said it takes a lot of courage to leave her behind and go for forty days.

My parents have already done the Hajj, and so has my sister. And my brother just got married, so this year they too plan to go. It is compulsory for us. Whoever has enough (resources) to be able to go must do so. And it is better to do it early on because it is very strenuous there. They say that the rounds are very long, from down below to the top, so activeness is very necessary there, and if you go at a later age that activeness, that fun, won't be there. My sister went after marriage, when she had just one small son. Her boy was a year old at the time and she left him with our mother. I wasn't married at the time, so I looked after him. She used to cry a lot when she called and said that she kept thinking about her son. It is so far away.

Yasmeen's view of the Hajj as "compulsory" for all Muslims is shared by many of the middle-class Muslims in Delhi I talked with. However, Yasmeen is not only a duty bound Muslim for whom the undertaking of Hajj is "compulsory", but also a caring mother, anxious about leaving her children in the care of others when she goes on the Hajj. This does not in any way diminish the significance of the Hajj, but shows that it is precisely because of its overwhelming importance that the Hajj generates many complicated layers of emotions, which tend to be missed if it is examined only through

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<sup>18</sup> *Dua* may be translated as request or appeal to Allah.

the prism of religious duty.

Like Yasmeen, most respondents acknowledged that Hajj is one of the main duties of a Muslim, so that in normative terms one can hardly claim to be Muslim and deny the importance of the Hajj or the Kaaba. However, I soon found that many middle-class Muslims in Delhi, particularly those with higher levels of education and often holding mainstream white collar jobs, chose to talk about the significance of the Hajj not so much in religious terms but in terms of familial duties or as an opportunity for travel and exploration. For instance, Salman, a middle-aged, married man and an officer in the Indian Army said:

We are planning to go for Umra, so that we'll visit that place where every Muslim wishes to go. Particularly for my wife, I am keen to visit that place. I am keen to see that place, but I don't have that ignition within me that I must visit, as a religious routine. I want to visit that place. Everybody wants to go for Hajj. I also want to do it. But then, there is too much of a crowd for Hajj, so I'll go for Umra. I will basically do it for my wife. She's very keen on it, so I said I must go.

Similarly, Kabir sahab, a retired professor, said:

I haven't been on Hajj, and I don't have much of a desire to go either. But my wife really wants to go once. And there are some men who have gone on the Hajj pilgrimage for the sake of their wives. But Hajj is not a matter of pride for them. It is not a matter of salvation for them (laughs). Its ok, the wife has to be taken on Hajj, has to be given company. Since my wife really wants to go once, it is possible that I too will have to go at some point.

Arpita: Isn't there a rule that women can't go alone?

Kabir sahab: Yes, yes, there is such a rule. They can make a group, or they can go with their male relatives - such relatives with whom they are not required to observe parda (veiling). Actually, there's such a rush there that I feel very scared of stampede. It is difficult. And my wife is also a little heavy, and she has some problem in her knees, so she keeps saying that she is very scared. So I tell her, you do Umra. You want to see that place, don't you? You want to go there, right? You do Umra. But people have this feeling that Hajj counts for more, that it's a bigger thing compared to Umra.

These conversations reveal some of the complexity of what the Hajj and Mecca mean to educated, middle-class Muslims like Salman and Kabir sahab who live in a

world where Muslim and modern are seen to be antithetical, and yet insist on remaining committed both to the ‘modern’ ideals of secularism and democracy and to their ‘Muslim’ identities and heritage. They are, therefore, clearly uncomfortable, especially when talking with me, a ‘modern’, Westernized, Hindu woman, about admitting any interest in performing Hajj as a religious duty. Rather, they claim that they are not particularly interested in performing the Hajj but would undertake the journey to accompany their wives, thus transforming Hajj from a religious to a spousal duty. Indeed, being a devout Hajji sits uncomfortably with their perceptions of themselves as modern, while being a considerate husband is far more in keeping with their notions of themselves as modern men. However, despite their views, both men stop short of a complete denial of the religious significance of Hajj in that they do not question their spouse’s acceptance and belief in Hajj as a religious duty and are indeed supportive of them.

Such views are by no means held by men alone, but also by highly educated and professional women, as will become clear from Razia’s account of her experience of the Umra which she undertook with her husband in 1997:

I had decided that I would take my husband along. He went with me. I think it was more concern for me and my insistence rather than his conviction. But he enjoyed himself thoroughly. I said, if you want to visit so many places then why not Saudi Arabia? Come as a tourist interest, but come, because I won’t go without you. So he agreed. I was very curious. I wanted to go. I wanted to see. I wanted to experience. So I went. And I have a religious element in me. I’m happy I did it. There’s no harm. And I know I cannot do a Hajj. It’s beyond me. It’s longer, very crowded, very demanding, and you are time bound. With my heart condition, it’s a problem. And I won’t like to go on Hajj, because you can’t concentrate then on what you want to do, the objective is not achieved. You are physically struggling to keep up with the rituals. Rituals are not important. Though of course everybody tells me that once you go for an Umra, then Hajj becomes obligatory, it becomes essential. But I had sort of asked Allah to forgive me (very softly).

We stayed on in Mecca for two days and in Medina for three or four days.... We wanted to go to other places, all the historical places, so we went and saw all the

mosques. There is the mosque in which it is said the qiblah had changed. Earlier, Muslims used to pray towards Masjid-e-Aqsa in Jerusalem. Then, it is said that Hazrat Muhammad one day changed his direction towards Kaaba. So there is this mosque that was built in the place where he said his prayers. Medina is where he was born, where he lived. So the place in which he lived has been enclosed. You are only allowed to go there two hours in the day and two hours in the evening. In Mecca there is no separation, but in Medina there is segregation. Men have a different section, women have a different section, and there is a limited time in which you can go. Then we went to these two important sites where these wars were fought. Then I went to see the hillock where Muhammad is supposed to have first received the revelation. They have put very big boards saying, these are just spaces on earth, like any other place, please don't offer anything here, don't pray here. In fact, they are not at all caring about maintaining. There are no graveyards. The main graveyard is almost leveled. Ritualism is at the minimal. I had been told not to look at the Kabaa suddenly, because it has a very awesome effect. It moves you and you start crying. People had told me all kinds of stories. I didn't get that feeling, to be very honest. Of course, God knows, so there is no point in my not saying it. I never had that feeling. In fact, I was telling my husband and I told others also - when I went to see the Taj Mahal for the first time, and even the second time, the kind of feeling I got, I didn't even get that feeling in the Kaaba. Because, it was there in my imagination. It was nothing new. The Taj Mahal, I couldn't have imagined the magnanimity and scale of it. But this, I had imagined. I had seen it so often, and I had heard so much about it. You see how disciplined people are over there, how clean it is, how well maintained it is. It creates a certain atmosphere. It is quiet, unlike other places. It gives you a lot of time for introspection, to think of your elders. I felt very good when my husband did the Umra. He just chose to go there, sit there, just be there, without even saying his prayers. You can do that. There is no forcing you to pray. I think he did it twice. You can offer it to your parents, or anyone - the ritual, on their behalf. So he said, "The first time I offered it to all my aunts and helpers, who helped my parents bring me up, who were so deprived and still served us so well." And the second time he said he offered it to his parents. I was very touched by that. I didn't think of it in that way. I just offered it to my old servants for whom I had a particular liking. But I didn't say it generally, the way he thought of it. The place has that atmosphere - it brings out the best in you and helps you to introspect a bit, because you are in that kind of frame of mind. It was a good experience. I don't regret it.

Razia's account reflects some of the same issues raised by Salman and Kabir

sahib: a husband who needed to be convinced to go on the Hajj, if only to accompany his wife, worry about her own fragile health and the physical rigors of the Hajj, an attempt to think and experience Mecca, not only as a pilgrim but as a tourist interested in visiting a

place of historical interest. In what follows I undertake a close reading of Razia's rich account to enable an understanding of how, for many middle-class Muslims in Delhi, the Hajj (or Umra), a religious duty, generates many ambivalent emotions and thoughts and how the experience of this journey, while moving and transformative, is far from uniform or predictable.

### *Sacred Word and Practice*

As I have argued earlier, the repeated utterance of sacred words by millions of pilgrims and their performance of rituals continuously remake and animate the sites traversed in the Hajj as particularly charged, sacred Muslim spaces. However, I would also argue that places like Mecca, Medina, or the Kaaba, which are of special historical significance in Islam, impart to visitors a special spirituality so that simply being present in these spaces becomes a transformative experience. Thus, Razia was happy that her husband did the Umra even if he "just chose to go there, sit there, just be there, without even saying his prayers." And when he did offer prayers, he did so first on behalf of his aunts and "helpers", and a second time for his own deceased parents. Razia was moved by his actions, which she attributes to the special qualities of the place itself. As she put it, "The place has that atmosphere - it brings out the best in you and helps you to introspect a bit because you are in that kind of frame of mind." Razia also notes how the actions of people contribute to the special "atmosphere" of the place, which in turn encourages a certain kind of spirituality: "You see how disciplined people are over there, how clean it is, how well maintained it is. And it creates a certain atmosphere. It is quiet, unlike other places. It gives you a lot of time for introspection, to think of your elders." However, the special significance attributed to particular Muslim spaces must always be

carefully balanced with the understanding that all of the earth, as Allah's creation is sacred and therefore no particular place should be the object of worship and Muslims should bow in prayer (sajda) before nothing and no one but Allah. Hence the messages Razia noticed at the hill, where the Prophet Muhammad first received the revelation, which she described as, "very big boards saying, these are just spaces on earth, like any other place, please don't offer anything here, please don't pray here."

*Modern Muslims: The Thinkers and the Believers*

Razia's account is also a good example of the desire and recurring attempts by Muslim educated professionals to construct and highlight a difference between themselves as modern "thinking Muslims", as opposed to the vast majority of less educated Muslims who simply believe and follow the religion "blindly". This difference can, however, never be absolute because the thinking Muslim must also be a believer. As Razia's account shows so clearly, to hold critical thinking in balance with an uncritical belief in Allah is an ongoing struggle. For instance, as a thinking Muslim Razia is able to make the considered choice of not going on Hajj and is able to logically explain her choice - because of her poor health, she would be "physically struggling to keep up with the rituals" which "are not important" and would distract her from concentrating and achieving the objective, which for her, as a thinking Muslim, is to introspect. However, as a believing Muslim, Razia admits that she feels compelled to ask Allah's forgiveness for not going on the Hajj.

Visiting and praying at the Kaaba is the high point of the entire Hajj experience, and Razia's description of this moment is telling and worth repeating:

I was told, don't look at the Kaaba suddenly because it has a very awesome effect.

It moves you and you start crying. People had told me all kinds of stories. I didn't get that feeling, to be very honest. Of course, God knows, so there is no point in my not saying it. I never had that feeling. In fact, I was telling my husband and I told others also - when I went to see the Taj Mahal for the first time, and even the second time, the kind of feeling I got, I didn't even get that feeling in the Kaaba, because, it was there in my imagination. It was nothing new. The Taj Mahal, I couldn't have imagined, the magnanimity of it, the scale of it. But this, I had imagined. I had seen it so often, and I had heard so much about it.

To admit to not being moved by this experience that all Muslims must cherish, and further, to compare this experience with that of seeing the Taj Mahal, the epitome of romantic love, easily makes Razia vulnerable to charges of not being an authentic Muslim. As a thinking Muslim, Razia is able to explain her lack of emotion by the fact of the ubiquity of the Kaaba in her life as a Muslim - one hears and talks about it, one sees photographs of it, and so it is "there in the imagination". In fact, one could even argue that she is indeed an authentic Muslim because she carries the image of the Kaaba in her heart. Also, Razia gives proof of herself as a true believer when she recognizes Allah as all-knowing - she is able to, indeed must admit her lack of emotion, precisely because she believes that, "God knows, so there is no point in my not saying it."

During the entire experience of the Umra, Razia and her husband focus less on the performance of rituals, which, she clearly states, are "not important." Rather, for them being in that particular sacred space is an opportunity to step back from the business of everyday life, to delve within their own selves, to "introspect," to think about and thank their elders. In emphasizing the cerebral qualities of her own actions, Razia constructs a difference that seems crucial to Indian middle-class Muslims' sense of their own selves - the difference between themselves as thinking modern Muslims and the vast majority of those 'others' or backward Muslims who follow their faith and perform rituals without any real understanding of Islam and, especially, the relevance of their religion to their



everyday lives and actions. Importantly, in constructing this difference, Razia never ceases to see and present herself as a believing Muslim (for example, she believes Allah to be all-knowing, merciful and forgiving) and her whole account emphasizes that to be a modern individual, capable of critical thinking, is not antithetical to being a devout Muslim. Rather, she emphasizes that Islam is not averse to but encourages critical thinking and quiet reflection, and it does not demand a strict adherence to performance of rituals. While Razia does not specifically articulate this view of Islam, in contrast to mainstream representations of Islam as a religion that is inflexible and encourages ‘fundamentalism’, she can hardly be unaware of these representations which treat Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same, and in the process reinforce ‘every negative fact associated with Islam – its violence, primitiveness, atavism, threatening qualities (Said, 1997, p. xvi).

For Razia, her understanding of her own self, as a modern, thinking Muslim, sits uncomfortably with her desire to go on the Umra. The discomfort comes through in her attempt to explain her own reasons for going, in terms of being “curious”, wanting to “see” and “experience” - that is, to undertake the Umra as a traveler, a tourist, rather than, or in addition to being a Muslim pilgrim. She adds, almost as an after thought, that her desire to go on the Umra was also shaped by the “religious element” in her and she appears almost defensive of her choice to go when she says, “I’m happy I did it. There’s no harm...” She describes the many mosques they visited in Mecca and Medina as places of “historical” interest, and in convincing her somewhat unwilling husband to accompany her Razia relies again on the trope of the tourist rather than the pilgrim.

In Salman, too, we see something of the curious tourist who is keen to “visit” and

“see” but not as a “religious routine”. We are sitting around chatting one evening at Salman’s home. Besides Salman and me there is Salman’s wife Sakina and Tabassum, a sister-in-law who is soon to leave for the United States to join her husband there. The conversation turns to travel, places they wish to visit and to plans for performing Hajj. Paris features at the top of Salman’s travel wish list and he suddenly says that he wishes the Hajj could be performed in Paris! Even though it is clear he is joking, he draws disapproving looks from both the women.

I argue that such statements from educated, middle-class professionals, like Salman and Razia, do not stem from a lack of faith in Islam but from their internalization of the principle of secularism and the accompanying belief that matters of religion must be confined to the private sphere. The very public performance of the faith that the Hajj entails, thus, makes them uncomfortable. Razia deals with this discomfort by turning inwards and seeing the Hajj as a journey into oneself, a time for “introspection” rather than the mindless performance of rituals. Both Razia and Salman also represent the Hajj as a journey undertaken in the spirit of curious exploration, traveling like a tourist and enjoying oneself. As Razia points out, even though her husband was initially reluctant to go on the Umra, ultimately “he enjoyed himself thoroughly.”

That the Hajj, Umra, or any pilgrimage, is also an opportunity for fun and enjoyment is an issue barely explored in the existing literature. Interestingly, having fun and performing a sacred pilgrimage are seen to cohere as a harmonious whole, not simply by educated, middle-class ‘thinking’ Muslims like Salman and Razia, but also by less educated, middle- and lower-middle class Muslims for whom the Hajj is often the only opportunity for international travel. For instance, Yasmeen, a middle-class housewife

whose husband runs a small printing business in Old Delhi tells me that when her in-laws went on the Hajj in 1987 they stayed for two months and “toured” Iraq:

They said they really enjoyed themselves. I don’t know exactly which places they visited. They say they enjoyed a lot. From here they went to Bombay and stopped there for two days. This was organized by the tour organizers, so they enjoyed fully, like tourists.

Yasmeen then went on to explain that she and her husband also plan to perform the Hajj on an organized tour mainly for reasons of convenience:

The Hajj committee organizes tours and sends people and you just pay them. Tour organizers take their own people so that there you won’t have to worry about cooking meals. The tour organizers will take along a cook who will do the cooking. Meaning, you won’t have any tension about what to eat in the morning, since he’ll prepare everything. They’ll take money but you’ll be free of tension, so that you can do what you are there to do. You go there to do ibaadat (worship), to offer namaz, and you’ll do just that. So I think tour is best. Otherwise, you have to take a lot of baggage of your own and then lug it back. That is why tour is best. They make all the arrangements.

As these statements show, the Hajj today is big business—an organized, structured phenomenon, involving states, tour organizers and pilgrim-tourists. Moreover, the Hajj means many things to many people: for some, it is a rare opportunity to experience the thrill of international travel, for others, it is a fulfillment of a promise to a spouse, and for yet others it is an opportunity to look deeply into oneself. Scholarly works that highlight the many dimensions of the Hajj, as experienced by middle class Muslims, may serve a broader purpose in countering mainstream representations of Islam as anti-modern and events like Hajj as yet more evidence of Islamic fundamentalism. However, such writing may also show how events like Hajj often become moments of creating or solidifying internal differences among Muslims, as in the case when Razia or Salman’s telling of the event recreates and strengthens mainstream representations of the backward unthinking Muslim, even if this is done in service of constructing by contrast the thinking modern

Muslim.

*Transformed by the Journey*

The notion of the Hajj as a process of spiritual cleansing is shared by many Muslims across divides of class and gender. However, for many educated, middle-class Muslims, such an understanding of the transformative power of Hajj is shallow and inadequate. For instance, Kabir sahib said that he had been surprised to find that immigrant Muslims in the U.S. tended to be more orthodox and conservative than Muslims in India. In support of his view, he told me, with great enjoyment, a little kissa or incident about his wife's sister who has been living in Canada for many years and recently visited India. She had "made a full program or a package" wherein she had gone on the Hajj then come to India and was going to stop in Paris on her way back. Kabir sahab said with some disdain that she had already performed the Hajj more than once ("Hajj ke upar Hajj kiye jaa rahe hain"). Then, he narrated with relish, in Urdu, that he had told her that this was all very good, but she had made a big mistake. She should have gone to Paris before doing Hajj, because that way all the sinful things she would do in Paris could be subsequently wiped away during the Hajj! As he finished, with a mischievous grin, sarcasm in every word, both of us burst out laughing.

While most of my informants were not as forthright as Kabir sahab, the cynicism reflected in his satirical comments is shared by many educated Muslims. For them, to believe that the performance of Hajj can rid one of one's sins is too simplistic and requires a leap of faith that conflicts with their emphasis on thinking things through logically and critically. Thus, Razia, for instance, does not deny the transformative power of the Hajj or Umra, but understands it in terms of a journey of inner introspection,

inspired by the places that are so central to Islam. For Razia's husband, who was just as unwilling to go on Umra as Kabir sahab is (indeed, the two are close friends), the journey was a transformative experience in that it inspired him to contemplate and to offer prayers thoughtfully rather than merely ritually, on behalf of his parents and all those who had helped raise him. I should make it clear that 'thinking' Muslims do not deny that Allah is merciful and forgiving, and indeed rely on these qualities such as when Razia asks for Allah's forgiveness for her inability to perform the Hajj. What comes through in their statements, therefore is not a lack of faith but a deep desire for a more meaningful understanding of their faith, reflected here in the attempt to move beyond a mechanical equation between the ritual performance of Hajj and the absolution of sins, to an understanding of the transformation that Hajj effects, as consisting of a transformation of one's inner self.

However, the view that performing the Hajj enables one to wash away the burden of sins committed, and to start afresh, was expressed by a few of my respondents, such as Jameela, a middle-aged woman, who told me that since she went on the Hajj she no longer goes to the movies, although she does watch television at home. When I asked her why, she said, "It is sinful. Just like with your tirtha yatra (Hindu holy pilgrimage), after coming back from the Hajj we think that after performing the Hajj all our sins are forgiven, and it is as though you were just born today. All your sins are washed away. So why would you want to commit those same sins a second time?"

The view that watching films or listening to music is prohibited in Islam, and therefore sinful, was expressed by very few of the Muslim men and women I interacted with. When such views were voiced (usually by women), it was explained that the reason

behind the prohibition was that movies and music took people to “another world” and encouraged fantasies, and movie theaters encouraged the public mingling of men and women. Such views expressed by Jameela and others, even if relatively unusual, is significant because it points to the way in which perceptions of themselves as modern, or the desire to become modern, exists among middle-class Muslims in tension with an anxiety about the modern, stemming from the perceived antithetical relation between the modern and the traditional, expressed occasionally by respondents like Jameela in complaints that Muslims belonging to the younger generations were “too modern”. As it is in the case of any hegemonic ideology, the hold of the modern is always partial, existing in contention with the pull of tradition.

### *The Masjid or Mosque*

Given the emphasis in Islam on the sacred word and practices shaped by it, and the consequent “portability” of ritual, scholars like Barbara Metcalf (1996) have raised questions about what the mosque means for Muslims, and whether it is held to be sacred or not. Among Old Delhi’s Muslims, few would deny the sanctity of a mosque but divergent opinions arise regarding how central the mosque and collective prayer are to being a devout Muslim. Importantly, these differences can be mapped along lines of fissure in class terms along with the related differences in levels of education and views about what it means to be modern.

The landscape of Old Delhi is dotted with mosques, ranging from the large, imposing, red sandstone structure of Jama masjid, built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1650, to the Sunehri masjid (literally the golden mosque) built in 1721, the Kaali masjid built in 1387, and many others. From all accounts, mosque building activities have

increased rather than decreased in recent years. When I asked Mir Ali about mosques in his Old Delhi neighborhood, he said, “There are so many! Within a radius of half a kilometer there must be thirty to forty mosques, big and small. Whenever some people felt anything, they raised a mosque.” It is a phenomenon that is noted with some alarm when polite conversations in Hindu middle-class urban India turn to discussing the “Muslim problem.” What gets buried in this kind of alarm, raised about the proliferation of mosques, is the range of very different views and practices around the mosque among Delhi’s Muslims themselves. For instance, Mohsin wholeheartedly believes that according to the norms of his faith he is “supposed” to offer namaz in the mosque, but readily admitted that for reasons of convenience he offers most of his daily prayers outside the mosque:

Arpita: Where do you usually pray?

Mohsin: Usually, I offer the morning and evening prayers at home. You have to offer fajr namaaz before sunrise. You’re supposed to do that at the mosque, but because I have to get ready with my children, to drop them to school, so I have to offer it at home. Then, in the day time I am out. So, if there is time I offer namaaz in a mosque or anywhere. In the evening, because I am in college, the Asar and Maghrib namaaz, I offer in college. After one hour of the Maghrib, it is the Isha, the fifth and last namaaz.

Arpita: And you offer that at home?

Mohsin: Yes. The jamaat (congregation) is almost over when I’m coming back from college.

Indeed, fieldwork in Delhi, at homes and workplaces, was daily punctuated by prayer times, when people would excuse themselves from conversations and turn to focus on prayers, often in the same room where we had been conversing, after cleansing themselves and spreading a prayer mat oriented in the direction of Mecca. However, on Fridays (Jumma), many of my male informants make it a point to offer prayers in a mosque, and often in a particular mosque. Mohsin explained his reasons for offering

Friday prayers at the Jama masjid (mosque):

If you are offering namaaz at home, it's the easier thing, but if you're offering namaaz at the mosque, in a jamaat (collective), it's the proper way. You will be getting more sawab (rewards) when you offer in mosque. For daily prayers, I am not choosy about the mosque. I pray wherever is available, if the time is convenient. But for Friday prayer, I prefer to go for namaaz at Jama masjid. We are supposed to offer namaaz at Jama masjid, because it's the city's big mosque so more people gather there, and more gathering is better.

The Quran tells us to offer namaaz. Then, the Prophet explained how we should offer it. I have to offer namaaz. Every Muslim has to offer namaaz five times in a day. How to offer namaaz is taught practically by Prophet Mohammed. Sawaab means reward. If you're doing a wrong thing you have to face the punishment. If you're doing a right thing, you have to get the reward. So if you're offering namaaz with a jamaat (collective), you will definitely get the reward of that namaaz. If you are offering namaz with others in a jamaat, after namaz you will talk to them, you will meet them, and there's a mixing with our community, an awareness of our brotherhood. If we are meeting five times in a day, then definitely no problem can be ignored. Islam says that every Muslim has some duties to God and many duties to other human beings. So if you're just offering namaz, it is nothing. When you are offering namaz, in a sense, you are having respect towards others, to other brothers, to your neighbors. It is said that you must offer this namaz in your nearby mosque, because where you are living, you must acquaint yourself with the surroundings.

While I had limited access to mosques in Delhi (since women in most of South Asia rarely join in collective prayers at mosques), having spent a lot of time in Old Delhi, I can confirm that on Fridays far larger numbers of men, many dressed in crisp white, would be headed to various mosques in their areas, particularly for the mid-day prayers. However, like Mohsin, many male informants reported that for reasons of convenience most of their daily prayers, other than Fridays, are offered outside a mosque—at home or at the workplace, particularly for those who work outside Old Delhi. As Mohsin points out, for instance, he has to get his children ready for school or be at his college to teach evening classes and must, therefore, offer his prayers where he can. This, of course, is permissible from a religious point of view, precisely because all of the earth is seen as Allah's creation and as such any clean place is suitable for offering prayers. However, the



understanding that in Islam the practice (offering namaaz) is more important than the space (the mosque) (Metcalf 1996), internalized by educated urban Muslims, along with an understanding of secularism as an integral element of modernity and the accompanying idea that religion should be relegated to the private sphere, leads many middle-class Muslims in Delhi to be critical of the significance attached by their co-religionists to collective prayer in the mosque. Salman exemplifies this position well when he insists that prayer is an intensely personal act, and the mosque, therefore, less significant:

I feel that worshipping is a very, very personal thing. It is as personal as your undergarments or your body. Not to be discussed. When you are worshipping you need not go and tell, nor beat drums to announce that I have just read the namaaz, ask if you have done so or not. But this happens everywhere. They will keep shouting at everyone, I have just read namaaz, have you, have you? What is this? It is a personal thing. You shut yourself in a room and offer namaaz. Nobody should even see you doing it. It should be that way. But it depends on the faith, and the kind of upbringing you have.

Kabir sahab, a middle-class professional like Salman, also does not see mosque attendance as necessary or significant to being Muslim:

Kabir sahab: I don't offer any namaaz. I offer namaaz only twice in a year, during Eid and Baqri Eid....In matters of religion, the fact is that very few people follow the religion very staunchly. All Muslims must compulsorily read namaaz five times daily, but only a very small percentage of Muslims are regular in offering namaaz. During the month of Ramzaan the number increases. But otherwise very few people go for namaaz. And the most illiterate, who blindly follows his religion, even he is careless about performing rituals like namaz and roza. But their religious bias is very strong. The illiterate, the uneducated, they are usually extremely biased, even though they are not as religious in their lives as the religion expects them to be.

Arpita: What do you mean by biased?

Kabir sahab: They feel that because they are Muslims, they are discriminated against. And they are discriminated against. So they feel very strongly about being Muslim, though they don't follow their religion very strongly.

In presenting these contrasting view points, my goal is not to determine which of

them is normatively correct but to show how mosque attendance becomes yet another issue around which a difference between “modern”, “rational” Muslims and “other” Muslims is constructed. This is not to say that all educated “thinking” Muslims believe that mosque attendance is not necessary, nor that no such Muslim offers prayers in a mosque. It is to point out, rather, that for some educated, middle class Muslims, mosque attendance becomes yet another issue on which they see themselves to differ from less educated, lower class Muslims. Thus, when Salman insists that offering namaaz should be a “personal” rather than communal matter, he is expressing his discomfort with social pressures to offer namaaz in a collectivity, while also expressing his belief in the modern secular ideal that consigns religious practices to the private sphere. Mohsin, who does offer prayers at the mosque every Friday, explains that namaaz offered collectively is more significant, primarily because it enables a feeling of “community” and “brotherhood.” Therefore, even for Mohsin, the physical space of the mosque is significant only in that it enables the coming together of Muslims as a community of believers, to engage in the practice of offering namaaz (Slyomovics 1996: 209).

Let me conclude this discussion with some remarks about the gendered nature of space in Old Delhi, and the ways in which my position as a Hindu woman both provided and limited access to certain Muslim spaces. Women in Delhi, as indeed in most of South Asia, rarely go to the mosque, even on special occasions like Eid. As a woman, the only mosque that I readily had access to in Old Delhi, even without a male escort, was the Jama masjid, the imposing, red sandstone mosque built by Mughal Emperor Shahjahan in 1650. A shaded raised platform-like structure on the outermost periphery of the enormous courtyard of the mosque is designated for women. Here, women sit around on the cool

stone surface and chat and children run around until the azaan (call for prayers) is heard, when they get up, brush the dust off their clothes, form orderly lines, and offer their prayers. The Jama masjid and some others like the Sunehri masjid in Old Delhi are outstanding examples of Mughal architecture, and they stand testament to the grandeur of Mughal rule. Today, they are important tourist sites receiving tourists from all over India and the world. It is probably for this reason that women too are able to visit mosques like the Jama masjid, for these spaces enable a certain anonymity that is impossible in the familiarity of the neighborhood mosque, where one is much more likely to meet men with whom one is supposed to observe purdah. Indeed, none of the women I talked with on my several visits to the Jama masjid were locals, but were visiting Delhi and had come to “see” the Jama masjid.

The extent to which the exclusion of women from mosques has been normalized becomes evident when Kabir sahab says, “A mosque is open to everybody, no matter where it is”, when, in reality, mosques are open to all men and to women only under certain narrow circumstances. Similarly, when Mohsin states that namaaz offered in a collectivity in a mosque earns more rewards and builds a sense of “community”, he seems unaware that his statement places women outside this imagined community and unable to earn greater rewards.

On being questioned, both men and women offered the same explanation regarding the exclusion of women from mosques. Women, they said, did not and should not go to mosques because they may distract men from their purpose of focusing solely on Allah as they offer namaaz. As I talked with them at length, however, I realized that while some had indeed internalized the notion that women are a “distraction” for men,

others simply found this exclusion convenient since it made it legitimate for them to pray at home, and they were thus not faced with the same kinds of social pressures, to be present and to be seen at collective prayers in the mosque, that men like Kabir sahib and Salman had to give into.

I was surprised and my feminist sensibilities disappointed, when none of the women I spoke with, including those who were highly educated, articulate, and “modern”, seemed to find this exclusion troubling. Both the responses of these ‘modern’ women as well as my reactions to their responses deserves some attention, because they point to the fact that the modern is not merely a concept but modernity is lived from day to day by many kinds of people in many parts of the world. In this business of daily life, as we live the modern, we do not always adhere to a tight script but make improvisations and changes, sometimes out of conscious decisions, sometimes because there is no room for decision making, and sometimes because one way is simply more practical than another. Thus, while a modern middle-class Muslim woman’s acceptance of her exclusion from the mosque may be interpreted by a modern middle-class Hindu woman as a symbol of oppression, for the former such as exclusion may often be “convenient” as some women explained, because it enables them to offer prayers at home in the midst of their busy everyday schedules.

### *Domestic Space*

Much of my fieldwork time in Delhi was spent in people’s homes, whether conducting interviews or just sitting around chatting over endless cups of tea. In some homes, where I became a frequent visitor, and in others where I spent at least a whole day, chatting with the women of the household as they went about their daily chores, I

was able to get a feel of the domestic space as a whole. I shall first describe a typical home in Old Delhi, to show how the organization of the everyday domestic space is designed to facilitate Islamic practices, and an overall Islamic way of life. Subsequently, I will point to some interactions and instances of disagreement among family members that show how the desire to live a 'simple' and 'traditional' Islamic life is often at odds with the desire to consume goods that are associated with a 'modern' way of life such as Western style beds and furniture.

Mohsin and Firoza's home in Old Delhi is typical, in its layout, of most other homes I visited in the area. The house was originally built by Mohsin's father for his own family. Today, the house is divided into three parts - the largest portion is occupied by Mohsin, his wife Firoza, and their five boys. Mohsin's younger brother Mushtaq, his wife, and two children live in a small portion at the back, while a third section is occupied by an uncle and his family. The house, like many old homes in Old Delhi, is built at an elevation from the street level, so that the front door at the street level opens directly onto a long steep set of stairs, at the end of which is the actual front door to Mohsin and Firoza's living quarters. Another set of steps lead downwards to the two other portions of the house. Mohsin's doors open onto a small square balcony, on the left hand side corner of which there is a small raised area with a tap jutting out from the wall. Here the family washes their hands and feet when they come in from the dusty road, and also wash themselves before offering prayers.

Directly facing the front door, across the balcony, is another door which opens into the largest room in the house. Adjoining it is a smaller room with an attached bath that serves as Mohsin and Firoza's bedroom. On the right there is another steep flight of

stairs which brings us to the small kitchen and up a few more steps leads to the second floor which has one mid-sized room, used by the two eldest boys as a study and bedroom. Up another flight of stairs and you emerge onto the terrace, from where you have a spectacular view of the Jama masjid, all the crowded housing that lies in between, and of course the open sky.

The largest room on the first floor is also the most used as it transforms easily from a family gathering and entertainment room to a study, to a dining room, to a bedroom, and to a space for offering prayers. It is rectangular in shape and along one of the smaller walls there is a study table and a large cupboard. In one corner there is a refrigerator and in another a television. The floor is covered in white sheets and there are white bolsters along the walls. Often the room serves more than one function simultaneously. It was a common sight to see Firoza spreading her prayer mat and offering namaz or reading her Quran, while Imad and Iqbal, the two youngest boys completed their homework, sitting cross legged on the floor and Zaheer, the eldest, slept in a corner, tired after a long day at college. Here, the children watch television after completing their school work and they sleep on the floor at night, bringing out extra pillows and blankets. Guests are received in this room and make themselves comfortable on the floor. When it is time for a meal a large plastic sheet is spread out in the middle of the room and the boys help Firoza bring plates of food down from the kitchen. The food is kept on the plastic sheet, along with plates, bowls, and serving spoons. Everyone eats together, sitting cross legged on the floor around the plastic sheet which functions as a table.

Such a design and organization of domestic space, common to most homes in Old

Delhi, is shaped largely by the requirements of Islamic practice, and, in turn, makes such practice possible. According to Old Delhi's Muslims there is no rigid division between sacred and non-sacred space since all of the earth is Allah's creation and any space can therefore be considered sacred and fit for offering prayers, as long as it is clean. As

Mohsin explained:

In namaz there are some basic things. You have to face towards Kaaba. You have to purify yourself. Your clothes should be without any dirt and you are supposed to wash your ears and mouth. The place where you are offering namaz should be a clean and purified (paak) space.

The home is, thus, transformed several times daily from a space of everyday domesticity to one that is sacred when family members spread their prayer mats on the floor, face the direction of the Kaaba and offer their daily prayers. As Haider explains:

Conceptually, the prayer rug, as it is spread out and qibla-directed, defines the elemental place of prayer. As the believer positions and orients his or her body on it and goes through various stages of salat, the Islamic ritual prayer, a place-space is defined, in the physical and temporal as well as experiential sense that has all the essential attributes of a mosque. (Haider, 1996, p., 43)

The organization of domestic space in Old Delhi is, thus, shaped by the practice of offering namaz daily in the home. This is facilitated by keeping at least one main room in the house very sparsely furnished, so that family members can easily spread their prayer mats and offer their prayers.

Another example of domestic spaces designed to facilitate Islamic practices is the way in which homes in Old Delhi are built around a central balcony or courtyard, with rooms opening off of it. In this central open space, easily accessible to everyone in the house, there is a very basic washing area with not much more than a tap. Even in the newer apartment style homes, an effort is made to provide such an open washing area. Such a facility enables one to wash and cleanse oneself in the way that is mandatory

before offering one's prayers.

Such an open space within the house also makes it possible to conduct the sacrifice of animals on the occasion of Baqri Eid, when goats are sacrificed to commemorate Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. As informants explained, one should ideally buy the sacrificial animal well in advance, feed it and care for it at home, so that in the end one sacrifices not just an animal but something that one has grown to hold dear, thus symbolically replicating Abraham's supreme sacrifice. During this time, the domestic space is transformed into a particularly charged sacred space as Yasmeen described, "On Baqri Eid there is a lot of din and excitement. Everything is ready two or three days earlier and the goats are brought. The kids really enjoy it. This sacrifice (qurbaani) is very necessary. It happens at everyone's place, in every house among Muslims.

While the number and size of rooms varied from home to home they were generally sparsely furnished, the floors covered with thin mattresses and plain white sheets, so that they easily served the multiple purposes of bed, dining table, study table, sofa, and much more. When I visited a home for the first time, family members often made it a point to tell me that this was the "traditional Muslim way" - to live simply, following the example of the Prophet. For them, living in sparsely furnished spaces is to be a proper Muslim through following the example of the Prophet in everyday life.

However, the pressures and strains of a crowded urban life along with the desires sparked by a modern consumerist culture makes this ideal of simple living difficult to live up to and its very centrality to being Muslim comes to be contested, as the following incidents revealed. Humra lives with her husband Asad and their five children, on the



second floor of her husband's family home. On my first visit, we sat and chatted on the floor in the large common room. The floor was covered from end to end with white sheets, and there were white bolsters along the walls to lean against. Later, I was taken on a tour of the rest of the house. The common room opened onto a bedroom, which in turn led to another bedroom. As we stood in the couple's bedroom which, like all the other rooms, is minimally furnished, Humra complains that her husband refuses to buy a bed even though she has told him repeatedly that she does not like sleeping on the floor. Asad said in a placating tone that he would get her one and she said jokingly, "Yes, when I die!" Asad then turned to me and said that he does not feel the need for furniture, since this is the traditional Muslim way of life in Old Delhi and he likes it this way. He adds that it also makes practical sense, since they have guests all the time from Pakistan and elsewhere and it is easy to make space for everyone to sleep on the floor.

In Mohsin and Firoza's home, there is a bed that occupies almost the entire room where the couple sleep, but the boys' room is devoid of furniture except for a study table and a cupboard. When I was getting ready to leave Delhi, I offered to give them my mattresses and Mohsin came along and took them, tied onto the top of an auto rickshaw. The next day when I was at their home, Firoza told me that the mattresses had been put in the boys' room upstairs and their son Zaheer had specifically asked her to thank me, because he was so happy to not have to sleep on the floor anymore.

Many informants expressly stated that to emulate the Prophet's example of living simply was to be an ideal Muslim. However, as the above instances show, the physical discomforts involved in the actual everyday practice of simple living, along with the desire to participate in modern ways of living and modern consumption practices, even

within the most intimate domestic spaces, produce tensions within the family and contestations about the very centrality of this ideal to being a proper Muslim. The ideal of simple living is also compromised in ways that are less clearly articulated, but nevertheless are very real and pressing. Because Old Delhi is extremely congested and housing demand much exceeds supply, cramped, overcrowded living quarters, and contestations over housing ownership rights are all too common. Yasmeen and I were talking one day about relations with in-laws when she said:

When a person comes to live in a home she should be treated lovingly. She should feel that it is home, and not feel like this is a jail and that one has to come and leave by rigid times. Both have to adjust a little, the in-laws and the girl too. Mostly the girl has to change. When my elder sister got married the problem was that they had one room. Earlier her mother-in-law had said that they would get them another room but they didn't. Now, in one room with the mother-in-law, and with a curtain in between, she carried on that way for a year. It does not feel good like that. Then she told her husband, take a separate room, even if it is small. It's not that you should not keep your mother but not in this way, this isn't good. And you (to me) have not seen our (natal) house. Please come some day. We have a very big house. My sister adjusted a lot even though her in-laws troubled her.

Arpita: And now they live separately?

Yasmeen: Yes, now they are separate. They have taken a place of their own. Her husband is a tailor. He has two shops of his own in Central market.

Disputes over the sharing of domestic space are not always solved amicably and often cause much tension within families. For instance, Mohsin and his brother complained bitterly about their uncle, saying that their father had let him stay in the house at a time of need but he had taken advantage of the situation and refused to move out, even though Mohsin and Mushtaq both need the extra space to house their own large and growing families. Partly due to the lack of space and overcrowding and the felt need for privacy, modern apartment style living has made its way into Old Delhi although it is still far less common than in other parts of Delhi. In one such apartment, I visited, it was clear that within this modern space some effort had still been made in following a layout at

least somewhat similar to the more traditional homes. For instance, the main door of the apartment opened onto a small balcony with an open washing area in one corner. To the right there were two rooms, one of which was without any furniture and covered from wall to wall in white sheets.

The few homes I visited in Old Delhi that were distinctly different, in that they had a formal sitting room with sofas and other pieces of furniture, belonged to families who were more educated and held professional white collar jobs that took them outside the confines of Old Delhi regularly. Muslims I interacted with outside Old Delhi (all middle-class professionals, such as professors, social workers etc.) also did not have homes with the traditional layout, which is so common in Old Delhi. It, thus, seems that with greater education and socio-economic affluence, Muslims in Delhi re-define what constitutes a Muslim domestic space, both for themselves and for others who have stereotypical notions about the same. For instance, Razia lives with her family in a large house which is simply furnished but includes all the material comforts that one may expect in a middle-class household in Delhi, such as comfortable chairs to sit on, a large rectangular dining table, and large comfortable beds. Razia told me about an incident, which aptly demonstrates how Muslim spaces are imagined in stereotypical ways by non-Muslims in Delhi. One of Razia's close relatives had brought along a friend while visiting. They chatted, were served tea and biscuits, and when they were ready to leave the friend, a Hindu lady, thanked Razia for her hospitality and added that Razia's home did not seem to be like a Muslim home at all! Razia told me of her surprise and indignation on hearing a well educated professional say such a thing. Razia then told the lady very politely that she did not quite know whether her comment was a compliment or

an insult. The good lady immediately apologized profusely and explained that she did not know too many Muslims and had grown up with particular ideas about how Muslims live. The specific nature of these stereotypes that many Hindus hold, about Muslim ways of life and Muslim homes, was made clear by Zeenat, Razia's teenaged niece, who lives on the second floor of the same house, when she described the first time her non-Muslim friends from school visited her home:

Once I had my birthday party over here (at her home). And when they came and saw that there were no pictures of Medina and Mecca (in the house), and my mom was not in a burkha (head to toe covering), and the house was not in a narrow congested lane, they were pretty amazed.

*Rhythms of the Day*

One of the hallmarks of modernity is the separation between the home and the workplace and the structuring of daily time by the demands of a secular workday such as the rhythms of factories, schools, and colleges, offices of financial business, the service industry, etc. However, one of the most common media images of Muslims seen in print, on television, and even in Hindi films is of the Muslim in prayer. Such images in their cumulative effect convey to us that the Muslim everyday is different from the 'normal' everyday, the former being shaped more by the five daily prayers rather than the secular workday. I argue that such images, once again, do the work of presenting Muslims as more traditional and too caught up in religious norms and practices to be secular, modern citizens. In reality, for middle-class Muslims in Delhi, a typical day is often shaped and experienced much more through the requirements of a secular work schedule than through the rhythms of Islamic sacred time marked by the five daily prayer times (although some Muslims would argue that in Islam, there is no distinction made between

sacred and secular time, just as there is no special significance attached to mosques as sacred spaces).

As Madan (1991) points out, time and space as categories of experience and understanding are overlapping rather than absolutely different, so that the environment in which one lives shapes the ways in which time is understood and experienced. Writing of South Asian Muslims in Europe and North America who are part of the Tabligh movement Barbara Metcalf observes,

What turns out to be at stake is not space, the new place where they have chosen to live, but time in which the past and future converge in the present. In Tabligh, participants seek to relive the highest moment of human history, the Prophet's society in Medina, and in so doing to taste the joys of the eternal happiness promised to them in Paradise ahead (Metcalf, 1996, p. 123).

As pious Muslims, many of my respondents in Delhi share the Tablighi view that the Prophet Muhammad's time in Medina as the time of origin of Islam and the Muslim community is the purest and most sacred time. Unlike the Tablighis, however, they do not seem to see this time as replicable in the present. Rather, they appear resigned to the idea that both through the natural progression of history, and through their own less than ideal behavior, Muslims are constantly moving away from the time of the Prophet. For instance, Javed sahab blamed Muslims for moving away from the traditions that distinguished the time of the Prophet:

Wearing a beard is a custom for Muslims. Having a beard is good. It is in the tradition of Prophet Mohammed. Whatever from that time you can follow you should follow, like wearing a cap or turban for instance. But that is not essential. That is not the real mark of a Muslim. The real identity of a Muslim lies in that when you come in contact with someone you are an excellent human being. From that one can tell you are a Muslim. At present there is hardly anything left over, because we have not followed the traditions or the teachings completely but only in parts.

In their everyday lives, the extent to which Islamic time is woven into the secular work day depends on the larger environment in which one lives, as well as a variety of other factors such as an individual's occupation. For instance, because of the great number of mosques in the tightly packed quarters of Old Delhi, at any particular prayer time one is very likely to be close to one mosque or another. When situated in Muslim spaces within Delhi it, thus, becomes easier to flow with the rhythms of Islamic time. For instance, those who worked in small businesses within the walled city of Old Delhi were more easily able to step aside from their work schedules and offer prayers, whether in a mosque, in their homes, or in their office spaces. And conversely, those who worked in the larger non-Muslim environment, in a variety of settings, like banks, corporations, or television stations found it difficult or even impossible to follow prayer times in the midst of their busy work schedules.

The extent to which sacred time shapes one's everyday changes not only over space but it also changes over time. It changes, for instance, over an individual's lifetime or in response to significant events in one's life or in the larger society. For instance, as a young woman growing up in a conservative middle-class family in Lucknow, Razia was taught to offer namaz five times daily and given lessons in reading the Quran. Her day was, thus, shaped in great part through the performance of religious duties. As a married woman, a young mother, and a working professional in Delhi, Razia's life became almost entirely consumed by the requirements of work, teaching college classes in Economics, running the household, and raising her two boys. Leaving for work at six in the morning, she had little time or energy to devote to fajar namaz, and her full schedule of classes left no time for the mid-day namaz. By the time we met Razia had retired, her sons were

grown men, she herself had suffered a heart attack and the loss of her parents, leading her to step back from the hectic pace of life and take stock. She told me that she often thought about how her mother had asked her repeatedly to be more regular in offering namaz, that she regretted not having given her mother the satisfaction of doing so in her lifetime, and that she now made it a point to offer all five prayers daily. Her every day was, thus, once again much more in sync with Islamic time, and she now seemed to have taken on the role of her deceased mother, encouraging her sons to offer namaz. That this is not necessarily a typical life cycle change is clear on comparison with Razia's husband, who is also now a retired professional and has more time on his hands but, much to Razia's despair, does not offer prayers regularly and prefers to fill his days with reading Urdu novels and poetry, attending seminars, meeting with colleagues and friends, and spending time with his family.

For middle-class working Muslims in Delhi, a typical day marches ahead to a rhythm provided by both Islamic time, marked by prayers times, and secular time, defined by the work schedule. For all but the very pious, Islamic time often gives way to the more strident rhythm and demands of the work day. Thus, Mohsin offers the evening prayer if he has time in between teaching classes at his college, Nazia offers the evening prayer, when she is back home from school, and Yasmeen often misses the early morning prayer because she is too busy cooking and getting her children ready for school. However, sacred time and the special rituals defining it become more central during particular times in the Islamic calendar, as for instance in the month of Ramzaan, the celebrations of Eid, or during Moharram.

*Ramzaan and Shifting Daily Patterns*

The month of Ramzaan is determined by the lunar calendar. It starts, therefore, on the sighting of the moon, and official announcements are made by religious leaders when they declare Ramzaan to have started. In Delhi, and indeed for Muslims in most parts of India, the prime authority who declares the start of Ramzaan is the Imam of the Jama masjid. During the month of Ramzaan, Muslims are required to observe a fast from dawn to sundown. In order to accommodate the special requirements of Ramzaan, certain adjustments must be made in the daily schedule, such that the day moves to a different rhythm. Again, the extent to which one can submit oneself to the changed rhythm depends largely on the nature of work one performs in everyday life. For instance, Yasmeen, a young mother and housewife living with her husband and his extended family in Old Delhi, says that her “routine changes completely”:

During the time of Ramzaan, we have lunch at five in the morning. Then I send the kids to school, and then I keep lying down, because I know that now we will eat only at five in the evening. That’s why all the work gets done late, only in the afternoon. At about 2.30 pm everyone gets down to work. With the kids it doesn’t make that much of a difference, but my daily routine, until they get back from school, changes. And then I have to attend to my small baby, so I don’t get to sleep during the day. During the day all the food is prepared, including the evening snacks, like fruit chaat (spicy fruit salad), dates, etc. All these things have to be there at the time of roza (fast).

Arpita: So this is the food that is made for sehri (the pre-dawn meal)?

Yasmeen: That is later. We make it separately at night. As soon as we open roza, if there is something we want to eat at sehri (the next day), we make that at night too. And we have dinner after that. Now, when you eat at 6 or 7 pm, then dinner is had only very late at night. Till 2 o’clock, keep eating, keep eating. One thinks one is hungry from the morning, so we keep eating. So we sleep late. It is not possible to sleep early. It is like this - we’ve just eaten, now we’ll move around a little bit, go here and there, and then we’ll eat more. One will eat only as much as one’s stomach will allow, but it does get to be late at night. After this daily routine of one month, when Ramzaan is gone, it feels very strange, that now we have to do that same work again, but we have to get up early in the morning (laughs).



Even Kabir sahab, who describes himself as a Muslim by birth and tradition but not a practicing Muslim, notes how the pattern of his day changes during Ramzaan:

Arpita: So, do you keep roza (fast) during Ramzaan?

Kabir sahab: No. My wife does. But I help her. She has to get up in the morning, but she can't get up, because she loves sleeping! I get up for her, I prepare her food, and I wake her up for sehri. Then she keeps the fast. And at the time of the breaking of the fast, I prepare the *aftaari* (meal breaking the fast) for her, and she breaks the fast and I give her company. There is a custom, that whether you observe a fast or not, if you are in the house at the time of the breaking of the fast, you should accompany the people who are breaking the fast, sit with them, eat with them. Now, during Ramzaan, from a little while before sunrise and until sunset, it's roza (fast). After that you can again eat and drink. On normal days, when there is no fast, what happens is, like now, at this time, I am not eating anything. I had breakfast in the morning at 7 am. Now I'll drink half a cup of tea with you. After that, at one in the afternoon I'll have lunch. Then I'll get down to my work. In the evening, at around 4 or 5 pm I'll have a cup of tea, and then have dinner at night. This is the normal routine. But during Ramzaan, when roza opens, then people think there will be restrictions during the day, so let me eat whatever I can, wherever I can. Not everyone, but most people. Bazaars open, food is prepared and sold. You must have seen. Fish is being fried, chicken is being fried, somewhere there is *seekh kebab*, somewhere this, somewhere that. People keep eating and eating, since there's time till sehri, and after that the time will be up. It seems as if after that another day will not come when they will be able to eat! So the amount they eat from evening to morning, they don't eat as much on normal days from morning till evening (both laugh).

Ramzaan as a special, sacred time is marked not just by a change in the day's pattern but also marked, at least ideally, by particular behaviors. For example, while giving *zakat* or alms to the poor is one of the five main duties of every Muslim and it may be performed throughout the year, doing so during the period of Ramzaan is supposed to earn greater rewards. As Humra explained:

It is Allah's *hukam* (order) to give *zakat* during Ramzaan. The rule for *zakat* is, suppose you have 1000 rupees, you must give 250 rupees to someone who is poor. And especially during the month of Ramzaan this (giving of *zakat*) is good for everyone.

Another significant way in which Ramzaan shapes the experience of time for many Muslims is that the observance of fast or roza for the very first time is an important

life cycle event, a classic rite of passage. Among South Asian Muslims it is marked by a special celebration when the child performing his or her first roza is dressed in new clothes and presented with gifts of money by elders in the family.

### *Celebrating Eid*

The month of Ramzaan culminates in Eid Ul Zoha when the fasting ends and it is a day of celebration, enabling a transitioning from the special daily schedule of the fasting period to a regular schedule. Yasmeen's celebration of Eid is typical of the ways in which Muslims in Old Delhi celebrate:

Arpita: On Eid what do you do?

Yasmeen: On the day of Eid the men go in the morning to offer namaz. We ladies, the ones who are in the house, make some sweet things. The men eat that and go to offer namaz. We keep sweets in the house. This is considered to be a good omen. People come to meet one another, to greet and pay their respects to the elders. Then, the day of Eid is (celebrated) at Mummy's place. It is (celebrated) here also, with my sisters-in-law (husband's sisters). We go to each others' houses.

Exactly forty days after Eid ul Zoha, Muslims celebrate Baqri Eid which commemorates Abraham's supreme sacrifice of his own son to Allah. Through the sacrifice of animals, Muslims replicate Abraham's sacrifice but always only approximately and imperfectly. As Mohsin explained, ideally, one is supposed to buy a goat - the sacrificial animal most commonly used in South Asia - and care for it at home, so that in sacrificing it one is able to feel something of Abraham's pain in giving up something or someone held dear. Ideally Baqri Eid becomes meaningful only through undergoing this time of waiting and nurturing, knowing that it is to culminate in a sacrifice. During my fieldwork, I found that while goats were sacrificed in most middle-class Muslims homes in Old Delhi, only a few families purchased the goat well before

Baqri Eid and tended to it for a length of time. For most families, however, the lack of space in the home and the hectic pace of daily life made it more convenient to purchase the sacrificial goat only days before the big day.

Eid is recognized in India as a national holiday and there are many heartening stories I was told by Old Delhi's Muslims, about Hindu friends who celebrate this special day with them and enjoy the special foods prepared on this occasion. For instance, Mohsin and Firoza's son Zaheer studies in a prestigious English medium school where most of his friends are Hindu. On Eid two of Zaheer's Hindu friends visited him at home, enjoyed the delicious biryani prepared by Firoza and carried more of the same back home for their parents. However, even as there are instances of Hindus participating in Eid celebrations in Old Delhi, I would like to draw attention to the difference in the way Christmas has come to be celebrated by many Hindus (especially from the middle-class) in urban India while Eid continues to be marked as a Muslim affair, with little of the large scale celebration that is attached to Christmas. For instance, many of my middle-class Hindu friends in Calcutta, Delhi, and Mumbai buy and decorate Christmas trees, and arrange for gifts from Santa Claus for their children, but few of them celebrate Eid with the same enthusiasm. One could argue that this is because the rituals of decorating a tree and gift buying associated with Christmas are easily transferred across religious boundaries and have acquired an almost secular character. However, I would argue that this would be only a partial explanation, and Christmas celebration by many Hindus has to do much to do with its association with the Western and therefore with the modern, while Hindu indifference towards Eid is related to the view of the Muslim as an 'other' who is radically different from one's Hindu self.

### *Moharram*

The first ten days of Muharram (or Moharram), the first month of the Islamic calendar, are observed by Shia Muslims all over the world as sacred time par excellence. During these days, and particularly on the tenth day, the faithful mourn the martyrdom of Husain, the second son of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and his cousin Ali, at Karbala. (Madan, 1991, p. 175)

As Zainab, a Sunni Muslim pointed out, the ten days of Moharram are a sacred time for both Sunnis and Shias. However, for Shias this time in the Islamic calendar is especially meaningful because it recalls a moment that defines Shia identity through the tragic deaths of Hasan and Hussain, whom they believe to be the rightful leaders of the community of Muslims. Since this study is mainly concerned with Sunni Muslims, I experienced Moharram only indirectly through the attitudes of Sunnis in Delhi. However, I have chosen to include some of these fieldwork encounters to show how the historic divide and ongoing tensions between Shias and Sunnis in India rise to the surface during Moharram, making this a particularly charged and volatile time for Muslims.

During Moharram, I happened to be at Mushtaq's office in Old Delhi one afternoon - a tiny one room affair protruding awkwardly from a side wall of a small mosque, containing only a small table and two battered chairs. As we chatted, several others (mostly friends or acquaintances) stopped by and some continued on their way after a quick greeting and others stayed for a longer chat. Of the visitors on this particular afternoon, Mushtaq introduced me to Nawaz and followed it immediately with the statement, "He is Shia. He will have many interesting things to tell you about how they are treated, and how they feel", thus hinting at the ongoing differences and tensions between Shias and Sunnis in India. Nawaz seemed almost embarrassed and smiled awkwardly but said nothing. Not seeming to notice Nawaz's discomfort, Mushtaq went

on to say that relations between himself and his Shia friends had always been good, and in a gesture of offering proof of his goodwill, he told me that every year during Moharram he goes with Nawaz on the procession accompanying the *tazia* and participates in the accompanying events.

Despite such gestures as Mushtaq's it became clear that most Sunni Muslims in Delhi see Shias as fundamentally different from themselves and find their religious rituals and beliefs unpalatable, even un-Islamic, as the following incidents with Zainab and Aamna will show. On my request, Zainab, a Sunni woman, took me to the home of a Shia acquaintance, to witness a *maatam*, an event mourning the death of the beloved sons of Ali, Hasan, and Hussain. From Zainab's sister's home, a ten minute rickshaw ride later, we arrived at the partially open gate of a modest two storied house, dressed in simple salwar kameez in dark colors, appropriate to the somber occasion. We walked in, took off our sandals and added them to the neat rows that had already formed, and stepped into a room full of women, busy greeting and talking to one another animatedly. Zainab greeted the women of the house and a few others she knew, before everyone drifted into a larger room and settled down on the floor covered with white sheets, forming a semi-circle around two women sitting on chairs, who, for the next hour and a half, recited and sang *marsia* or dirges. The audience listened with their heads bowed low, looking down in respectful and sorrowful silence. About a half hour into the recitations, some women had tears streaming down their faces and beat their chests in mourning, as they listened to the speakers narrating the wrongs done to Hasan and Hussain.

As the afternoon wore on, more women came in and those already present made room for the newcomers to sit on the floor. As the recitations built to a climax, the crying,

beating of chests, and rhythmic chants of the names of Hasan and Hussain reached a crescendo before coming to an end. Once the recitations were over, the women resumed talking to one another, greeting those who had come in late, exchanging neighborhood news, laughing, and chatting animatedly. Soon after, the women of the household brought out food - individual portions of kebab and naan (a kind of bread), wrapped in paper and ready to be handed to the women as they said their goodbyes and left. Zainab and I left together. As we rode another rickshaw back to her home, Zainab asked how my experience had been. Before I could answer, she shrugged her shoulders and said that she found it all “very strange” and could not understand how the women could be mourning and crying profusely during the maatam, and laughing and talking “normally” immediately afterwards.

When I met Aamna, she had been recently married and moved to Delhi to live with her husband and his parents. She belongs to a landed, well known family from Sundargaon, in the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh. When I visited her family’s ancestral home there, Aamna, showing me around the large rambling house and its surroundings, mentioned that many Muslims in the area who work her family’s fields or render other services are Shias. Pointing to a large raised platform near the main entrance to the house, Aamna said that every year during Moharram the tazia is decorated and kept here, and it is from here that the procession with the tazia starts with the well wishes of Aamna’s family. On a later occasion, while chatting with me at her home in Delhi, Aamna stated quite clearly that although she, like all Sunnis, held Ali and his sons in reverence, she did not subscribe to the overt show of grief that characterizes Moharram for Shias and found it overdone and distasteful.

Stemming from a fundamental disagreement with Shia views of the special role of Ali and his sons, many Sunni Muslims in Delhi, like Zainab and Aamna, expressed varying degrees of disdain about Shia practices of *maatam* or mourning during Moharram, most making the charge that it was ‘overdone’, ‘unreal’, or ‘fake’. However, such opinions were always voiced in conversations with me and never in the presence of Shias. In Sunni dominated South Asia, both Shias and Sunnis are mindful of their differences, and well aware of the potentially violent consequences of these differences. In the few cities of India where there is a large Shia concentration, such as Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, violent conflicts between Shias and Sunnis often break out during the charged days of Moharram, particularly when large Shia processions with elaborate tazias pass through the cities.

On a brief visit to Lucknow, shortly before the start of Moharram, I stayed at Razia’s family home, where her youngest sister and brother now live. One evening, Razia’s daughter-in-law’s sister, Kulsum, came by to visit. She lives with her husband’s family in an area that is at the heart of the old city of Lucknow. And through its crowded streets, Shia *maatam* processions wind their way every Moharram. As we chatted, everyone present, all Sunnis, expressed concerns about anticipated violent clashes between Shias and Sunnis during Moharram. They also hoped, like they did every year, that they would be proved wrong. Taking a step beyond hope, some of Lucknow’s Muslims, Shia and Sunni, including Kulsum’s husband, had already been at work, urging community leaders to be more proactive and use their powers of persuasion to prevent violence.

### *Conclusion*

Razia and I are sitting in comfortable cane chairs in a shaded part of the large lawn of her house in South Delhi, talking about the problems facing Muslims in India today, when she says:

There is also a kind of barrier (between Hindus and Muslims) created by these stereotype images (of Muslims). These have increased and we (Muslims) have contributed to the promotion of these images. For instance, the gol topi (round cap) frightens me also. I have never seen so many namazis (those offering namaaz) on jumma as I see now. I tell Imran (spouse), see them coming along in white caps and clothes. You know, they will all dress up in spotless kurta-pajamas, so many people, young and old, from all sections of society. If you pass the Okhla mandi (market) way on a Friday, you'll find people just walking from all sides (to the mosque) like I'd seen in Mecca. The azaan (call for prayer) sounds and everyone goes. On Fridays they clog the roads because there is such a huge jamaat for namaz. Over the years, I've seen it increase.

Razia's words bring back memories of my mother telling me about 1947, the year of the Partition of India. Her father, my grandfather (Dadu) was a munsef, or a lower court judge in the colonial judicial services. In 1947, he was working and living with his wife and young daughter in Borishal. Borishal, like much of the eastern part of the undivided Bengal province, had more Muslims than Hindus and most of Dadu's staff were Muslims. When Partition became a reality, Hindu government employees, like Dadu, were transferred out of Muslim dominated East Bengal (which was to become East Pakistan and later Bangladesh). Whenever my mother talks about their last few days in Borishal, she recalls how the news of partition led to impromptu celebrations among the Muslims living close by. And she remembers a pervasive feeling of fear, communicated wordlessly by her tense parents - fear that would become more tangible each time they would hear the azaan sounding from the mosque close by, a constant reminder that they



were Hindus among Muslims, and potential targets of Muslim rage in those uncertain days, despite the daily assurances from their largely Muslim staff.

Growing up in Calcutta, I was very aware that there are ‘Muslim’ areas within the city. It never struck me as odd that we had no friends or relatives living in these areas and that I had no familiarity with them, passing through them only on my way to some place else or stopping briefly for specific purposes - perhaps to drop off clothes to be stitched at Ashraf Tailors, or to pick up boxes of fragrant biryani at Badshah to be enjoyed later. Many years later, I arrived in Delhi for fieldwork. And this time I found it telling that almost every single Delhi-ite I asked, Hindu or Muslim, could easily reel off the names of Muslim areas in the city. As I have shown, in cosmopolitan urban centers like Delhi, distinct Muslim spaces are created and maintained as much through Islamic practices as also through negative stereotypes about Muslims, through a pervasive culture of fear and, in the most extreme instances, through violence. While my mother’s memories of their last days in Borishal compelled me to pay close attention to the role of an ever present Hindu fear and anxiety in the creation and maintenance of Muslim spaces, Razia’s fear of the “gol topi” and the crowds overflowing the mosque and onto the streets during Friday prayers urged me to pay attention to that which necessarily remains unacknowledged in homogenizing mainstream discourses – that Muslim spaces are also differently experienced by Muslims themselves, shaped by factors other than religion, such as class and gender. Thus, for a middle-class educated woman like Razia who came to age in Nehru’s India and holds as dear Nehru’s vision of India as a secular democracy, the crowds overflowing the mosque on a Friday become a cause for anxiety, precisely because it signals, for Razia, a growing public show of religiosity among Muslims. In

encroaching upon secular public spaces like roads, these Muslim bodies in prayer blur the boundaries that should ideally keep religion separate from public life in a secular country, and thus threatens, to Razia's mind, the Nehruvian secular ideal that she, and other middle-class Muslims like her, consider to be so important for holding India together.

## CHAPTER 4: LEARNING TO BE MUSLIM, LEARNING TO BE MODERN

### *Introduction*

The pedagogical practices and attitudes of Delhi's middle-class Muslims towards religious learning can be understood only in relation to a wider politics of language and education in colonial and post colonial India, shaped by specific language ideologies within which English, symbolic of modernity, occupies the pinnacle of a linguistic pyramid and Urdu, identified as a Muslim language, has come to be relegated to the bottom of the linguistic hierarchy. In their attitudes and practices, Delhi's middle-class Muslims express a very clear preference for secular, modern education, the medium of instruction being English, as opposed to traditional Islamic education or Arabic literacy, seeing the former as crucial to being a socially and economically successful modern citizen and the latter as significant only for the transferring of tradition. In this chapter, I show how this is a response to specific linguistic and educational policies in colonial and post colonial India that have consistently portrayed Muslims as educationally backward. I argue that the figure of the backward Muslim looms so large, and it has been internalized to such an extent by middle-class Muslims in Delhi that it precludes the possibility of creative structural changes in the knowledge system, in ways that religious and secular education may be conceptualized as a complementary whole rather than two clearly distinct spheres.

*The Backward Muslim*

Tracing the discursive life of the backward Muslim, Seth (2001) notes that it was following the introduction of Western education in India by the British colonial government in the first half of the nineteenth century that “the figure of the ‘backward Muslim’, falling behind his Hindu counterpart in educational attainments and hence in employment and influence, became a persistent theme and object of concern of the colonial government and of some Muslim organizations” (Seth, 2001, p. 136). The British colonial formulation of the backward Muslim was embraced by some sections of the Muslim elite, who sought to bring about reform, as seen for instance in the drive for encouraging modern education among Muslims, spearheaded by Syed Ahmed Khan and culminating in the foundation of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (now known as Aligarh Muslim University). Attempts to rectify the perceived lack of education among Muslims have also found shape in the later establishment of other educational institutions, such as the Jamia Milia Islamia University in Delhi. Despite these initiatives, however, the lack of modern education among Muslims in Old Delhi, as in India as a whole, continues to be identified by insiders and outsiders as one of the major problems facing Muslims in India today. As Salman, a middle-aged professional, put it, “Education is the only area in which they (Muslims) are lacking. If you can give them good education they’ll do well, there’s no doubt about it.” Thus, the discourse of the backward Muslim continues to thrive in India today as is evident from the 1983 government Report on Minorities which identified Muslims as a backward community because of “their dismal education and exceedingly poor socio-economic status, particularly of women,

and a higher drop-out rate at the elementary stage of education” (Hasan and Menon, 2005, p. 24).

### *Learning in English-Medium Schools*

Muslims in Old Delhi across class divides increasingly want to educate their children in English-medium schools, while providing basic religious education (mostly limited to Quran reading) at home after regular school hours or during school holidays. Aameena, a young, female, social worker, highlighted the significant relation between class, English medium-education and upward mobility among Old Delhi’s Muslims when she said:

If my uncle studied in Aligarh University his children are studying in St. Columbia or in Jesus and Mary. If you have studied in a government school your children are now going to public schools. And kids whose parents have studied in public schools are now going abroad to study.

Adnan, a young man from an affluent family, told me that while there had been several Muslims from Old Delhi and other Muslim-dominated areas of Delhi among his class mates at his elite English medium school, there are many lower-middle or lower-class Muslims who cannot afford to send their children to these elite schools but still want them to receive an English-medium education. To meet this overwhelming demand, a large number of small privately run English-medium schools have sprung up in various parts of Delhi, often with names like Oxford English-medium School. This is not a phenomenon confined to Delhi or North India. Edward Luce, a journalist with the *Financial Times*, came across a number of private English-medium schools in an area of mainly Muslim slums in the old city of Hyderabad in southern India.

Many state school teachers are available only for private tuition, so the parents have set up a flourishing network of private schools, staffed by untrained or semi-

trained teachers, which charge between 500 and 1500 rupees (\$ 12 – 36) a month in fees. These schools all teach in English, in contrast to their state-run counterparts, which teach in either Telugu, the language of Andhra Pradesh, or Urdu. The private schools overwhelmingly cater to the children of the Muslim working classes – rickshaw-wallahs, vegetable sellers, weavers and mechanics (Luce, 2006, p. 252)

While the quality of English-medium education received varies according to class, the aspiration to acquire such education cuts across classes. Thus, for Mushtaq who runs a small catering business in Old Delhi it is a matter of great pride and prestige that his eldest son Asad, all of six years, is attending the elite Delhi Public School. At the time of my stay in Delhi, Mushtaq was also trying very hard to have his daughter, four year old Aasia, admitted to a reputed English- medium school in South Delhi. Most Muslims in Old Delhi, across class, gender, and generational divides, made it clear that religious education is important but secondary and the provision of modern Western education is both desirable and necessary for improvement in their overall socio-economic conditions.

### *Learning to be Muslim*

Most Muslims in Old Delhi, across divides of class and gender, receive some instruction for learning to read the Quran and are, therefore, able to read the Quran by themselves. Such instruction is imparted either through informal channels such as parents and elders at home or in the neighborhood, or through more formal but part-time learning at home or at the local mosque, from a *maulana*<sup>19</sup>, usually in late afternoons or evenings after regular school hours. For instance, Yasmeen, who grew up in a well to do household, said, “The maulana from the masjid used to come home to teach me.” Salman described his experience in a small town in the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh where he grew up:

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<sup>19</sup> Maulana is an honorific title given to learned Muslim men.

Generally, in a small town you find some lady in the neighborhood or some small madrasa in a mosque where all the children go and study. We also used to go every evening for one hour. There was a lady who taught at her home. We used to go to her and there we finished learning, my brother, sister, and some more children. But she never used to take any money for it.

Kabir sahab, now in his 70s, said of his growing up years:

Everyone at home would have read the Quran. Grandmothers would usually have time on their hands, so they would sit with us kids. We would also go to the masjid where the maulana taught and Quran classes were held. Those who want can send their children there. Some people prefer to teach their children at home.

Shehnaz, a married woman in her mid thirties, had initially learnt to read the Quran at home from her mother and later at a local mosque for about a year and a half. She now teaches children to read the Quran in her home and said, “Many children have learnt to read (Quran) in our house and many still come to learn. I teach them or one of my relatives or my mother teaches. All of us have read the Quran so any of us can give lessons to them.”

Mohsin and Firoza have five sons, two of whom are in their teens and have completed their religious education. The younger ones—Imran aged twelve and the ten year old twins Akram and Afzal—regularly offer namaz but are still learning to read the Quran. They have a male tutor (addressed as maulana sahab) who comes to teach them at home in the early evening after they have returned from school, had lunch, and taken naps. On one such occasion, the tutor arrived and the children just could not be woken up from their after-school nap. Firoza then went through what became familiar to me - a whole routine of coaxing, cajoling, threatening, and warning (“Allah is watching you”) - before the boys got up and groggily but carefully washed their arms, legs, and faces, put on their white fez caps, and headed upstairs to maulana sahab.

Religious pedagogical strategies in Delhi are clearly gendered, with girls being taught primarily at home or by a female neighbor while boys are more often sent to local mosques or madrasas. Of the middle-class families in Old Delhi I interacted with, only two were sending a son each to be trained in the local mosque to become a *hafiz* or one who can recite the entire Quran from memory<sup>20</sup>. Religious instruction is also woven into the rhythms of daily life, as Farhan pointed out when he said, “I did receive religious education but I didn’t know it was religious. My grandmother used to tell me bed time stories and most of them used to be from the Quran, about Abraham and others. But I didn’t know at the time that she was talking about the Quran.”

### *Being Religious and Rational*

Despite the general consensus about the importance of reading the Quran, and the common practices of providing children with some instruction that enables them to do so, my interviews and numerous conversations revealed a much wider spectrum of attitudes towards and practices of knowledge centered around the Quran. For instance, when I asked Yasmeen, a young housewife and mother, if she read the Quran daily, Yasmeen replied:

Actually we say that daily at morning time you should definitely read one page. Then all your work in the world will go well. It is very necessary to read. Now, there are some times when one shouldn’t read. I don’t even touch it (the Quran) at that time (when menstruating) and nor do I read namaz at that time. Sometimes the children get late for school and I have to skip reading the Quran. But in general, I have been taught by my mother that even if you read only one page you must definitely read. It brings *barkat* (blessings and plenty) in the home, in food and drink and in the business.

Arpita: Are there other Islamic texts that you read?

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<sup>20</sup> Yoginder Sikand notes that “Often families want to carry on in the tradition of their ancestors and get at least one son, often one of the less bright or promising of them, to become an *alim*, send the rest to regular schools” (Sikand, 2000, p. 99).



Yasmeen: Yes. How much you read depends on you. Now it is a matter of shortage of time. Before marriage there was a lot of time. Now, being with the children all day I don't even realize how the time slips away,

Arpita: What did you read when you could?

Yasmeen: There were many books, like books on the techniques of namaz where you find that there are so many different ways. You find out about which things are *sunnat* (recommended) in namaz and which things we should do. All these things are there in the books.

Yasmeen's sentiment was by far the most commonly expressed by middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi - that one should and does try to live up to the ideal of reading the Quran every day but sometimes the business of daily life gets in the way. For Yasmeen and many others I met in Old Delhi, reading the Quran and other religious texts is a means of acquiring knowledge about how to live one's life according to the norms of Islam or that which is recommended (*sunnat*). But it is also something larger than acquiring knowledge for, as Salman explained, the very act of reading the Quran is considered to be *ibaadat* or a form of worshipping Allah. For Yasmeen, the act of reading the Quran is linked even more intimately to her everyday life in that it brings *barkat* or blessings to her household.

Despite these commonly expressed sentiments, many middle-class educated Muslims admitted that they did not read the Quran regularly. They did not see this as a failure on their part as Muslims, but explained it instead to be stemming from what they considered to be a critical difference between their own relations to the Quran, as compared to the Quran reading practices of the majority of their less educated fellow Muslims in Old Delhi. Listen, for instance, to the ways in which middle-class, educated professionals like Salman, Kabir sahab and Farhan talked about their Quran-reading practices and attitudes towards the Quran:

Salman: I finished reading the Quran at the age of seven. I can recite very fluently. Even just a recitation is considered as worshipping. Reciting the Quran is *ibaadat* or a form of worship, but since I don't believe in the worshipping thing I try to extract the good thing out of it and put it into practice. That is what I believe in.

Arpita: Did you receive some religious education?

Kabir sahab: Yes, yes. In my home at that time the atmosphere was very religious. Nowadays that atmosphere is no longer there, since there is no longer the feeling that children should read the Quran along with schooling. For us, reading the Quran didn't mean that you read it once and were done with it. You were supposed to keep reading it regularly so you wouldn't forget. And we also had to keep *roza*<sup>21</sup> and offer namaz.

Arpita: So, you keep reading (the Quran) regularly?

Kabir sahab: I can read but I don't read (laughs).

Farhan: I am Muslim but I don't know how to offer namaz and I have never read the Quran. I tried to read it but could not go beyond the first few letters (Arabic letters). They say that nobody wrote the Quran and it just came down (*utra hai*). I don't believe that. I fail to accept that as a religion, as a part of my belief.

Arpita: Why does that not seem plausible to you?

Farhan: That the Quran came down? It doesn't *yaar*<sup>22</sup> (laughs). It's like saying *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* (a famous Hindi movie) was based on a true life story!

For both Salman and Kabir sahab, it is important to point out that they are perfectly capable of reading and reciting the Quran fluently. Having thus established their credentials as proper Muslims, they then go on to demonstrate their positions as educated, rational, thinking Muslims. As such, Salman *chooses* not to read the Quran regularly as a form of worship but to read it at his leisure, in order to extract knowledge from the text and put it into practice. Kabir sahab is more ambivalent - on the one hand, he seems to disapprove of the fact that children are no longer made to read the Quran in a meaningful way but on the other hand he laughingly admits that he does not read the Quran regularly, taking care to stress that he is fully capable of reading it. Farhan's frank admission of his inability to read the Quran and his questioning of the very validity of the Quran make him

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<sup>21</sup> Roza refers to the fast that Muslims are supposed to observe from sunrise to sundown during the holy month of Ramzaan.

<sup>22</sup> Yaar is a form of informal address used among friends who are close in age.

vulnerable to the serious charge of being a *kafir* or non-believer, but Farhan firmly identifies himself as a Muslim. In this context, it is Farhan's English-medium school and college education, financial affluence, and his family's social status as one of the esteemed Muslim families in North India that give him the confidence to make these admissions to me (an outsider) while still making a strong claim to a Muslim identity. Indeed, Farhan, Salman, and Kabir sahab each establish their own positions as rational, modern individuals by producing themselves as thinking Muslims, different from the masses that follow the tenets of Islam without true understanding which, according to them, can only emerge from critical reflection. As modern individuals they insist, thus, on a very different relationship with the Quran as text, a relation that is defined not by worship or *ibaadat* but by rational thinking which is a hallmark of modernity.

#### *Islamic Knowledge and Worldly Knowledge*

In numerous interviews and conversations with middle-class Muslims in Delhi, I found repeated expressions of the desire to have their children avail of modern education, primarily because it is perceived to be a means for gaining upward socio-economic mobility. Religious knowledge is still considered important and, as I have shown, everyone still receives some instruction in Quran reading. However, the marked preference for mainstream education among Delhi's middle-class Muslims stems from the belief that religious education, while necessary for development of one's religious and moral self, is largely irrelevant to one's socio-economic success in life as a modern citizen and it should therefore be confined to the private sphere. As Salman explained in some detail for instance:

Basically there is a need to modify the way Islam is preached nowadays. Otherwise Islam is the best and there's no doubt that it teaches you the best way of living. But the preachers have their preconceived ideas about everything and they want to direct everyone to think the way they think. They interpret things in their own manner. For example, Islam says a person should be educated. In Islam we call it *taleem*. Education is given importance in Islam, but what kind of education? If you ask the preachers for their definition of education it'll be different from mine. They'll tell you that you must educate yourself about the Quran, about all the deeds of Islam, and you should be fit enough and sufficiently educated and talented to earn your bread. The rest Allah will give you, as Allah provides for everyone. I say, if you subscribe to this belief then don't complain that I didn't get this and he's getting this. If you are not putting yourself in the worldly competition then don't complain. But if you put yourself into the competition then you have to come into that field and learn all those things which are required to be in that competition. And you have to score high marks. So if you want to become a scientist or an engineer then only religious studies cannot make you a scientist or an engineer. I find that although preachers are very sharp and can memorize the Quran and become a hafiz, which is not an easy thing, they don't want to put that effort into other kinds of education. There are many people who are thinking like me now and awareness is increasing. But if someone who is highly religious hears what I am saying, then he will straightaway outcast me and say he is not a Muslim, he is talking nonsense and don't give him any importance.

Like Salman, when Delhi's middle-class Muslims expressed the view, as they often did, that lack of education is one of the main problems facing Muslims in India today, by education they meant 'modern' education in the English language and accepted a rigid separation between religious and worldly education. However, such a widespread acceptance of the rigid separation between religious and secular education was not always in place. As Yoginder Sikand notes, "...in both the Quran and the Hadith knowledge is seen as one comprehensive whole, there being no rigid division between 'religious' (*dini*) and 'worldly' or 'secular' (*duniyavi*) knowledge... As the Quran sees it, to conduct one's worldly affairs in accordance with God's will is also a form of worship" (Sikand, 2005, p. 31). In medieval India, both transmitted and rational sciences were taught at the madrasa because the two were not seen as systems of knowledge opposed to each other, in the way that that a clear distinction is made in modern India between

religious and secular education. Famous madrasas in India, like Firangi Mahal, emphasized the teaching of ‘rational’ sciences over and above ‘transmitted’ sciences, although the latter was also taught. While some sections of the ulama saw the popularity of the rational sciences as threatening, the teaching of these sciences continued since it was important for securing employment in the Muslim courts. Feeling that Islam and their own authority was threatened with the decay of the Mughal Empire, many revivalist ulama such as Shah Waliullah of Delhi insisted on turning to a more narrow definition of Islamic education to mean strictly religious education (Sikand, 2005, p. 48). The difference between Islamic and secular education was further crystallized with the advent of British rule in India. As English-medium education rather than madrasa education became the path to obtaining lucrative employment, Muslim elites increasingly sent their sons to British schools while madrasas began catering to Muslims from lower classes, thus creating a sharp divide within the Muslim community that is present to this day.

In the process of accepting and trying to overcome the stigma of being educationally backward, Delhi’s middle-class Muslims seem to have unquestioningly embraced the modern separation between religious and secular learning and the relegation of religion to the private sphere. Thus, for middle-class Muslims in Delhi, becoming modern has come to be inextricably linked with acquiring English medium education, while religious learning, although acknowledged to be important, exists on the periphery of their daily lives. In what follows, I shall look more closely at how and why the separation between Islamic and worldly knowledge has come to be so widely accepted, with Islamic knowledge being marked as traditional and secular or mainstream education as modern and more useful.

*The Perceived Failure of Madrasas to Modernize*

The emphasis laid by Delhi's middle-class Muslims on acquiring English-medium, mainstream education appears to contrast sharply with the nation-wide rise in the number of madrasas in India. A madrasa is defined as an "an institution geared to the preservation and teaching of the Islamic scholarly tradition"<sup>23</sup> (Sikand, 2005, p. 1). There is little agreement over the number of madrasas in India today, particularly given the range of madrasas some of which exist within mosques while others, like Dar ul-'Ulum in Deoband, are sprawling university campuses with Mughal style grand architectural features. Estimates put the number of madrasas between 12,000, identified by the home ministry, and the figure of 30,000 (Robinson, 2005; Sikand, 2005). Cautioning against exaggerating the influence of madrasas, Sikand reminds us that in the context of the size of the Muslim population in India, estimated to be about 150 million, the number of madrasas in India is not that enormous and only a small proportion of Muslim students study full time in madrasas (Sikand, 2005, p. 95). However, the continuing significance of madrasas in contemporary India must be understood in relation to the position of Muslims, as a minority in an always potentially hostile larger environment. As under British colonial rule so also in contemporary times, for many Muslims in India madrasas are symbolically significant Islamic spaces responsible for imparting proper knowledge of Islam, so that Muslim identities may be preserved and nurtured—a task seen as even more urgent with the rising power of the Hindu right-wing and the widespread perception of the use of text books in government schools, to inculcate ideas of Hindu superiority and Muslim inferiority.

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<sup>23</sup> As Sikand (2005) notes, the term madrasa is rooted in the Arabic word dars which means learning.

Moreover, for many poor Muslims madrasas provide the only source of education, often including free boarding and lodging, and it equips graduates to support themselves as *imams* or teachers in madrasas, thus also providing for low-caste<sup>24</sup> Muslims a path to upward social mobility. The vast majority of madrasa students today come from low and lower- middle-class backgrounds (Kumar, 2002), while Delhi's middle-class and upper-class Muslims aim to secure for their children the best possible modern, Western education in English-medium schools. Not one of the middle-class Muslims I talked with in Delhi saw madrasas as capable of imparting an education that would enable socio-economic mobility, and many were critical of government failures to provide good quality mainstream education for Muslim children. Some like Adnan are more critical of the role played by maulanas, who are perceived as conservative and hindering the spread of modern education:

You know, if you go to Barabanki (in the state of Uttar Pradesh) and places like that, Muslims definitely send their girl child to the madrasa and the boys are also sent to madrasas. These madrasas are also economically powerful. If you land up in a village where there is no school and you go and build a madrasa there, kids don't have a choice but to go there. So that is what the madrasa is doing to Muslims. Now there's a lot of money in madrasas and they are highly conservative. And they land up in places where I wish they could build proper schools instead. So it is not that poor Muslims do not want to get educated but they are not being given the opportunity by people from within the community who can give him the opportunity.

Ameena, a young social worker in the field of education, also laments the lack of opportunities for modern education and links it to a lack of able leadership within the community:

Now Muslims have climbed up quite a bit and there's no shortage of money. The middle-class is quite settled. I am from the middle-class. But I'm talking about the

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<sup>24</sup> Caste distinctions are common among Muslims in many parts of India and upper-caste Muslims are often disdainful of lower-caste Muslims. However, as among many Hindus, for Muslims living in large cities like Delhi caste distinctions are of relatively little importance (see Bhatti, 1996, Luce, 2007).

lower-middle-class people. Changes are necessary there. They have adopted modernism (Ameena's term) but they need to focus on their education a bit more. There's a lot of talent here (in Old Delhi) but there is no opportunity here. The problem is that the people here need a godfather type of person who will come and guide them. Here the families of young boys and girls don't have the level of education that is required to guide their children.

Writing of Mughal Delhi, William Dalrymple notes that madrasas were regarded even by British colonialists as centers of the highest, most well rounded education available in Mughal India. Dalrymple cites the example of one Colonel William Sleeman, who commented on the madrasa education available in Delhi as being at par with the best British education:

Perhaps there are few communities in the world among whom education is more generally diffused than among Muhammadans in India....He who holds an office worth twenty rupees a month commonly gives his sons an education equal to that of a prime minister. They learn, through the medium of Arabic and Persian languages, what young men in our colleges learn through those of Greek and Latin – that is, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. After his seven years of study the young Muhammadan binds his turban upon a head almost as well filled with the things which appertain to these branches of knowledge as the young man raw from Oxford – he will talk as fluently about Socrates and Aristotle, Plato and Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna; (alias Sokrat, Aristotalis, Aflatun, Bokrat, Jalinus and Bu Ali Sena); and, what is much to his advantage in India, the languages in which he has learnt what he knows are those which he most requires through life. (quoted in Dalrymple, 2006, p. 95)

Dalrymple describes Delhi in the 1850s as “a celebrated intellectual centre...at the peak of its cultural vitality” (2006, p. 95) with many reputed madrasas, several newspapers, journals and legendary poets and intellectuals like Ghalib, Zauq, Sahbai, and Azurda. Attesting to the open-ness of madrasas to Western science and education Dalrymple notes that, “Here many of the new wonders uncovered by Western science were being translated for the first time into Arabic and Persian, and in the many colleges and madrasas the air of intellectual open-mindedness and excitement was palpable” (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 95).



However, with the introduction of new forms of education under the British, education in madrasas increasingly came to be restricted to “what was to be narrowly defined as ‘religious’ (*dini*) or ‘Islamic’” (Sikand, 2005, p.66). This was related to the rigid separation between the religious and the secular that came with colonialism so that:

In the minds of many ulama, religious education (*dini talim*) came to be limited simply to the transmitted sciences, while the rational sciences came to be seen as secular (*duniyavi*) or modern (*asri, jaded*).... Such a “narrowing of the focus of the madrasas...led to a growing stagnation in the madrasa system of education” (Sikand, 2005, p. 67).

Moreover, the quality of education provided in madrasas also suffered a huge setback with Partition and the migration to Pakistan of many leading ulama from important madrasas. Today, as Yoginder Sikand shows, madrasas in India are indeed beset with many problems including factionalism, the lack of consensus among various sects, and the unwillingness on the part of many madrasas to include the teaching of modern disciplines. Given this current condition of madrasas in India and the Muslim middle-class desire to be modern, it is not surprising that they express an explicit preference for an English-medium education rather than a madrasa education.

#### *Discrimination in Education and Employment*

While preferring English-medium education over madrasa education, many middle-class Muslims also expressed acute dissatisfaction regarding the availability and quality of modern education as well as employment opportunities for Muslims. In accounting for backwardness of Muslims in India in the field of modern education, Yoginder Sikand notes that, “There is enough evidence to suggest considerable discrimination against Muslims in matters of educational provision, with proportionately fewer schools being set up by the government in Muslim localities” (Sikand, 2005, p. 97).

The lack of government schools in Old Delhi and the constant struggles and negotiations to keep resources in the area were revealed in a conversation with Ameena, a young woman from Old Delhi who currently works as a project manager with a non-governmental organization that specializes in “remedial education.” Recalling a conversation with an important government school official, Ameena spoke of his attempt to justify the decision to move the eleventh and twelfth grades from a government school in Chitli Qabar, a locality in the interior of Old Delhi, to Daryaganj, an area on the outer fringes. While the government official argued that the decision was due to the lack of students in the former area, Ameena tried to explain to him:

Today if you send one girl who lives in Chitli Qabar to Ansari road (near Daryaganj) that means she spends ten rupees going and ten rupees coming back. If she comes by foot she drains her energy for studying at school. The second thing is that a girl who is wearing a veil and going to a Chitli Qabar area school, when she crosses the road she can't wear a veil there because nobody wears veils there. The other school may not be very far in terms of actual distance but culturally there is a distance. He couldn't understand that they wouldn't fit in there. This kid is from a lower-middle-class family and there the kids are from middle-class households. So there, for example, one has to eat sandwiches and have cold drinks. This kid is not in the habit. She is in the habit of eating home made *parantha* (fried bread) or eating last night's *roti* and *subzi* (bread and vegetables) for lunch. I told the government officer that this might be a very insignificant thing for you, but you have to understand that these things hold a lot of meaning in the growth of a child.

Malika Qizilbash, interviewed by Hasan & Menon (2005), is a long time resident of Old Delhi and a teacher for thirty years at Bulbul-e-Khana, the oldest school for Muslim girls in Delhi. She too is critical of the government's lack of efforts to encourage vocational education for girls in Old Delhi, as well as the poor quality of teaching in corporation (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) primary schools, noting that that's why “better off and more educated families now send their daughters to public schools”

(Hasan & Menon, 2005, p. 59). Her comments on lack of resources in Old Delhi touch on issues similar to those that Ameena raises:

Earlier, if Muslim girls wanted to study science, they would have to go to Mata Sundari School. Even now, crossing those two roads is considered to be quite a distance - from Turkman Gate to the red lights and then to Mata Sundari, even now it is considered to be far. So at that time children had to walk a considerable distance if they wanted to study science. (quoted in Hasan & Menon, 2005, p. 66)

In the government schools that do exist in Old Delhi, Ameena points to ways in which Muslims are harassed in discriminatory ways:

I've seen that all this (discrimination) happens a lot because these are schools with largely Muslim students and non-Muslim teachers. You understand torture? So for instance they (teachers) will say, "Oh, you come from such households, what will you study? Have your parents and families studied that you will study?" Being a teacher you cannot talk like this to a student. If a kid has not done the homework you can scold, you can even hit the child. But you can't talk like this! This is my personal observation. When I was in twelfth grade, there was a teacher who made some similar comment about me. She didn't know about my family. Sure I was studying in a government school, but that didn't mean I was from that kind of background. So my uncle came and complained to the principal and the teacher had a bad time.

Ameena's statement that normally people from a certain *kind of background*, that is the lower and lower-middle classes, would go to government schools points again to the significance of class differences among Delhi's Muslims in shaping access to modern education. Thus, in the middle-class area of Jamianagar long time residents like Razia said that the situation was "not so bad", particularly due to the presence of the Jamia Milia Islamia University that provides inexpensive education for many people. Moreover, due to the popular perception of the lack of education among Muslims as a major problem, the center for social work at Jamia University and other non-governmental organizations receive funding that enables them to provide educational and vocational training, particularly for girls. Razia also notes a high degree of awareness among those

who employ local women for domestic work, such that “in a number of homes (where these women work) the employers find out if their children are going to school or not, and they help through financial support or by helping in their studies.”

### *Women’s Education*

One of the ways in which mainstream discourses produce Muslim backwardness is by highlighting the lack of education among Muslim women. However, in contrast to these stereotypes of conservative Muslims who keep their women at home, and despite the fact that “some ulama still viewed ‘modern’ education as un-Islamic, particularly for girls” (Sikand, 2005, p. 98), in Old Delhi it is Muslim girls who are availing of formal, modern education in increasing numbers as compared to Muslim boys - a change that Malika Qizilbash, a long time resident of Old Delhi and a teacher, links to women’s desire for economic independence (Hasan & Menon, 2005, p. 60). This was also identified by most of my respondents, particularly women, as one of the major and most significant changes in Old Delhi in the last two decades. For instance Razia said, “People in Old Delhi are still caught up in their traditions and their old ways of life, but I think education there has definitely improved and women are more educated as compared to the men.” Ameena elaborated on this “positive change” in greater detail:

Girls have become more conscious about their education. I feel like everyone wants to study now. And many barriers have been removed. Girls don’t go only into the teaching profession any more. I think this is a very positive change. My cousin (female) is now doing a course with Jain TV in order to become news reader. She has no problem in going into that profession. This change has come about in the last few years. Another (female) cousin of mine is going into advertising after getting a degree in Fine Arts. So now things have changed and there are many girls coming out of middle-class families and working in many professions. Now, in this time, doing a job is not seen as a *gaali* (literally means swearing but used in the sense of bad here). In poor households where women work there is a need for money. At one point that was the philosophy in Old Delhi.

Now this has changed. Now working is something to be proud of. My mother and I were talking just yesterday about this and we were laughing. Earlier, when they used to come to see a girl (as a prospective bride) they would ask, can you do household work? Do you know how to do stitching? Nowadays they ask how far the girl has studied even if their own son has only passed the tenth grade. They want to know how much the girl has studied, whether she works, whether she teaches. I'll tell you, the girls here, even if they earn only 700 rupees they would have a reputation that they go and teach in government schools! Do you understand what a great change this is in mentality? I think a lot of people today feel that girls should have a job. There are still some who think they shouldn't. But this is a very major change.

Despite this major change there continue to be several problems with girls' education. According to Khubroo Khanum, a teacher at Bulbul-e-Khana, the oldest girls school in Delhi, some of the obstacles in the way of girls' education are financial hardship, uneducated parents who are unable to help, Hindi rather than Urdu as a medium of instruction in many schools, social pressures to marry early and take on household work, all of which contribute to a very high drop out rate among girls, with only about fifty percent of students making it to the twelfth grade (Hasan & Menon, 2005, p. 59). While many of these problems extend to education among Muslims, in general, my respondents articulated yet other problems that are more specific to women and have significant consequences for the nature of gender relations in the community. For instance, while Razia and Ameena are happy about the fact that more women are acquiring modern education they point out that this is causing problems in finding suitable matches for them when it comes to marriage:

Razia: I have found that the girls get educated while the men get into family business. Many women become highly qualified and there are problems finding educated boys for them. This is one of the very serious problems in Old Delhi. Either the women get married at a very young age and are unable to carry on with their education or they go in for an education and then they have this problem of finding a suitable match. But things are definitely improving for women.

Ameena: Nowadays the environment is such that parents want to get girls married off. When the girl gets educated where will you find a boy for her? In the matter

of education boys are totally useless! Among them five per cent are very good but that five per cent will not marry these girls you see. They will want better<sup>25</sup> girls for themselves.

As a result, says Ameena, in Old Delhi there are increasing incidences of Hindu-Muslim marriages which, according to her, is a “major problem”:

In my view that should not happen because not everyone has the capacity to maintain such relationships. Love marriages, especially inter-caste<sup>26</sup> marriages, are happening a lot more than was the case earlier. Now it is very common for a Muslim girl to marry a Hindu boy, no problem. Girls have become very modern mentally (in a sarcastic tone). When girls step out of the house there are negative aspects also. When you don't have the brains or intelligence how will you manage yourself? It is a positive sign that you are coming out of the house and getting an education but to maintain that is difficult. Divorce is also increasing. As my grandmothers and my mother tell me, earlier relationships used to last because in them the man ultimately had an upper hand. Now the reason for marriages breaking up more easily is that girls are able to say, “I'm also earning, what is your problem?” Meaning, now there are more ego clashes.

Many other respondents were also of the view that boys are not getting as much education as girls because many of them get involved in running family businesses or small enterprises early on, especially since the popular perception is that one can make as much or more money running a small business as compared to holding a salaried job or *naukri*. A related and significant reason for lesser education among boys is the widely held and voiced view that employers do not want to give jobs to Muslims. When I asked about discrimination faced in getting jobs some said directly that Muslims were discriminated against, especially in government jobs, while many others said that there is no such discrimination. However, of these latter some pointed to discrimination indirectly when they said for instance:

Arpita: Some people say that Muslims aren't given enough jobs.

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<sup>25</sup> By 'better' Ameena means that educated men will want as wives women who are not only educated, but come from wealthy, educated families.

<sup>26</sup> While Ameena uses the word inter-caste here, she is talking about inter-religious marriages and primarily about marriages between Hindus and Muslims.

Salman: No, I don't agree with that statement. If you have talent you will get it. There is one thing though - if you participate in a competition and if the passing grade is supposed to be fifty out of hundred, you have to score fifty one. This is true in India at least and even abroad this is the situation of Muslims. You have to score fifty one or fifty two and then only can you expect the job. Even with a score of fifty you will not get it. You have to be *above* the average in comparison to others. Then only you can expect to get the job.

Another significant problem for Muslims keen on acquiring mainstream education is the recent move to revise school textbooks in accordance with Hindu fundamentalist visions of the past. Such a new communal revisionism of history has been spearheaded by powerful political players like the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, who described Leftist historians as “intellectual terrorists” who are “much more dangerous than the cross -border variant” (Murlidharan, 2002, p. 6). Dr. Joshi issued an official directive to the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) asking that all “objectionable portions [that] hurt the religious sentiments of people” be removed from history textbooks (*The Hindu*, October 9, 2001). Many leading national newspapers such as *The Hindu*, *The Times of India* and *The Statesman* carried several articles and editorials expressing criticism and outrage against Joshi's move and a larger communalization of Indian society<sup>27</sup>. Reacting to Joshi's move, historian Irfan Habib stated that “The Sangh Parivar wants to not only dilute the content, but also present facts in such a fashion as to inculcate ‘pride in the nation’ which in turn is the India of their narrow imagination” (*The Hindu*, October 9, 2001). In a similar critique, Achin Vanaik wrote in a newspaper editorial:

Sangh ideologists...can only promote a regression towards the older kinds of cultural histories where a Western paternalist Orientalism obsessed about ‘civilizational essences’ and ‘essential differences’ actually promoted a Brahmanical-philosophical centered view of Hinduism, Indian society, and

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<sup>27</sup> See Sahmat's 2000 publication, titled *Communalisation of Education: The Assault on History*, New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust.

culture. The irony is complete! The Sangh Parivar, self-proclaimed defender of indigenous ‘authenticity’, is the most faithful offspring of Western paternalism in historical research. (Achin Vanaik, *The Hindu*, 2001)

In keeping with recent government requirements, madrasas have also had to develop a new curriculum to fit a government board syllabus rather than a classical Islamic syllabus. For instance, they have had to include subjects like history and geography, textbooks for which had to be written. Such textbooks also reveal religious biases as evident in the following excerpt from a fourth grade social studies text book taught at Jamia Hamidia Rizvia, a Barelwi sect madrasa, on the Jama masjid, the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, a city holy to Hindus as well:

This Jama Masjid was built approximately 315 years ago in 1070 hijri (c.1664 C.E.) by the renowned emperor of Hindustan, Alamgir. Hindus claim that it was built by destroying a temple on this site. This is wrong. The foundations of this mosque were laid by the great grandfather of Emperor Alamgir, Akbar, and Alamgir’s father, Shah Jahan, had started a madrasa in the mosque in 1048 hijri that was named “Imam-e-Sharifat”. (from Maulana Abdus Salam, *Geography District Varanasi*, quoted in Kumar 2002: 344)

While Kumar notes that such textbooks “create a history and consciousness on questionable premises”, she also emphasizes that unlike government-run schools such madrasas have a limited reach and therefore cannot impose their views on a larger populace (Kumar, 2002, p. 344).

### *Of Multiple Language Ideologies and Incomplete Hegemonies*

Emphasizing the multiplicity of linguistic ideologies, scholars (e.g. Gal, 1997; Woolard, 1985) have pointed out that not only do different language ideologies construct different visions of reality but that multiple language ideologies exist in contention with each other “within a single social formation” (Gal, 1997, p. 320). While there is usually a dominant ideology within a social formation, such ideologies, too, are rarely uniform or



monolithic. Given that hegemony is always partial and in the making, there is always room for contestation and the emergence of new or multiple dominant language ideologies.

The current preference among Delhi's middle-class Muslims for English-medium education must, thus, be understood in relation to a wider politics of language, and the contentious relation between different language ideologies that jostle for space within the socio-economic world of Muslims in Delhi. On the one hand, the association between knowing English and being modern, and the functional value of English in enabling one to secure jobs in contemporary India leads to an overwhelming importance being attached to learning English. As I have shown, the value attached to knowing English cuts across divisions of class and gender among Muslims in Delhi, and the importance given to English is certainly not confined to Muslims alone in India. However, like any dominant ideology, the hegemony of English and the related hegemony of Western modernity is never complete and is cross-cut by other language ideologies, such as the significance of Urdu for middle-class Muslims in Delhi.

Thus, as I sit cross legged on the white sheeted floor in Mohsin's home in Old Delhi, talking with him about various things - the unbearable heat of the Delhi summer, the college where Mohsin teaches Persian, why Bengalis use so much turmeric in their cooking, and so on - we switch back and forth between Hindi, Urdu and English, sometimes using all three in the same sentence. This is how most of my conversations with friends in Old Delhi would proceed, since all of them are fluent in Urdu and Hindi<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Urdu and Hindi in the spoken form are very close to each other, but the scripts are different since Urdu is based on the Arabic script and Hindi on the Devnagri script.

and most use at least a sprinkling of English words (like friend, school, vacation, shopping), although some would converse in English entirely.

The current significance of English among Delhi's Muslims (as indeed among urban and increasingly also among rural Indians) is, of course, directly linked to British colonial rule in India. As Khilnani points out:

The imposition of English as the language of politics transfigured Indian public life in at least two ways: it obviously divided the British rulers from their Indian subjects; and it also divided Indians themselves, between those who could speak English....and those who did not....The slow extraction of power from the society and its concentration in the state was in India's case crucially a matter of language. The social power that Sanskrit – and then Persian – had once held was replaced by a new, still more mysterious, more potent language of state: English. (Khilnani, 2004, p. 23)

However, the Urdu language has a much longer and influential history in India dating from the Mughal period. As William Dalrymple writes, the city of Delhi in particular was the center for the nurturing and refinement of Urdu:

If there was one thing in which the town was most confident, it was in the beauty and elegance of its language. After all, Urdu was born in Delhi....According to Maulvi Abd ul-Haq, 'Anyone who has not lived in Delhi could never be considered a real connoisseur of Urdu. It is as if the steps of the Jama masjid are a school of fine language.' There was no other city like this.... The intoxication with the elegance of Delhi's language was common to both men and women – there was a special dialect of Delhi Urdu used only in the women's quarters – and perhaps more surprisingly to all classes. Poetry in particular was an obsession not just of the elite but also, to a remarkable extent, of the ordinary people. The Garden of Poetry, a collection of Urdu verse published ..., contains no fewer than 540 poets from Delhi, who range from the Emperor and fifty members of his family to a poor water seller in Chandni Chowk, a merchant in Punjabi Kutra, 'Farasu', an elderly German Jewish mercenary – one of a surprising number of Europeans in Delhi who had taken to Mughal culture – a young wrestler, a courtesan and a barber. At least fifty-three of these Urdu poets have clearly Hindu names (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 35).

The decline of Urdu began with the British colonial period, when English gradually replaced Persian and Urdu as the language of power. From a slim book

published by Urdu Ghar, a copy of which Kabir sahab handed to me, I learnt that at the sixteenth session of the All India Muslim Educational Conference held in 1903 in Delhi, the Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu was set up to oversee and advocate the development and nurturance of Urdu language in India. The Anjuman now has over 620 branches throughout India as well as break off section in Pakistan with its own branches. In pre-Partition India, the Anjuman worked tirelessly to have Hindustani, defined as a simple language written both in Urdu and Devnagri scripts, be accepted as an official Indian language. In the communal violence that broke out with Partition in 1947, the office of the Anjuman in Delhi was attacked and ransacked and much of the property, as well as publications, valuable manuscripts, and rare books were looted or burnt.

In newly independent India the debate about national language centered around three main contestants, Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani. As Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, pressing for Hindustani as the national language in the Constituent Assembly explained:

A style resplendent with Persian is called Urdu and a style leaning towards Sanskrit is known as Hindi. The term 'Hindustani' has developed a wider connotation; it embraces all forms of the language spoken in northern India. It includes 'Hindi' as well as 'Urdu', and even more than that, it includes each and every shade of the spoken language of the north. It does not exclude any. It covers all (quoted in Noorani, 2003, p. 294).

Unfortunately, few shared Azad's broad outlook and in independent India Urdu has increasingly been neglected and replaced by Hindi as the official language of the central and many state governments. Moreover, with Pakistan declaring Urdu as its national language, Urdu in India has come to be characterized as "a 'Muslim' language with 'Pakistani' associations, while Hindi was projected as somehow more 'Indian'" (Sikand, 2005, p. 98).

However, organizations like the Anjuman have continued to work towards the preservation and development of Urdu in independent India. For instance, in 1954 under the aegis of the Anjuman, a memorandum with signatures of Hindu and Muslim Urdu speakers was prepared and submitted to the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The demands made in the memorandum included:

- (a) Providing adequate facilities for instruction and examination through Urdu medium at the primary level to all children whose parents or guardians have declared Urdu as their mother tongue, strictly in accordance with the arrangements for the training of teachers to both sexes capable of imparting education and of examining boys and girls in Urdu in the primary classes and for providing suitable text books in Urdu for these classes.
- (b) Providing adequate facilities for instruction through the medium of Urdu at the secondary level of education and for making immediate arrangements for providing the necessary teachers and text books in Urdu language for these classes.
- (c) Ensuring the publication of important laws, rules, regulations and notifications in Urdu language, and acceptance of documents in Urdu by all courts and offices without their translation or transliteration into any other language or script and the entertainment of applications, petitions and representations in Urdu.
- (d) Recognizing Urdu as a medium of examination in all competitive examinations connected with recruitment to Public Services, in accordance with the fundamental rights of equality of opportunity in matters of public employment guaranteed by Article 16 of the constitution.
- (e) Rendering financial assistance to:
  - (i) institutions imparting higher education through Urdu and other institutions for the propagation of literature and sciences through Urdu
  - (ii) awarding scholarship to students, writers and scholars in Urdu, and
  - (iii) giving grants-in-aid to Urdu libraries in order to implement fully the provisions of article 16 of the constitution.
- (f) Ensuring that the broadcasting of news, talks, plays etc. by All India Radio is adequate enough to meet the requirements of the Urdu speaking population, either by devoting some station or stations mainly for Urdu programs or by increasing substantially the percentage of Urdu programs at Delhi, Lucknow, Jallundhur, Patna and Hyderabad Radio Stations. (2003: 25-26)

As I have pointed out, the hegemony of particular ideologies including language ideologies is always partial and despite having accepted and embraced the importance of English in their daily lives, it was clear that Urdu continues to hold a special significance

for middle-class Muslims in Delhi. Only if we acknowledge the contentious co-existence of multiple language ideologies, can we understand for instance Kabir sahab's anguish about the decline of Urdu in India that he has witnessed in his life time, along with his decision to have his children be educated in English-medium schools where no Urdu was taught:

Arpita: In your daily experiences, what kind of situations make you feel that you are different, that you are part of a minority?

Kabir sahab: There are many things. The Partition of the country made a huge difference. Urdu was our common heritage. Now Urdu has become the Pakistani tongue. They have declared it to be their national language. Urdu has suffered a lot in India. Earlier Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians all used to read Urdu. Over time, Urdu has become limited to Muslims only. And because of that Urdu also suffers from the same problems that minorities and Muslims have. The problem of survival that Muslims face is also faced by Urdu. There are Hindus educated in Urdu, but not in the younger generations. So, in the future, if Urdu has to live, it is only Muslims who can keep it alive. But now Muslims don't have opportunities to read Urdu. In UP (the state of Uttar Pradesh) which was the biggest center for Urdu, there is not a single Urdu school. And the new generations of Muslims, they speak Urdu, listen to Urdu, because they live in this social environment, but they don't have Urdu literacy. This is a very big thing. I am a writer in Urdu. My children cannot read my books! What irony!

Arpita: So they can speak but cannot read the Urdu script?

Kabir sahab: Yes. The books that I have are mostly Urdu books. I don't know what they will do with my books after I am gone. That is why I want to dispose of the books myself. Give them to some library or something. My daughter comes sometimes and takes some of my English books. But she has no interest in the Urdu books.

Arpita: So you did not teach them (Urdu) at home?

Kabir sahab: No. There is so much pressure on kids in public schooling. I learnt Urdu in school. But now, to teach them Urdu separately at home is difficult when they are already going to public school and there is the pressure of homework. I was busy, and my wife was also working. If she was a housewife then perhaps she would sit with them at home and teach them sometimes. Our kids did learn a little. My son can read, he can write. He writes stories in Urdu, but then sends them to me to make corrections, and only then they are sent for printing. Fortunately, the Urdu script and the Quranic script are the same. So if you can read the Quran, you can at least read Urdu. The writing still has to be learnt. My daughter is in Qatar nowadays, where her husband is currently working. She is a lecturer in education in Bombay, but she has taken leave for two years to live with her husband. She started reading Quran on the internet and she finished the entire Quran. She can read the Quran now. So, she can read Urdu but she cannot write. She cannot write

me a letter in Urdu. And she cannot understand such refined Urdu that she can read my literature books.

Kabir sahab's anguish is shared to some extent by younger Muslims in Delhi, many of whom consider Urdu to be an integral part of their Muslim identity. For instance, Imran says, "I say I am a Muslim because when I greet other Muslims, like my cousins or elders, I say *salam aleikum* and *khuda haafiz*. I just use Urdu, it just comes out. Unfortunately Urdu has also become a Muslim language." Farhan too acknowledges the centrality of Urdu to his own identity as a Muslim, as well as his own deficiencies in this regard when he says:

No, I haven't (tried to learn Arabic). I have tried to learn Urdu because of my interest in poetry etc. Learning Urdu just happened because it is the easiest thing to learn in this house. So I just did. Had Arabic been as easy, or German, I would have done that too. I cannot write (Urdu). My basic job in television has now shifted to writing scripts. I am a script writer. I tell my friends that my English is not too good, my Hindi is poor, I hardly know Urdu, and I am a script writer! That surprises me too. My father was into Urdu, not just as a professor, but as someone so actively involved with things happening with Urdu, seminars etc. But he never forced me to learn Urdu. In fact, he never so much as said, come here, sit down and let me teach you some Urdu today.

Despite the younger generation's admitted lack of prowess in Urdu, many of them take special pride in the refined Urdu that Delhi's Muslims consider to be particular to them. Thus for instance, when I asked Zeenat, a teenaged girl, if she noticed any differences in the *mahaul* or social environment in India and in Pakistan on her visit, Zeenat said:

Yes, it is a little bit different. A lot of Punjabi effects are there. The way they speak is very different. Here (in Delhi) everything is pronounced very distinctly. Lahore is basically more Punjabi speaking than proper Urdu speaking.

Thus, despite the dominance of English, Urdu continues to be spoken by Muslims in Old Delhi, at least at home and with other Muslims, even if most young middle-class

Muslims are unable to read or write Urdu. Moreover, many among the older generation continue to read Urdu newspapers, magazines, and novels on a daily basis and some are actively involved in nurturing the survival and development of Urdu in India. Thus, Kabir sahab, a retired professor of Urdu, volunteers as the editor of a monthly literary magazine published by Urdu House, which took birth from a movement for the preservation and progress of the Urdu language in British India. Kabir sahab proudly told me that the magazine currently has a not-too-large but loyal following in India and is also sent to Pakistan where it has a regular readership, adding that readership is often difficult to measure because several people share and read a single copy of the magazine. He added that the Urdu House regularly presents petitions to the government, on issues that affect or hinder the progress of Urdu, showing me a petition that he was currently working on addressed to the Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit.

*Language and Prayer: 'Reading' the Quran without Knowing Arabic*

A dominant language ideology among Muslims in many parts of the world centers on the value attached to the mastery of Arabic, the sacred language of the Quran (Fischer and Abedi 1990; Graham 1987). Most middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi, however, like most Muslims in India, are not literate in Arabic. While Arabic is recognized by Delhi's Muslims as important, by virtue of being the language of the Quran, Urdu is placed almost on an equal footing with Arabic, due to the fact that the script in both these languages is almost identical, as also due to the long history of Delhi as the center for the cultivation and flowering of Urdu. Thus Old Delhi's Muslims challenge the notion that knowledge of Arabic is central to all Muslim identities, because they rarely acknowledged any need for or inclination to learn Arabic, as knowledge of Urdu, with its

proximity to Arabic script, was seen to be good enough. However, they did subscribe to the view that the closer one is to Arabic (through knowledge of Urdu in this case) the more Islamic one is, as became evident in their disdain expressed towards Bengali Muslims who, through their attachment to the Bengali language rather than Urdu, are seen to be further removed from knowledge of Quranic script. Similarly, Yoginder Sikand refers to a conversation with a teacher at an Arabic college in the southern state of Kerala who laments, “Many north Indian Muslims are like the Brahmins, thinking that we in the south are inferior and that they have nothing to learn from us. Some even say that we cannot be good Muslims since we don’t know Urdu!” (Sikand, 2005, p. 139)

Given the lack of Arabic literacy in India, what does it mean for Muslims to read the Quran? How does this kind of reading shape their understandings of what it means to be Muslim? What other kinds of language ideologies jostle for space with the primacy of Arabic, in the everyday lives of Muslims in Old Delhi? Unfamiliarity with Arabic, and now increasingly with Urdu, has meant that many of Delhi’s Muslims, particularly those of the younger generations, depend on rote memorization to learn and recite their prayers. For some, this produces a deep sense of alienation. For instance, Farhan talking to me about his inability to pray regularly said:

Now I have finally understood why I cannot read namaz. I have memorized all my text books, so what is there with the namaz? It is this whole logic of praying to my God in someone else’s language. Namaz all over the world happens in a particular language which cannot be changed. If you change it, you are not saying your namaz. Ibaadat is something that I don’t even understand the meaning of. It is a problem of a language barrier. And why should I pray in a format? That has been the one big reason why I don’t offer namaaz. My wife is really religious in terms of offering namaz, reading the Quran. She told me that I should read and learn. I said, I have no problem with learning, but then I will ask lots of questions and you explain to me. You have to be very patient. So then it fizzled out because she did not want to.



When I asked Yasmeen, Salman, Kabir sahab or Shehnaz, if they could read the Quran, they all answered yes, they could. And yet, none of them are literate in Arabic. When I asked Yasmeen if she knew Arabic, she said, “No, but I can read in the Quran. I don’t know Arabic language. (The meaning) is written in Urdu underneath (the Arabic script) in our Quran, so that people can understand”. Similarly, Kabir sahab can read Arabic script, because of its proximity to Urdu script, but does not know Arabic:

Arpita: So, you can read the Arabic script.

Kabir sahab: Yes, although I don’t understand Arabic language. And that’s the case with most of the Muslims. They read Quran but they don’t understand Quran.

Arpita: So have you read it in translation?

Kabir sahab: Sometimes I’ve read translations also. There are two types of Quran available in the market. One contains only the Quranic script, Arabic. The other carries under each Arabic line, a translation in Urdu.

Arpita: So most people read it like that?

Kabir sahab: Mostly people don’t read like that. Most people just keep reading and think that in reading the Quran alone their *pooja* (worship) is complete. Only those who want to know what is written in the Quran look at translations.

### *Conclusion*

Even though financial ability, perceptions of discrimination against Muslims in government jobs, and anxieties about sending daughters to schools outside the safe confines of Old Delhi are factors that often prevent Muslims from sending their children to mainstream English medium schools, the overwhelming desire to have their children acquire such a modern education was very evident among Delhi’s Muslims. Many of them saw the backwardness of Muslims in modern education as one of the most serious challenges facing the community today, and different solutions were offered to solve the perceived problem. Some see a more holistic approach as the only way out. For instance, Razia points to the close link between literacy and economic conditions, suggesting that the former cannot improve without taking into account the latter:

It is not simply about literacy but about creating of awareness. This is again a problem more in the north than in the south (of India). And it is very unfortunate that crafts are in the hands of mainly Muslim groups in the north. Crafts such as chikankaari, brass work, carpet work, bidi making, tailoring - most of them are done by Muslims. So these are crafts that are passed on from one generation to another, because it is a means of economic survival. And they are therefore forced. There is such a lot of exploitation in that sector. They are unable to take their children away from that sector and put them in schools.... You have a little girl child in the house, you want to teach her how to do chikankaari, because that is going to help you. And also these self employed women, who are working in the house, if they were to send their daughters out to work, how would they support themselves? They need someone to look after the children, look after the house, to be a help in the house. So it is not such a simple thing, that you open a school and you ask the girls to come in. You have to have a kind of movement, have a survey of the *needs* of the people, and then provide them with these things that you think are very essential, in the manner in which it helps them. For instance, I know of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) which did it, which asked the women to bring their children along to the center, where they were being taught while the mothers were doing the chikankaari work. And they also took the responsibility of training these girls if they wanted to become chikan workers. So if you have a kind of umbrella system, where you look after all these inter-related needs. One needs to go deeply into the problems to see what is preventing this (education) from happening. I am sure in this day and age, if you ask any mother, she will not say she does not want her children to be educated, because education itself brings a kind of status to you, other than being a means of earning a livelihood. It is a matter of status.

Razia's son Adnan also stresses the importance of economic advancement:

I think education by itself is not enough. After all you have Aligarh Muslim University. But I feel that it's the employment and economic opportunities, and that temperament which must develop in Muslims. I don't believe that is the best way to develop a community or anyone, but that is I think the only way they will come up. And this approach, that something should be done for Musalmans - I argue about it with a whole lot of my Muslim friends. The moment you have that approach, it doesn't work. Why do you want to have just for the Muslims? Why don't you have it for everyone else? Muslims should also be part of it, benefit from it. You should have *that* approach. But the moment you say that it should be for Muslims you are already identifying yourself in a certain way, making yourself vulnerable to a whole lot of things.

Thus, Muslim social workers like Ameena work through broad based non-profit organizations like Prayaas, which aims to "have every child in school and learning."

During my fieldwork, Ameena was spending part of her week working with teacher at

Shishu Sadan, a charitable institution in Old Delhi which has been around since the 1950s. In keeping with Prayaas's design, Ameena was helping to establish and run the following programs at Shishu Sadan: a "library program" for all children; a program called "learning to read" for confidence building; another called "reading to learn" designed for out of school children; and a "baalwaari" program, for three to five years olds, preparing them for school. As Ameena explained to me:

The idea here is not to create a parallel system but to strengthen the existing system by working with government schools. We could rent a private area and teach there, but no, that's not our philosophy. We tell the government straightaway that we have come to you, to strengthen you. We know you have your problems, limitations. See, for instance, the MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) is now interviewing teachers for employment on a contract basis. So MCD sent an offer to Prayaas saying please could we send our people so they could conduct the interviews with MCD. Normally governments run from NGOs - what if their inside stories come out! But they said, because you have so much experience, we want you to help us identify good teachers. So we have a rapport. I think this is a great achievement for Prayaas. For instance, girls from this area sometimes tell me, we would never have thought we could do this. You think for yourself what a big thing it is - a girl from here, who has passed only the twelfth standard, is going and teaching in an MCD school with a government employed teacher.

Salman, on the other hand, told me of his plans to start his own school:

It is ok that you have your religious education and everything. It is all fine. But what I have is a keen-ness in me to have an institute where I could produce Muslim officers. There is a definite need to take them to the right direction. So I have thought of establishing a small school. I have managed a few air force schools in places like Simul. So I have got a very fair idea about functioning of a school. And my wife is a teacher. So I was thinking, we should have a institution where we can mould the children. So I have bought a small piece of land in my hometown Shahpura, that is around one acre. I have also written a project proposal. So when I go out (retire from the Air Force), whatever money I get from the Air Force, and whatever I can raise from bank loans, I will see where I stand and if a decent institution can be established. My plan is to start a school up to the fifth standard.

As these conversations show yet again, the modern separation between religious and worldly knowledge, along with the notion of the backward Muslim, have been

internalized to such an extent that there is little room for conceiving of other alternative forms of education that may bring together the religious and the modern, although some innovative attempts have been made by particular madrasas and organizations. But by and large, Delhi's Muslims see the productive relation between Islam and scientific knowledge as a thing of the past - a heritage to take pride in and recall in nostalgia, but not of relevance to the present. Thus, only a handful of my informants, like Javed Sahab, emphasized the connection that historically existed between religious Islamic knowledge and a larger, more extensive body of knowledge encompassing science, mathematics, and literature:

The ideal Musalmaan (Muslim), he will always keep striving towards scientific research, advancement and development, so that people in the world can benefit from that research and invention. And this has been happening over time. Many years ago, of all the scientists, seventy to eighty per cent were Musalmaan. Musalmaans have been told repeatedly to read, to keep reading and gaining knowledge, from birth till death. It did happen for some time, and there were some inventions. But Musalmaans gave up in the face of the smallest difficulties. Today, Musalmaans want to escape those things that require brain work, and do those things that are easy. Like watching cock fights, movies etc. And he will be weak in brainy tasks, like mathematics, or playing chess. He will play ludo and dice games, which are easy. He will not involve himself in anything that exercises the brain. This is a bad thing. Especially when he has been told to keep accounts, observe everything, see what is good and bad in everything, travel widely. But it seems to have become almost the opposite. As a result Muslims have not turned out to be the way they should have been.

Many middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi share Javed Sahab's sense of disappointment in the conditions of Muslims in India today and are concerned about the educational backwardness of Muslims, but, unlike Javed Sahab, they are increasingly turning, for a way out, not to Islam, but to modern, English-medium education, while continuing to provide some religious learning in the private sphere, thus solidifying further the modern rigid separation of religious and secular systems of knowledge.

CHAPTER 5: MIND/BODY DUALISM, HYGIENIC PRACTICES AND THE  
FASHIONING OF MODERN MUSLIM BODIES

*Introduction*

Lounging in an armchair, on the seventh floor balcony of my aunt's apartment in a south Calcutta neighborhood, I reveal the good news feeling almost like an expert magician about to perform her prize trick. "I've found you someone", I tell my Aunt Renu. I am in my home town of Calcutta for a week, taking a break from fieldwork in Old Delhi. Catching up with Aunt Renu on the telephone, I had learnt that her full time maid had left without prior notice, and she was having a difficult time taking care of all the household chores including caring for her aging mother in law. Feeling sorry for her, I had promised to try and help find her a new maid and just this morning I had heard from a friend calling to tell me about Shabnam, a young woman who was looking for housework. As I deliver the news to Aunt Renu this evening, I expect her to break into a smile, maybe even give me a hug, knowing how hard it is to find house help these days. Instead, there is a strange, undecipherable look on her face and a moment or two of pregnant silence, and then awkwardly, "Is she Muslim?" "Yes", I reply. More silence before my aunt says half embarrassed, half defiant, "I can't have a Muslim woman working here. I don't really have a problem with it but my mother in law won't like it. You know how she is. She still believes in all the stuff about not allowing a Muslim into her kitchen."

I would like to think of Aunt Renu as an exception and leave it at that. However, as numerous interactions with friends, family members, and acquaintances in India reminded me, prejudices against Muslims are commonplace among Hindu educated urban middle class Indians. As this particular instance highlights, some of these

prejudices are concerned specifically with the body, manifest in the most benign form in continual attempts to keep Muslim and Hindu bodies separate and in more vicious forms in the violence inflicted on Muslim bodies. Moreover, as Sudhir Kakar shows, it is not merely the Muslim body that is seen as reprehensible to the Hindu but from a psychoanalytic perspective the Muslim also provides the absolute ‘other’ to the innermost self of the ‘good’ Hindu, so that, at the Balaji temple where Hindus come to be rid of spirits or *bhutas*, Muslim *bhutas* are considered to be the most evil, and the most difficult to be rid of (Kakar, 1982).

In this chapter, I focus on two embodied practices that are central to becoming and being Muslim: the offering of prayer or *namaz*, and *halal* and *haram*<sup>29</sup> norms regarding food and eating. I show how the attitudes and practices of Delhi’s middle-class Muslims towards *namaz* are shaped in relation to Hindu representations of Muslims as unthinking and uncritical in their relation to their faith, holding up the body-in-*namaz* as evidence that Islam lays greater emphasis on adherence to rituals performed mechanically, while Hinduism values the pursuit of moral and philosophical development. Similarly, I argue that middle-class Muslims’ understandings and practices surrounding the Islamic norms of *halal* and *haram* are shaped in relation to and in contention with Hindu perceptions of the Muslim body as dirty, volatile and savage, as compared to the civilized, pure Hindu body – representations that often pose as secular rather than Hindu. For instance, in explanations offered by middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi, the practice of *namaz* was linked repeatedly to the cultivation of discipline of the mind, in contrast to mainstream Hindu views of *namaz* as a mechanical ritual. Norms of *halal* and *haram*

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<sup>29</sup> In the most general terms *halal* refers to all that is allowed and *haram* refers to all that is prohibited in Islam. I elaborate in further detail the meanings of these terms as the chapter unfolds.

were explained by Muslim respondents as being scientific and hygienic, in utter contrast to ubiquitous Hindu representations of the Muslim as dirty, as always threatening to spill over carefully preserved boundaries.<sup>30</sup> In the final section of this chapter, I shift focus and move beyond how Muslim experiences of embodied Islamic practices are routed through Hindu representations of such practices, to show how middle-class Muslims in Delhi who have not been direct victims of Hindu-Muslim communal violence, nevertheless, become aware of and experience their own bodies through fear of potential violence emanating from the Hindu other and threatening the destruction of bodily integrity.

*Namaz as an Embodied Practice*

Salman is taking a break from work at his neatly organized office as he talks to me about his views regarding namaz:

I'm not into the worshipping thing. One concept that Muslims have is that only a Muslim will get through to heaven, but I don't believe in this. Whoever does the deeds, he gets through to heaven. Heaven is for all. Hell is for all. And see, there are two types of worshipping nowadays. One is highly spiritual worship, done by those who feel it inside the heart. They do need not show off that they are worshipping. Such a person does not need to tell anybody he is praying. He will go inside a room and he will sit for hours and do recitation of the Quran. That is real worshipping. Another kind of praying is about showing off and sometimes it is a social requirement, *especially* among Muslims. When you live in a community where others are doing namaaz and are going regularly to the mosque, you are duty-bound to follow them as a customary kind of thing. And when you follow something as a custom, you get tuned to it, it becomes your routine. So some people do it (offer namaz) as a routine. They don't understand what they are doing it for, what it means, and where it leads them. They just do it as a routine. And if they miss (a prayer) in between, they feel that something is missing, but only because it has become a routine. A body gets tuned to certain kinds of things

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<sup>30</sup> While focusing on these contrasting identities, and how they are formed in relation to each other, I do not wish to suggest that 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' are monolithic entities. Thus, not all Hindus label Muslims as dirty, but it is nevertheless a widely prevalent and deep-rooted assumption. Similarly, there exist divergent views and practices among Old Delhi's Muslims regarding namaz, diet and dress, linked to differences in class, education, and gender.

no? And that is actually the idea behind making namaz five times a day compulsory. It's a highly psychological issue actually. The Huzoor (Prophet Muhammad) had very high standards of the study of human being. The idea behind five times namaz is to discipline oneself. But again, it depends upon the human being. Because he is not being taught what the purpose behind it is he is just putting himself into a routine of offering namaz. But how much he learns out of that routine, how much he practices what he learns in his life, and how much his attitude changes towards life and towards others, all that varies from person to person.

The ways in which we think about and experience the body are shaped by historically specific cultural, political, and socio-economic factors. As Emily Martin has argued, for instance, the transition from the era of Fordist mass production to flexible accumulation has entailed “a dramatic transition in body percept and practice” resulting in “the end of one kind of body and the beginning of another kind of body” (Martin, 1992, p. 121). Similarly, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock argue that while the Cartesian mind-body dualism is a cultural construction that emerged at a particular juncture in Western history, most clearly articulated in the seventeenth century philosopher-mathematician Rene Descartes' dictum *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), it has come to be naturalized as a universal category (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 10). In support of their argument, Scheper-Hughes and Lock point to different conceptualizations of the mind-body relation in other cultures, such as the notion of yin/yang or ‘balanced complementarity’ in ancient Chinese cosmology, or the Islamic concept of Towhid that stands for the notion that all existence is “essentially monistic, so that human beings are not only answerable to one God, but are guided in all their actions by the principle of achieving unity ‘through the complementarities of spirit and body, this world and the hereafter’” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987, p. 12).



As the above quote shows, however, Salman, and many middle-class Muslims like him, in their attitudes and practices regarding namaz, subscribe to an understanding of the mind and body as dichotomous, rather than as one, and place greater emphasis on the workings of the mind rather than on ritualized bodily actions. Thus, I argue that while Scheper-Hughes and Lock are right in directing our attention to the culturally constructed and naturalized (rather than natural) character of the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy, by mapping particular conceptualizations of the body onto particular cultures in an unproblematic manner, they fail to acknowledge that conceptions of the body may travel across cultures, especially when such conceptions are as hegemonic and powerful as the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Moreover, I argue that in this case the mind-body dichotomy is powerful not because it has come to be seen as natural, but precisely because it is associated, along with related conceptual dichotomies (such as nature-culture, passion-reason, individual-society), with the West and more specifically with being modern.

An emphasis on the mind over the body is not merely the stuff of conversations but also shapes actual practices of namaz. In interviews and informal conversations most middle-class Muslims in Delhi acknowledged the centrality of prayer, stating that offering namaaz five times daily was obligatory for all Muslims. However, when asked about their own practices, most of them also said that they offered one or more prayers daily but not all five. Most often, those of the five daily prayers that they do offer are the ones that fit in most conveniently with the secular structures of time that shape their days. For instance, Zeenat explained that she offers the evening or Maghrib prayer most regularly, since it's "the easiest" as she is back from school and not sleeping.

Acknowledging their inability to fulfill the duty of offering namaaz five times daily, most informants did not however see this as un-Islamic, but rather explained it as a choice made as a conscientious Muslim, for whom critical thought is more important than outward ritual performance. For instance, Salman said:

I do worshipping a little bit, but I don't do five times. I have tuned myself for one namaz a day, that is in the evening, sunset time, maghrib namaz we call it. And I don't feel like I must do all the five times, that I must rush to do it. I don't feel comfortable doing that so I don't do it. I do it when I feel very comfortable, when I feel a certain peace of mind. Sometimes I read Quran also. But I should find meaning in it. I don't do it otherwise.

Kabir Sahab, a retired professor of Urdu, told me, quite casually, that he does not offer namaz regularly, and on the rare occasions that he does it is either due to social pressures or from a sense of familial obligation:

I don't offer any namaz. I offer only two namaz-es in a year, on Eid and Baqri Eid, because it is a mass congregation and if you don't go for that then you are spotted out - this is the fellow who does not even go for an Eid namaaz! Eid namaaz is such that no matter how much one is the sort to not offer namaaz, but for the Eid namaaz every man goes. People sometimes go for the sake of their offspring. The father is an atheist, he does not believe in religion, but since theirs is a Muslim family, the father wants to transfer their customs, traditions to the children. When they are grown up they may decide their own future, but so long as they are your offspring and they are being brought up under your guidance, under your umbrella, you have to introduce them to all these things.

Similarly Farhan, a young media professional, declared in the same breath and without the slightest hesitation, "I am Muslim, but I don't know how to offer namaz, I've never read the Quran. I don't offer namaz because I have never been able to memorize it." He went on to explain that although he had been taught to pray at home from a young age, he had never quite followed it:

I just could not. And there was not *so much force*. Maybe *that's why* none of us did it. Otherwise, there are some things that we were made to learn by force, things like be polite, be nice and do not hit someone. So namaz could have also happened but it did not happen. My mother offers namaz but she started doing it

recently, after her retirement. And she doesn't do it regularly. In the morning she does, because she gets up early and she has time. Sometimes she prays all five times but not always. So namaz has a different meaning in this house. It is definitely about belief and trust, but it is not a compulsion. It is not that if you don't do it you are not Muslim, because I *am* a Muslim.

The performance of the five daily prayers is considered to be one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith and it is “considered to be so centrally important in Islam that whether someone who does not pray regularly can qualify as a Muslim has been a subject of intense debate among theologians”(Mahmood, 2001, p. 83). Middle-class Muslims like Farhan, Kabir sahib, and Salman are certainly not unaware that their views on namaz are far from conventional. As Salman said, there is “increasing awareness” with many more Muslims thinking the way he does, but at the same time he expresses the fear that “somebody who is highly religious will straightaway outcast me and say, he is not a Muslim, he is talking nonsense, do not give any cognizance, he is nothing.” As Salman notes, many of his own Muslim acquaintances, playing the authenticity card, would denounce him as a kafir or non-believer or as an inauthentic Muslim for holding the views he voices about namaz. However, we may see the views expressed here as attempts on the part of middle-class educated Muslims to defy the fixing of meanings of identities, like ‘Muslim’ and ‘modern’, by opening up the possibilities of what it means to be Muslim. Thus, Salman insists that he does not feel compelled to offer namaz five times daily and does not do so unless he finds *meaning* in it, and Farhan claims that namaz is really about “belief and trust” rather than ritualized action. I argue that such an emphasis on the development of the mind enables a reformulation of Muslim subjectivity, crucial to enabling a moving away from popular, deeply entrenched views of Muslims as

backward and traditional, more fanatic than rational, and thus as the problematic minority that cannot have a productive place within an Indian secular democracy.

In their writings, nineteenth century European travelers and colonial administrators in Egypt highlighted the fact that Quran recitation in schools, prayer, and Sufi dervish dances entailed repetitive physical motion, such as swinging back and forth while reciting from the Quran. They then went on to draw a contrast between “the Egyptian body-in-motion with an idealized body-at-rest, which they believed characterized their own, more “spiritual” approach to the world of the sacred” (Starrett, 1995, p. 958). Pointing to different images of the Egyptian body-in-motion, such as the spinning dervish, the bowing prayer-maker, and the school child rocking as he memorizes the Quran, European writers arrived at the broad and negative conclusion that all the rituals centered on physical activity “that appeared automatically to *exclude mental activity*” (Starrett, 1995, p. 958 emphasis mine).

Salman’s views on namaz point to the ways in which the views of many middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi appear surprisingly close to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European travelers and colonial administrators of whom Starrett writes, when they insist that for most Muslims *namaz* is more a matter of outward bodily compliance rather than inner mental activity or understanding. For instance, Kabir sahab is of the view that it is “the most illiterate who blindly follow religion, even though they are careless about performing rituals like namaaz and roza.” Similarly, Mohsin stated that while Muslims are acutely conscious of appropriate handling, orientation, and movements of the body in prayer, most “common people” are *not conscious* of the significance of these actions, but simply follow the imam leading the namaz in the mosque they happen to frequent:

Mohsin: The ordinary Musalmaan who reads the namaz, he does not have religious education. There is no such system that every man is getting (religious) education. He only reads the namaz as namaz is read. They don't know anything about what they are doing, what they are offering, because every Muslim is not literate, and does not know so many things about the religion. But they are following (what is done) in mosque. So if the Imam is Hanafi (follower of a particular school), then they are doing it the Hanafi way. In India, Sunni Muslims are mostly Hanafi<sup>31</sup>.

The cultivation of the thinking Muslim, thus, stands in utter contrast to the “Victorian religious sensibility” in terms of which “Muslim religious values are represented as all surface and no depth; preoccupation with ceremonial, ablution, fasting, gesture and grammar - all of the seemingly shallow manifestations of *a primitive faith founded on formal reiteration rather than inner development.*” (Starrett, 1995, p. 958 emphasis mine). However, the views expressed by middle-class Muslims like Kabir sahab, Mohsin, and Salman also point to the ways in which a colonial discourse of racial superiority is appropriated by middle-class Muslims, not to establish a difference between Muslims and an inferior ‘other’, but to construct a difference *between* Muslims – that is, between the educated, urban, English-speaking, middle-class Muslim and the poor, uneducated lower-class Muslim. Where the European colonialists used their particular interpretation of the body-in-namaz to establish a racially motivated difference between the inferior Muslim native and the superior Christian white colonialist, middle-class educated Muslims in Delhi have appropriated such a colonialist discourse to set up a difference between themselves as modern, thinking Muslims, and the mass of uneducated, lower-class Muslims, who, according to them, perform namaaz ritually with little or no understanding of Islam and of the real (*asli*) meaning behind their actions.

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<sup>31</sup> Hanafi is one of the schools of thought in Islam.

*The Present-Absent Ethical Muslim Subject*

In the initial stages of a conversation, the question, “Who is a Muslim?” would inevitably draw responses such as “Anyone who believes in Allah is a Muslim”, or “Whoever is born to Muslim parents is a Muslim.” As we would keep talking, however, informants would often turn to defining a Muslim as being, most importantly, an ethical subject. The following excerpts from conversations illustrate this point well:

Javed Sahab: Earlier, the way of ordinary people was that they were firm of word and helpful, especially Muslims. They were expected in particular to be firm on their word, firm about commitments. It was expected that they would not misbehave with anyone and would not cause anyone any loss or injury. I remember that ordinary people would say, “Brother, being a Muslim you are lying! Being a Muslim you are doing these wrong things, like gambling and drinking alcohol.” So, the real identity of a Muslim lies in being an excellent human being. From that one can tell you are a Muslim. Suppose a man comes to you and interacts with you very nicely, very politely. Before he tells you his name you will know that he is a Muslim. But at present there is hardly anything left over, because we have not followed the traditions and teachings (of the Prophet) completely.

Shehnaz: A Muslim is one who believes in Allah from his heart, believes in his deen (religion), believes in Allah’s given Quran and reads it, abides by it, offers namaz. Most importantly a Muslim is one who is concerned for his neighbors and relatives, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A Muslim is one who abides by all this. Most importantly, what is taught in the *deen* (religion) is that neighbors have very extensive rights. So, *Huzoor* (Prophet Mohammed) once said, Allah has granted such great rights to neighbors that just as children have rights in inheriting property, perhaps Allah will grant neighbors the same rights. Such is the extent of rights given to neighbors. You should not trouble your neighbors and you should take care of them. It should not be that you are eating chicken and meat and are not aware if your neighbor even has *daal* (lentils) or rice to eat. So neighbors have a great deal of rights (*haq*) and so do relatives. If relatives drop in they should never be turned away. But nowadays it is a rare case if you come across someone like this. Thanks to Allah we have a lot of visitors and attend to many guests. A lot of relatives visit and are very well looked after. On some Sundays, it happens that breakfast has been prepared for a guest and served, the utensils and *dastarkhwan* (sheet spread on the floor on which a meal is served) have not yet been removed, and *Mashallah* another guest arrives! And if by chance on a particular Sunday no one comes, we really feel bad! Most religions emphasize the same things and the themes are the same. That you should believe in the one who is up there (god). You should not hurt or trouble

your relatives and neighbors, whether Hindu or Muslim. All religions teach this, but it is especially emphasized in Islam. If someone is following his own religion, you cannot force him to read the *kalma* and become Muslim. *If* he is interested and is drawn to you, then you should help him, but you should not force anyone to become Muslim.

Arif admits, in a tone half embarrassed and half apologetic, that he does not offer namaz five times daily but he does make it a point to do so every *jumma* (Friday) and every day during the month of Ramzan. When I asked Arif who according to him was a Muslim he gave me the usual answer, “*Jo maane*” or “One who believes”, and one who offers namaz and observes roza. However, he then goes on to say that nowadays people are useless and do not obey and do not practice Islam as they should. For instance, things like not lying or exercising *itjihad* for everything are things that people seldom practice nowadays. When I asked why this was so he explained that this was because:

Every man now only looks out for himself and worries about his own benefit, whereas in earlier days people were not greedy, and did not wish ill on anyone. Earlier, men were firm of word and did what they promised. Nowadays, the atmosphere is such that even when men make friendships it is for their own profit only. Earlier people were truthful, good of heart, helpful, and compassionate. They would help another without thinking of their own loss or gain. Now, no one will step forward if it is not to their benefit.

I ask if the situation is any different in his native village and Arif says:

Yes, it is somewhat different since people obey these rules more, since they are of an older type (*puraane type ke*). They keep their word once given. If they say they will sell something for rupees ten thousand and someone else comes along and offers rupees fifteen thousand, they will not just give it to the person offering more money. They say, once the word has left the tongue, it should remain firm, one should not lie.

As it becomes clear from the above quotes, according to Delhi’s middle-class Muslims belief in Allah, offering namaaz, reading the Quran, and dressing appropriately therefore certainly define a Muslim, but not entirely and nor even fundamentally. Rather, what defines and marks a Muslim as distinct is the cultivation and daily practice of an

ethics and particular ways of relating to other people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. However, such an ethical Muslim subject is a present-absence, in the sense that it is always in the present as an aspired to ideal but also absent in the sense that most informants emphasized that such ethical Muslims are rarely to be found in contemporary society - rather, they must repeatedly reach into a historical Islamic past for such an ethical subject, embodied in the figures of Prophet Muhammad and his close followers.

An emphasis on the cultivation of piety in all aspects of one's life is also seen among women in the mosque movement in Egypt:

[The act of prayer was] a key site for purposefully molding their intentions, emotions, and desires in accord with orthodox standards of Islamic piety. As a highly structured performance - one given an extensive elaboration in Islamic doctrine - prayer (salat) was understood...to provide an opportunity for the analysis, assessment, and refinement of the set of ethical capacities entailed in the task of realizing piety in the entirety of one's life, and was not a space conceptually detached from the daily tasks of routine living. (Mahmood, 2001, p. 830)

For the Egyptian mosque movement participants, the body in prayer is seen as a central means for developing inner piety, and central to the correct execution of prayer or salat was "an intention to dedicate the prayer to God", and the performance of salat "with all the feelings, concentration, and tenderness of the heart appropriate to when one is in the presence of God - a state called *khushu*" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 830). Mohsin expressed a similar sentiment when he stated that, "Namaz is just to surrender your self in front of Allah. There is nothing very special in what you are *doing* there, but what is important is your heart, your feelings, your submission to God." Moreover, while most informants stated that offering namaaz is a religious duty, they emphasized as more important the development of an Islamic ethics through everyday exemplary behavior, particularly in interactions with others. The means of cultivating such ethical behavior, thus, lies not



only through namaz but also through daily good deeds and thoughts, examples of which are to be found in the life of the Prophet himself, as well as in Muslims of earlier generations whose behavior more closely approximated the ideal. Thus, once again, we see the deployment of a particularly Western mind/body dichotomy, to make the point that being Muslim is fundamentally about a certain development of the mind - in this context an orientation to a particular ethics - manifested outwardly, not only in religious rituals like namaaz, but in everyday actions.

Since the mosque is primarily a male space in most of South Asia, with women usually offering namaz in the privacy of the home, it is not surprising that the religious and social significance of collective namaz offered in the mosque was stressed repeatedly by male informants only. For instance, Kabir sahib explained:

The namaz that is considered to be the best is that which is offered in the masjid, in a mass prayer. Individual offering of namaz does not have the same kind of significance that namaz offered in mass prayer or jamat has. This is because the whole focus in Islam is on the mass congregation and it is prescribed that everything should be done together, collectively. So prayer should also be collective. That is why one goes to the masjid, to pray collectively. And new meanings have been culled from the practice of offering namaz collectively. Some say that when you are offering collective namaz, all the very good people included in that collective, their goodness will get evenly distributed among all those present. Thus, the bad individuals in the group will also accrue some goodness. Similarly, it is said that for funerals the maximum number of people should go. Thus, if a very good person, who will probably go to heaven, lends a shoulder (*kandha dete hai*) to carry the dead body, the person whose corpse it is will also go to heaven. Or, if the dead person was a very good man, the people who lend their shoulders to carry his body will all benefit. This is what is said. And the reason is to promote collectiveness, understand?

Interestingly, men who rejected the centrality of collective namaz, once again framed their critiques in terms of modern dichotomies like that of mind and body, public and private. For Salman for instance, prayer is intensely personal:

What I feel is that worshipping is a *very, very* personal thing. It is as personal as your undergarments are or your body is. It is *not to be discussed*. When you are worshipping you need not go and beat the drums (*dhindora*) to announce that I have just read namaz and ask you if you have offered namaz. This is generally practiced. It happens everywhere. They will keep shouting at everyone, have you read? *Why?* It is a personal thing. You do it behind closed doors, and nobody even should see you doing it. But it depends on the faith and the kind of upbringing you have.

As I have shown earlier, in colonial and post-colonial India, figures like Rammohun Roy and Nehru have desired to re-make India in the mould of the modern. If, as Arjun Appadurai (1996) writes, the Enlightenment aspired to create persons who would wish to become modern, the success of the Enlightenment project has been far-reaching in creating in India an overwhelming desire to be modern, a desire that has its locus in the urban Indian middle-class but is no longer confined to them. Within this context, middle-class Muslims in Delhi also imagine themselves as modern but find themselves confronted with proliferating images of a homogenized Muslim who is the anti-thesis of the modern. Always, already constructed as non-modern and backward by the Hindu ‘other’, one of the ways in which middle-class Muslims in Delhi attempt to contest or at least sidestep such negative stereotypes of Muslims is by setting himself apart from other Muslims. Just as Muslims in a post 9/11 America must carry the onus of proving themselves to be good Muslims in contrast to bad Muslims (Mamdani, 2005), similarly middle-class Muslims in India can re-present themselves as modern Muslims only in opposition to the uneducated lower-class Muslim who is designated as non-modern. Thus, in contrast to the uneducated poor Muslims, the middle-class Muslim is one who applies his critical faculties even in the practice of Islamic rituals.

Such a differentiation also allows Delhi’s middle-class Muslims to make the point that the problem of backwardness does not lie in Islam as a religion, but in the way it is

practiced by “the most illiterate who blindly follow religion.” Having thus established that the problem lies with some Muslims and not with Islam as a whole, they can then go on to make the argument that in contrast to mainstream representations, Islam is actually thoroughly modern, and evidence of its modernity lies, for instance, in the fact that Islam places a high value on the cultivation of knowledge and the mind. Thus, Salman notes that the “the idea behind putting five times namaaz every day” is “to discipline yourself”, through subjecting the body to certain routines. This, he reminds us is “a very highly psychological subject” and that Prophet Muhammad “had very high standards of the study of human being.” In reasoning that bodily compliance through rituals like namaz is less essential than finding meaning in those actions, both Mohsin and Salman make the point that it is the mind and knowledge that is more central to Muslim subjectivity - indeed that Islam *requires* the cultivation and privileging of mind over body. Far from being unthinking and animal-like, real Muslims are not those who perform namaz mechanically and ritually, but those who do so with complete understanding that emerges only from the cultivation of a certain ethical state of mind derived from the teachings of Islam. The act of offering namaz is merely the outward expression of a belief in Allah and in the values of Islam, the cultivation of which makes one a real Muslim. Envisioning Islam in this way, thus, enables them to remake Muslims, albeit only some Muslims, as modern and rational rather than anti-modern and backward.

As Marcel Mauss (1950) has argued, every “manual knack” or “technique” of the body is learnt slowly through education and imitation, and in each society there are a set of attitudes and different forms of techniques of the body, such as specific ways of walking, sitting, or swimming. Scholars like Bowen (1993) have argued that the bodily

postures entailed in namaz are an example of “techniques” of the body (Mauss, 1950) or bodily hexis (Bourdieu, 1977). Bodily hexis, as described by Bourdieu, is unconscious and transmitted practically rather than discursively. However, Gregroy Starrett has argued that in case of Islamic rituals, bodily hexis is not unconscious because the bodily postures in rituals like namaz are subject to “explicit, formal interpretation” (Starrett, 1995, p. 954). Following Starrett’s emphasis, I have looked at “the relationship between hexis and public discourse about hexis” as a productive area of enquiry (Starrett 1995, p. 954). However, while Starrett’s focus has been on “formal interpretations” of bodily hexis, I have looked at the way in which the sources and nature of such interpretations is far more diffuse than Starrett’s argument would suggest.

Starrett (1995) has also argued that in postcolonial Egypt, the very dispositions of the Muslim body that were used by colonialists to demonstrate the inferiority of Egyptian and Islamic civilization have now been re-presented by the Egyptian establishment as symbols of modernity and progress, to create a modern version of Islam that can compete with European ideologies. Thus, for instance, “...according to the current second grade textbook the daily prayers not only “invigorate the body” but “accustom the Muslim to organization, and respect for appointed times” (Starrett, 1995, p. 961). While there are clearly strong similarities in the discourses on Islam in postcolonial Egypt and postcolonial India, Starrett’s writing also points to significant differences. While it is unclear what or who exactly Starrett refers to by the Egyptian establishment, it seems from Starrett’s argument that the repositioning of Islam as modern emanates from particular, clearly identifiable, institutionalized sources. As this study shows, however, re-workings of Muslim bodily hexis can emanate not only from the state or the Muslim

religious establishment, but also from sources that are less visible (or audible) and organized, such as educated middle-class Muslims in Delhi who are not politically organized or active, but nonetheless occupy potentially influential positions in society owing to their education and socio-economic status, and attention to their voices may, thus, reveal new discourses in the making. Moreover, there is little in Starrett's arguments to indicate that discourses of a modern Islam, emanating from power and thus having certain powerful effects, necessarily includes some and excludes others. As my study has shown for instance, a construction of Islam as modern builds on and reinforces existing class divides among Muslims in Old Delhi, since the middle-class Muslim can become modern only in contrast to the backward and uneducated Muslim who is also poor and lower-class.

*Halal is Scientific and Healthy*

Industrialist Jamnalal Bajaj's widow, recalling her experiences of the 1940s as a follower of Gandhi and subsequently Vinoba Bhave, said in an interview: "I walked with Vinobaji for years....Ten or fifteen miles a day, begging land for the poor. It was very hard, changing camp every day, because I never eat anything I haven't prepared with my own hands. Everyone knows that Moslems and Harijans have dirty habits" (quoted in Varma, 1998, p. 43). Unfortunately, many decades after independence and Gandhi's death, "everyone" – that is, Hindus – still "know" that Muslims "have dirty habits" or are, in general, dirty. While many Hindus no longer adhere to Brahminical injunctions against eating with Muslims, and few middle-class, educated, urbanized Hindus would make so blatant a comment as Jamnalal Bajaj's widow, many of the prejudices associated with such customs continue to run deep, as the incident with my aunt, narrated earlier, reveals.

And so it is that stories of Hindu-Muslim friendships, enthusiastic celebrations of each other's festivals, and the interest shown by Hindu colleagues and friends in Muslim cuisine, were narrated alongside experiences like that of Ayesha's:

Things became bad (at work), in the sense that people started feeling that I am Hindu and you are Muslim. I never used to think that in *my* office (this could happen). I used to work for Arnett (a large Indian corporation), and the directors were very good, they gave us real good respect, the directors of the Company. But colleagues! I tell you, it was difficult to deal with them. You know, I stopped eating lunch together. Suppose we are sitting at the lunch table, and, I am Muslim, so normally every day we have meat. So someone sitting there said, oh, get some kheema (minced meat preparation) for me tomorrow. And I said, oh yes, this was very tasty, so let me bring some tomorrow, and without a thought in my mind that I would spoil someone else's mood. So (the next day) everyone had kept their lunches on the table and we were sharing. And there were Sharmas (Hindu last name) over there, they were my bosses. They said, either you remove this food from this table or else we won't sit at this table from tomorrow (long pause). And they are senior people. I'm not talking about people who are *peons* (message carriers). At that level you can expect all this – I won't eat, I won't drink – but not at this level. He was the head of the department, and he was talking like this. And suppose if I would go and stand somewhere near him, he would just turn his back on me (pause). I had a very, very unpleasant time.

Hindu expressions of disgust and aversion towards Muslim meat-eating practices have been analyzed in recent works such as that by Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (2006) on the Hindu hyperbolic vegetarian who emerges in urban Guajrat during the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 and suffers from allagi which is an allergic reaction, triggered by the sight and smell of blood or raw meat. Ghassem-Fachandi goes on to make the point that it is no coincidence that this condition appears prevalent among Hindus in the state of Gujarat, which is both largely vegetarian state as well as the experimental home ground of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism. Attributing Hindutva's electoral success in Gujarat to "its ability to unify Adivasi lower and intermediary status groups with the Savarnas (high castes), as Hindus in opposition to Christians and Muslims who are positioned as outsiders," Ghassem-Fachandi emphasizes the important work done in this context by

Hindu vegetarian practices which “can take hyperbolic forms, manifested in visceral somatic reactions of disgust and narrativized in an idiom of bodily invasion.”

As the above examples from my work as well as that of Ghassem-Fachandi’s make clear, many of the Hindu notions about the intrinsic dirtiness of Muslims center on dietary practices, particularly the Muslim consumption of beef, since the cow is considered sacred by Hindus. Moreover, in Hindu perceptions Muslims are not only dirty but also unnaturally cruel, due to the practice of slaughtering animals ritually, so as to make them halal and fit for consumption. In utter contrast to such Hindu representations, the practices and attitudes of Old Delhi’s Muslims not only highlighted the halal/haram dichotomy as central to Muslim identity but also explained it as a scientific and hygienic practice that is thoroughly modern.

### *Halal and Haram*

As I stood by Yasmeen in her small kitchen and asked her to explain the meaning of halal, she stirred a pot of rich goat curry and deftly adjusted the seasoning as she said, “The halal-haram distinction is there very much among us. One who is Muslim wants every single thing to be halal.” As Yasmeen’s statement indicates, the Islamic norms of halal and haram play a significant part in the formation, maintenance, and performance of Muslim identity among middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi. Halal and haram were explained by respondents first and foremost in relation to the way animals are to be slaughtered, so as to make them ritually fit for consumption. For instance, Farhan explained that to slaughter in the halal way is to “slowly cut the nerves first and do it properly.” Similarly, Yasmeen said, “Among you people (Hindus) you cut it (the animal) at one stroke through a machine and prepare the meat. But that is not allowed for us. That

will become haram for us. The meaning of halal is that we cut it very gradually so that the bleeding happens”. Another important element to making meat halal, as Zeenat pointed out, is to say *Bismillah* or recite the kalma before doing *qurbaani* or slaughtering the animal. As Farhan and Zeenat point out, however, the main idea behind the notion of halal is to slaughter in such a way that the blood is allowed to flow out completely, before the animal is butchered for consumption. In the context of slaughtering practices, the opposite of halal was referred to as *jhatka* or the way in which meat-eating Hindus slaughter animals by cutting them “at once” or “at one stroke”, or as Zeenat put it more graphically, “by just chopping off the head.”

In contrast to Hindu representations of halal slaughtering as a cruel practice, Adnan pointed out that many Muslims find slaughtering in the *jhatka* way a cruel practice and say, “How can you kill and eat like that!” Moreover, where Hindus mark halal as cruel and barbaric because the slow blood letting also entails a slow and presumably more painful death, it is precisely this aspect of halal - allowing blood to flow out slowly – that was explained to me, over and over again by middle-class Muslims in terms of hygiene and cleanliness. As Adnan put it, “Haram is basically the *jhatka* thing and it is not good, because when the blood comes out it flows and mixes with the meat, then it is not clean.”

Halal and haram were also explained in terms of prohibitions regarding the eating of certain animals and certain foods. For instance, as Kabir sahab explained:

Some animals are prohibited from being eaten. The most haram animal is pig. That is absolutely prohibited for Muslims. Besides that most other animals are halal and can be eaten, but people are not in the habit of eating some animals so they don't eat. This depends on the region. For instance, here, in India, you cannot imagine that Muslims will eat horse meat. But one can eat horse meat. There are many areas in Central Asia where people do eat horse meat. But here, the things



that are normally eaten are goats, sheep, cows, buffaloes, deer, rabbit etc. Now cows are not slaughtered everywhere. People used to eat cows a lot and they used to be slaughtered everywhere. Nowadays, cows are slaughtered in Bengal for instance but not here (in Delhi).

Therefore halal and haram revolve around two categories: foods that are totally prohibited and foods that are obtained through following certain correct procedures that make them permissible. As Kabir Sahab put it,

So there are two concepts of halal and haram. One is that whether the animal is slaughtered properly or not. The other kind of haram is that which is prohibited completely, meaning, there are animals which you cannot eat under any circumstances, whether they have been slaughtered properly or not. Pigs for instance – it is not like if you slaughter a pig properly it becomes halal. It will remain haram.

I was repeatedly told that the halal-haram norms were scientific and rational, in keeping with and actually preceding modern medical norms of health and hygiene. For instance, when Kabir Sahab noted that Muslims could eat fish but not if it had been found dead, he added that this was “because of health reasons.” Then again, he explained that it is considered preferable to offer castrated goats for sacrifice during Baqri Eid, because they are “thought to be cleaner.” Explaining the correct method of slaughtering an animal to make it halal, Kabir Sahab once again referred to medicine and hygiene as the guiding principles behind the norms of halal:

To make it halal and eat it means that you don't just behead the animal but slaughter it properly. The medical reason for that is that when you slaughter it all the blood of the animal oozes out with the heat of the body that is generated within it. So by the time the animal is dead all the blood oozes out and the meat remains blood free. But when you kill an animal for pleasure, behead it all at once, the animal dies instantly so the blood clots inside, and that is not hygienic. This is the Islamic point of view. So that is why one should make it halal and eat it and one should not eat jhatka.

Zeenat, who, like most of my informants, said that she ate only halal food, remarked that this was sometimes difficult to do when eating out, but claimed that most

restaurants in Delhi are supposed to serve halal food by law “because it is more hygienic.”

Such medical or scientific explanations were also provided to explain certain choices of foods, as for instance, in the case of foods commonly eaten when breaking the day’s fast during the month of Ramzaan:

Kabir sahab: These fried things that people eat (at *aftaari*, the meal eaten on breaking the fast), it helps them feel less thirsty. Fried *pakorīs* (savories made with chickpea flour and a variety of vegetables like onions, pepper etc.) are eaten in the evening at *aftaari* since people have not had water all day long, and they don’t want to risk drinking so much water that they are then unable to eat food. So these fried foods keep the thirst under control. This is a medically proven thing. During Ramzaan the body craves water all day. You are thirsty and if you drink too much water you will not be able to eat food. So these things keep the thirst under control and that is why they are eaten. These are the old rules made by elderly people and handed down to us.

In the many conversations I had about dietary practices, only a few informants stated that they did not always eat halal foods. For instance, Zeenat said that she may sometimes eat meat that is not halal “by mistake”, such as when eating out or eating at a friend’s home. According to her, if one is not sure if the meat being served is halal or not, it is alright to eat it “if you just say Allah ho Akbar, and read the kalma.” Often the reasons cited for not eating halal were framed as practical constraints, as for instance when Farhan said that in his work in films and television he had to travel a lot, and he had “never had any problem from eating meat or vegetables, never had an upset stomach or fever, nothing.” Therefore, he said, “I personally don’t find anything wrong with it. I am sure I have had a lot of jhatka meat, the unclean meat, but it did not affect me adversely. I could digest and throw it out.” Thus, even as Farhan rejects the practice of eating halal only, he reiterates the deeply ingrained notion that jhatka meat is “unclean meat.”

Kabir Sahab, like Farhan, recognized that his food habits were shaped by the larger milieu, saying that he maintained the halal-haram norms because of the social environment he lived in. However, he was more candid and a trifle embarrassed in his admission that “even enlightened Muslims” like himself have very strong inhibitions about certain foods that are deemed haram, particularly pork:

Arpita: So you don't have any pork or alcohol?

Kabir Sahab: No, it is like this - although alcohol is haram for Muslims, yet they drink a lot. But Muslims are strict about one thing - that is ham and pork. Under no circumstances will Muslims eat ham and pork. Even an enlightened Muslim, an atheist Muslim, his inhibitions become so strong that he cannot. Take me for instance. I don't have too many inhibitions. Once or twice, just to break my inhibitions, I ate pork, since I don't believe in such restrictions. But I could not relish it. I could not eat it. I don't have any desire to eat pork, nor can I enjoy it. Once or twice I just had it, because I was sitting with someone who was eating it, so I too ate. But those inhibitions are so strong that it just becomes impossible to eat. So under no circumstances can Muslims eat pigs. Even if he becomes an atheist it will still be difficult for him to eat pigs.

*Bringing Time and Space into the Analysis of Food Taboos*

Much has been written in anthropological literature about the body as a symbol for the larger society or culture, and taboos centering on the body have been interpreted as attempts to create and maintain social differences and boundaries (e.g. Douglas 1966, 1970; Needham 1973). Thus, according to Mary Douglas “The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. The boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.” Since all systems, social, ideational, and bodily, are most vulnerable at the margins, the “ritual protection of bodily orifices” signifies a preoccupation with governing social boundaries (Douglas, 1966, 116).

Within this analytical framework, the norms of halal and haram followed by Muslims in Delhi can certainly be understood as one of the ways in which religious differences between Muslims and non-Muslims are wrought on the Muslim body. The

norms of halal and haram mark and make the Muslim body as pure and clean in contrast to other bodies, and these bodies, thus, become symbols of difference (embodied difference) between Muslim and non-Muslim socio-cultural worlds. Moreover, if as Douglas notes “anxiety about bodily margins expresses danger to group survival” (Douglas, 1966, p. 125) and preoccupation with bodily margins is therefore greater among minority groups, then it is possible to understand why Muslims in Delhi, as a minority, are particularly attentive towards maintaining halal and haram norms in their everyday lives. However, to understand why middle-class Muslims in Delhi situate halal and haram within the discourse of modern medicine and hygiene, it is necessary to step beyond a structuralist approach.

According to Rouse & Hoskins, “The anthropology of food taboos....has been characterized by a preoccupation with classification, anomaly, and disorder that is usually divorced from concerns with power, history, and social change” (Rouse & Hoskins, 2004, p. 230). In a similar vein, Harbottle critiques the inability of the structuralist approach (exemplified by works of Claude Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas) to capture the importance of individual agency in bringing about social transformations (Harbottle, 2000). To understand the role of power, change, and agency in the formulation and reformulation of food taboos, Rouse & Hoskins (2004) make a particularly strong case for bringing history back into the study of food taboos. They show, for instance, how African-Americans converting to Islam in the early days of the Nation of Islam eschewed foods associated with slavery as haram, thus distancing themselves from the history of slavery, while Sunni African-American Muslims today are once again appropriating those very foods as healthy and hygienic. They, thus, demonstrate “how a classic

anthropological concern with food taboos can be opened up to history and how the experiences of the past can be reinterpreted in terms of the struggles of the present” (Rouse & Hoskins, 2004, p. 230).

Following Rouse and Hoskins (2004), I argue that in the context of particular historical and contemporary discourses representing Muslims as backward and unclean, middle-class Muslims in Delhi today are recasting the Islamic norms of halal and haram in terms of modern, scientific understandings of cleanliness and hygiene, and thus also presenting themselves as modern, in rejection of stereotypes of Muslims as anti-modern. In this, Delhi’s middle-class Muslims are very similar to many contemporary Egyptian intellectuals and educators, who “use Islamic principles to legitimize new technologies like in vitriol fertilization, as well as corroborating Islamic concepts and practices with scientific and medical vocabulary” (Starrett, 1995, p. 960). However, in Delhi, such a unitary construction of the hygienic, scientific, and always already modern Muslim is fragmented by differential links between hygiene and particular Muslim castes<sup>32</sup>. For instance, butchers who constitute a lower caste among Muslims are concentrated in a particular area within Old Delhi, which Mohsin described repeatedly as dirty and refused to take me to.

In addition to being attentive to the dimension of history in the analysis of food taboos, I argue that this study also points to the significance of space in understanding dietary taboos. While Muslims in Delhi continue to draw on a long and rich Muslim-Mughal culinary history in India, incorporating it in modified forms in their everyday lives, as minorities within the larger landscape of Delhi they have to work to create

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<sup>32</sup> For a classic study on caste among Muslims in India see Imtiaz Ahmed’s (1978) *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims*.

Muslim spaces within which the norms of halal and haram may be observed, or fall back on existing Muslim spaces like Old Delhi where these norms may be followed more easily. As Kabir Sahab explained:

Muslims are very cautious about it (consuming halal meat). That is why Muslims will not eat meat everywhere, even though they eat a lot of meat. They won't eat meat on airplanes, on trains. They won't eat meat at any such place where Muslims are not around and they are not sure whether the meat they are being served is halal or jhatka. Although in Delhi the thing is that most of the meat business is in the hands of Muslims so you get mostly halal. But the orthodox Muslims are very particular about halal.

The significance of Kabir sahab's words became fully apparent to me only after the following incident, which makes it clear that as Muslims move from the familiar and taken-for-granted Muslim space of Old Delhi and into other parts of Delhi that are marked as non-Muslim, the need for safeguarding their bodies against the consumption of haraam foods comes to be felt more acutely. A few days before leaving Delhi, I invited Mohsin and his wife Firoza over to my apartment for lunch. They were one of the first couples I had met in the course of fieldwork, and over the months I had grown very close to them and their large extended family in Old Delhi. I also spent a great deal of time in their home and shared many wonderful meals with them, so I wanted to cook them at least one special meal at my place. The evening before, I had talked to Mohsin on the phone and confirmed our lunch meeting. He had also mentioned that he would bring along some chicken. He has quite a reputation in the family for being a great cook and I had been teasing him about it, so I thought he wanted to prove the point, and I readily agreed. The next morning I realized in a panic that I did not know of any halal meat shops in the area I lived (or none that advertised themselves as such), so I went to Central

market, in a central Delhi neighborhood, and bought mutton from one of the two shops that had prominently displayed ‘halal’ signs.

I was just putting the finishing touches to my spicy mutton curry when Mohsin and Firoza arrived, Mohsin holding his scooter helmet in one hand and a plastic packet of uncooked chicken in the other. After a quick tour of the apartment, we settled down in the kitchen as I made tea and tended to the still cooking mutton curry and Mohsin gathered all the spices he needed to cook his chicken. Mohsin asked why I was bothering to cook mutton, since he had already told me that he would be getting meat and both of them protested even more loudly when I told them that I had gone to Central market to buy halal meat. Mohsin asked me to specify which shop I had visited, then nodded in recognition and commented that these shops catered to the ‘Arabs’ who did not know any better, and although they claimed to be halal, they also sold ham and other pork products (I had seen no pork in these shops). When we finally sat down to lunch, we thoroughly enjoyed Mohsin’s chicken dish and the other vegetarian dishes I had prepared, but the mutton curry remained untouched until I finally and tactlessly asked Mohsin why they were not having any. He smiled an embarrassed smile and mumbled that they knew the butcher in Old Delhi and were used to buying meat from him. It was only then that it dawned on me that even halal may not be considered halal - to an outsider like me, a shop sign board saying ‘halal’ is an unambiguous sign, but for Mohsin and Firoza it means very little, precisely because halal, for them, is not only about a process of slaughtering animals but also about human relationships based on familiarity and trust, and it is also about a known, familiar social space that is clearly marked as a Muslim space as opposed to other non-Muslim spaces.

In Old Delhi, however, one is almost always within an overarching Muslim environment, an environment in which, as Kabir sahib said, “Only halal is sold here. Even if I wanted to heat haram or jhatka I would not get it.” During Baqri Eid, for instance, most Old Delhi Muslim residents contact local butchers to slaughter the animals they want sacrificed, and these are usually the butchers from whom they buy meat year round. At this time, butchers also come in from areas around Delhi as they are much in demand to slaughter the sacrificial animals. Also, supply of these animals (goats, sheep, camel) come in truckloads. They are sold in the special market that is set up during this time in front of Jama masjid. Similarly, living in a largely Muslim neighborhood makes it possible to conduct the sacrificial slaughtering of animals in the home during Baqri Eid, while this is rarely possible in the homes of Muslims who do not live in Old Delhi or other Muslim dominated areas of the city, often for fear of offending Hindu neighbors.

*Everyday Fears Embodied*

Since the large scale Hindu-Muslim riots during the Partition of India and in every subsequent episode of communal conflict in independent India, the Muslim body has been the site of horrific violence. Reports like the following filed by *Daily Mail* correspondent Ralph Izzard were common in the provinces of Punjab (including Delhi) and Bengal which saw the worst of Partition violence in 1947: “...the 15 Up from Delhi, a train with nine coaches and room enough....for a thousand persons at least, had arrived in Lahore seven hours late with eight battered Muslim survivors on board” (quoted in Pandey, 2001, p. 36). In the latest bout of violence in the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002, the Muslim woman’s body was the site of the greatest violence with women



being stripped, raped, beaten with rods and pipes, and in some cases even burnt alive (Sarkar, 2002).

Within the vast literature on violence against minorities, much attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of the excess of violence in recent times—when victims are not simply killed but beaten, raped, and burnt—with women, children, and even fetuses being targets in particular. Taking a macro approach that attempts to explain excessive anti-minority violence worldwide in relation to globalization, Arjun Appadurai (2006) argues that this tendency has much to do with the ever proliferating uncertainties created by the blurring of various boundaries that globalization brings about, along with the anxieties of the nation-state which finds its national sovereignty threatened by the forces of the market in a globalized world. In other words, according to Appadurai, within nation-states minorities who are already reminders of the incomplete purity of the nation become flashpoints around which coalesce the anxieties and uncertainties of the nation-state produced by globalization. Sarkar (2002), on the other hand, takes a more micro approach which seeks to understand such anti-minority violence as rooted in specific local histories and political realities. She argues that the reasons behind the excessive violence inflicted on the bodies of Muslim women and children in the Gujarat pogrom can be understood only within the framework of the specific politics and teachings of the Hindu Sangh Parivar, which has successfully identified killing and masculinity and invoked old stereotypes about uncontrolled breeding and rapid self-multiplying among Muslims, in contrast to anxieties about a comparatively less potent Hindu maleness and the connected vision of Hindus as a dying race with Muslims outnumbering Hindus in the near future (Sarkar, 2002).

Despite the differences in approach, both Appadurai and Sarkar focus on events of violence and their works add to our understanding of how and why violence towards minority groups unfolds in particular ways at specific historical junctures. However, we need to look beyond events of violence as moments of rupture to understand how, as in the case of Muslims in post-independent India, violence or its possibility forms a more or less constant backdrop to the everyday. We can do so by moving our focus from acts of violence to the fear of violence, and from moments of violence to the before and after of violent events. I argue that Muslims in India have lived with fear at least since the events of the partition in 1947, and while 9/11 has ensured that in an increasingly interconnected world many of us now live with a new sense of the everyday possibilities of violence, the case of Muslims in India provides an important counter to the claim that fear and violence as an everyday condition is new and specific to globalization (Appadurai, 2006). For many of my older respondents, for instance, who witnessed the Partition directly and whose memories of this time are rooted in the intense violence inflicted on Muslim and Hindu bodies, every new episode of Hindu-Muslim conflict and violence is not new but a continuation and reminder of the horrors of Partition, a virtual going back to “that time.” The experiences and memories of Partition are also grim reminders of the mundane-ness of death at times of violent conflict. Kabir sahab’s recollections of the Partition are thus filled with images of death which is suddenly all around him, its very everywhere-ness making it meaningless, turning the dead persons into nameless and faceless dead bodies:

Kabir sahab: If you go a little further out from this area (where Kabir sahab lives) then it’s a mostly Hindu dominated area called Bazaar Sitaram. It is very close to our house. There used to be gunfire from there and here people would stand on their terraces to see what was happening and they died from bullets. There is a Kaali masjid (black mosque) here, which you must have seen. During that time, Muslims were standing on the roof of that Kaali masjid and firing shots in the

other direction. So people must have been dying from bullet wounds there (in the Hindu areas) too. The shrine that is here behind my house now, all this used to be open ground. The corpses would collect here. I used to see those dead bodies, sometimes eight or ten. The earth was dug to bury them. There used to be many dead bodies during that time. And there was curfew round the clock, the shoot at sight type in every lane. Sometimes at night there would be gunshot sounds, someone would have shot someone, someone else stepped out, and the police shot him. People like beggars were killed in great numbers during that time because they had no understanding of what was going on.

In their writings, scholars like Veena Das, Deepak Mehta, and Roma Chatterjee have examined how victims rebuild and live their lives in the aftermath of violence directed against them. However, such analysis can and must be extended beyond direct victims of violence to all those whose lives are indirectly touched by it, because fear of violence is not only experienced directly but also through the human capacity for empathetic imagining that places oneself in the position of a victim. For instance, as a little boy of ten at the time of the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984<sup>33</sup> and living in an area close to a wealthy Sikh neighborhood that saw much rioting, Farhan recalls:

It actually hit me when we went up to the terrace and we looked towards New Friends Colony (a rich, mainly Hindu Punjabi area, neighboring the Muslim dominated area where Farhan lives). We could see *only* smoke. That was one of the scariest sights I have ever seen in my life. I now feel that had I actually gone there and seen the riot then maybe I would not have felt so scared. But to have thought about it, about what must have been happening there, that was scary.

Arpita: Did you later on hear people talking about it?

Farhan: Yeah, my friend in school. He said, it is good, they killed someone, so we will also do the same to them and there will be retaliation. They have to be killed because they did something which is so anti-national. And I agreed with that. And then our teacher came in and she started speaking. And she changed everything, the whole outlook, that this is not how it is, this is the wrong way of thinking about it. So that is the little I remember. But only that one scene I saw from my rooftop is stuck in my head. That was very scary, something which has really affected me.

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<sup>33</sup> On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984 Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards. From November 1<sup>st</sup> Delhi witnessed a widespread massacre of Sikhs, with men and boys killed and often burnt, women and young girls raped and abducted, shops and homes looted and burnt.

Thus, while most of my middle-class Muslim respondents in Old Delhi have not been the object of violent assault, their lives are nevertheless shaped to some degree by the ever existing possibility of communal violence. Fear and violence occupy, I suggest, a somewhat nebulous middle ground in the everyday lives of middle-class Muslims in Delhi – it is not entirely novel as Appadurai suggests it is for many of us in a globalized post 9/11 world, but nor is it present in the way it is in societies torn by continuing conflict where physical violence or its possibility is a part of the everyday to the extent that the very sense of order and everydayness is organized around the prospect of violence (Mbembe, 2003). Rather, fear ebbs and flows in its intensity with the changing tide of political events and episodes of communal conflict so that Razia remembers feeling insecure upon the death of Nehru (independent India's first prime minister and a great champion of the principles of liberal secularism), and she notes that every time Muslims in India "build up their confidence" there comes an episode of communal conflict which destroys their confidence and "takes things back to square one." Thus, during periods of Hindu-Muslim conflict, the fear of violence rises to the center of everyday life but in the periods between bouts of violence fear lingers as a residual feeling that has come to be accepted as an unhappy but unavoidable part of one's everyday, best encapsulated in the statement made by Aslam, a young Muslim man who was driving me to Jama masjid one day. The traffic was unusually slow that day as we neared the masjid, and as we got closer we realized that this was because a police check point had been set up on the narrow road approaching the masjid and cars were passing slowly through it after being searched by policemen. I asked Aslam why there was such a

police presence today and he replied, “Madam, there are no guarantees these days. Anything can happen anytime you know.”

Anthropological literature on the body has directed attention to the place of emotions in analyzing the individual, social, and political body (e.g. Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Ahmed 2004). While anthropologists like Geertz (1980) have long argued that emotions are not private but shaped by culture, Sara Ahmed (2004) has made the point that “emotions are not simply “within” or “without” but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (p. 117). Drawing on Ahmed’s analysis of the ways in which the emotions of hate and love work to align some subjects with some others and against other others, I argue that the fear of the possibility of violence in the future plays an important role in delineating and maintaining the boundaries of and between Muslim and Hindu bodies. Fear also enters the everyday through the path of memories of events of Hindu-Muslim conflicts and violence. If bodies can be read as “topographies that relate memory and community” and “bodily traces create belonging and exclusion” (Pandolfini 2000: 17), then the memories of particular events shape the ways in which Muslim bodies are experienced in relation to the Hindu ‘other’.

Fear is embodied not only in the sense that the feeling of fear is itself a bodily sensation, but also in the sense that fear stems from the prospect of injury or annihilation of the body and the body is, thus, brought into awareness through fear. It is not surprising, therefore, that in extreme instances an end to fear is sought through self-destruction of the body itself, as in the numerous instances of women (both Hindu and Muslim) committing suicide by jumping into wells to escape capture and dishonoring by men of the opposite

faith during the violence of partition. In a horrifying continuum, Razia narrated the case of a neighbor, a middle-aged Muslim woman who lives with her teenaged daughter. During the riots that rocked Delhi after the Babri masjid demolition, this neighbor confessed to Razia that she had prepared a bottle of poison for herself and her daughter to consume, in case they were attacked by Hindus. Although Razia's neighborhood experienced no violence, her neighbor suffered a heart attack soon afterwards which, at least in Razia's perception, was caused by the fear and anxiety she experienced, stemming from the possibility of a violent attack on her young daughter.

Not only is the fear of violence linked to a concern for maintaining one's bodily integrity, but the resources for dealing with this fear are also routed through the body.

Thus, Kabir sahab reminisced that during the time of partition:

...when some peace had descended, people like my father who used to wear a Turkish cap earlier stopped wearing one. And he told me, "Don't go out in clothes in which you look different, look distinctly Muslim." One had to move around in all the areas (including non-Muslim areas). During that time many refugees (mostly Hindus) had come from Punjab. I learnt to speak Punjabi so that if I met someone on the streets, I could talk to them in Punjabi, and they would think this is a Punjabi guy.

The possibility of violence and bodily injury is, thus, sought to be thwarted through the making of bodily transformations such as changes in clothing, the absence of facial hair, and the taking on of a different language. Such strategies of embodied transformation are drawn upon and mobilized time and again at moments of crisis, as in the case of some of Farhan's relatives who while traveling by train in the period after the countrywide riots, following the destruction of the Babri masjid, used the precautionary measure of taking on Hindu names temporarily. In other words, the ability to use embodied markers to morph from a member of a targeted minority group (Muslim) to a

majority identity (Hindu), especially during times of violence, is seen as a skill absolutely crucial to survival even for middle-class Muslims in Delhi who have never experienced bodily violence first-hand but have lived with the fear of such violence for a very long time.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have shown how embodied Islamic practices like the offering of namaz and eating halal are formed in contention with Hindu representations of Muslims as dirty and polluting, as unthinking and uncritical in their relation to their faith. Such negative representations, posing as secular rather than Hindu, have been crucial in marking Muslims off as backward and non-modern. In order to be modern, therefore, it becomes equally crucial for middle-class Muslims to counter these representations by linking the practice of namaz with cultivation of discipline of the mind and presenting halal as a scientific, hygienic, and progressive practice. Once again, what emerges from this discussion is the way in which scientific, rational, critical thought lies at the core of middle-class Muslim imaginings of themselves as modern within a larger context in which these are the very qualities that are routinely denied to Muslims when they are accused of being anti-modern and backward.

CHAPTER 6: REINVENTING THE UMMA:  
SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS IN NEW YORK CITY

*Introduction*

Brother Hamza Mahfouz: I am not saying that the media controls society but it influences society. The society here (United States) thus accepts many things that should be rejected. Six months before Saddam Hussein attacked the media started talking about it so people would be prepared. Media has to live within the framework of society. But media also helps define public agenda, shapes what people are going to talk about. Media tells not only what happens but also what people think. It is important to distinguish reporting from analysis and commentary. Newspapers don't do this.

History is what is recorded, what has been written. The media makes history. We see the revisionism of history in Palestine in order to shape people's attitudes to Jews within the land of Palestine. A land without people for a people without land. So idyllic! But it is not so at all. History is written by the victor. Always reflect on that. Only earlier generations of Muslims documented in detail exactly what happened since they were interested in learning and not in painting rosy pictures. Media is a powerful tool. Following the sunnah of the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) *you too must use the media for the benefit of the Umma* (emphasis mine).

Sheikh Abu al-Asad: If you are asked who you are, to what nation you belong, you are Muslim, *you belong to the umma* (emphasis mine).

The lines quoted above are excerpted from talks delivered by two of the five speakers at a Muslim youth conference, held at an Islamic center in Jersey City (New Jersey) in 2002. The theme of the conference was 'The State of Our Umma.' Several scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 2002; Leonard, 2002) have noted the current salience of the concept of *umma* or a global Muslim community, especially among Muslims in the West. For instance, in her study of Chicago's Sunni Muslim immigrant community Garbi Schmidt notes that, "The idea of the *umma*, the community of believers, has become a unifying motive around which Muslims in both East and West coalesce and according to which they defend the applicability of their faith to a modern world" (Schmidt, 2002, p. 111). Similarly, Karen Leonard notes that American Muslim activist discourse and



practice are constructing a transnational Islamic *umma* through the use of American Muslim print media which regularly provide reports about Muslim countries and issues that involve Islam or Muslims, thus enabling a vision of “communities of suffering embodied in acts of giving and lobbying across national boundaries unify North American Muslims as they address problem areas such as Palestine, Bosnia, Kashmir, and Kosovo” (Leonard, 2002, p. 240).

As my fieldwork in New York City and the larger New York metropolitan area revealed, the *umma* is being invoked and constructed by immigrant South Asian Muslims<sup>34</sup> not only through Muslim print media<sup>34</sup> but also in different activist settings such as youth conferences, like the one referred to at the beginning of the chapter, as well as in forums like weekly meetings of Muslim student organizations, and in the discourses of non-profit organizations like the Islamic Group of America (henceforth referred to as IGA).

In this chapter, I draw upon fieldwork in a variety of settings such as Islamic schools, Muslim grocery stores, and community organizations to show how the *umma* is constructed, lived, and contested by South Asian Muslims in New York City<sup>35</sup>. Despite the fact that Muslims in both India and the United States are plagued by mainstream representations of Muslims as anti-modern, I present evidence to show that many of the South Asian Sunni Muslims I worked with in New York are interested in thinking and living the *umma* in a way that is almost totally absent among the middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi who, as I have shown, are more interested in finding, both for themselves and for those to whom they represent Muslims, ways in which Islam and modernity can be

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<sup>34</sup> I use the term South Asian Muslims to include Muslims from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

<sup>35</sup> I worked in three areas of New York City where large numbers of South Asian Muslims live and work, namely Jackson Heights, Flushing and Coney Island Avenue.

understood and experienced as integrated and complementary rather than oppositional. For instance, compared to Old Delhi's Muslims, South Asian Muslims in New York are far more conscious and accepting of Saudi Arabia as the center of the Islamic world. This becomes apparent in many ways such as the greater emphasis laid by South Asian Islamic schools in New York on teaching Arabic and the relative indifference towards Arabic shown by Delhi's middle-class Muslims (for whom the declining relevance of Urdu is of far greater concern). This difference stems undoubtedly from South Asian Muslims' greater exposure to and interaction with Arab Muslims in the United States from whom they have imbibed the notion that knowing Arabic is essential to being a proper Muslim. However, I argue that the emphasis on learning Arabic also has much to do with the efforts and engagements of many South Asian immigrants in building a strong and cohesive transnational umma. I show that many middle-class South Asian Muslims in New York are engaging in re-building the umma, not only through activism that keeps them attuned to and engaged with the hardships and politics of Muslims in different parts of the world, but also through everyday practices of pedagogy, halal and haram, and the making of Muslim spaces, which cumulatively serve to re-produce themselves and their children as 'proper' Muslims who live an Islamic life that is in tandem with the life of the imagined global Islamic community or umma.

Following a brief history of South Asian Muslims in the United States and their post September 11 status as suspect citizens and potential terrorists, I provide a more detailed understanding of how the umma is invoked, articulated, and contested in Muslim public spheres in the larger New York area, focusing on public forums and events like meetings of Muslim student organizations and Muslim youth conferences. Moving

beyond such direct and forceful articulations of the centrality of umma, I show how particular pedagogical strategies in Islamic schools in New York City inculcate in first and second generation South Asian Muslim children knowledge and practices that enable them to become ‘proper’ Muslims and able members of the global Islamic community. I then explore how the debates and practices around eating halal foods and avoiding haram foods becomes one of the most important ways in which South Asian immigrant Muslims create and participate in an imagined global Islamic community. I also examine the significance of the mosque as an institution and space that both facilitates the experience and construction of the umma among Muslim immigrants within the United States while also bringing to the surface national, regional and cultural ties and longings that threaten to undermine the attempts to make the Muslim umma a significant mode of transnational belonging. In conclusion, I argue that the striking contrast between Old Delhi’s Muslims and New York’s South Asian Muslims in their views regarding the umma are related to the particular position of the latter as immigrant actors located at the cusp of a racial and immigrants politics specific to the United States, and a larger “transpolitics” (Silverstein, 2004) which encompasses particular homeland politics, different strands of political Islam, as well as the cultural and ethnic politics that different groups of immigrant Muslims bring to the mix in the United States. Immigrant ties to different homelands and varying ethnic cultures and politics cut into and threaten to undermine the project of living the umma. Even as South Asian Muslims (along with Muslims from the Arab world and elsewhere) attempt to negotiate these various obstacles that threaten to undermine the umma, they simultaneously assert and value their identities and rights as

American citizens, thus countering mainstream representations that insist that being Muslim, American, and modern are incompatible.

*South Asian Muslims in the United States*

Given the large numbers of Muslims living in the West today, it is now less tenable than ever before to map Islam and the West onto separate geographical areas.

Haddad (1999) points to four different phases in the history of Islam's encounter with the West:

Islam's expansion into Europe through the Ottoman empire; the encounter with Catholic Christianity through the Crusades, the Reconquista, and the Inquisition's efforts to "de-Islamize" Spain; Western colonialism and colonization of Muslim territories; the current phase marked by the world super power status of the U.S., the empowerment of Israel and the emigration and acquisition of citizenship by Muslims in various Western countries (1999, p. 602-603).

There is much disagreement about the estimated number of Muslims in the United States today. According to Haddad & Lummis (1987), the consensus of several scholars puts the number in the range of 2 or 3 million. According to Nu'man's (1992) estimate, South Asian Muslims constitute 24.4% of the American Muslim population, while Arabs constitute 12.4%. However, Ba-Yunus & Siddiqui's (1999) estimates place South Asians at 29% and Arab Muslims at 33%. As Haddad (2000, 1999, 1998) and others have pointed out, the Muslim community in North America is characterized by its diversity, including Muslims from many nations with various ethnic, racial, linguistic, tribal, and national identities, and differentiated in terms of class as well as political, ideological, and theological positions (Haddad, 1999). Haddad & Lummis (1987) divide Muslims of North America into two broad, distinct groups: immigrant and indigenous Muslims, the latter category composed mainly of African-Americans but also including a growing number of "Anglo" converts.

Within a five phase periodization of Muslim immigration to the United States, it has been noted (e.g., Leonard, 2002) that the first three waves starting from 1875 consisted of Arab Muslims while it was only in the fourth (1947- 1960) and fifth (1967 - the present) waves that South Asian Muslims were and are included. Thus, Muslim immigrants to North America were initially from countries like Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, but the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act in the 1960s in the United States brought large numbers of immigrants from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, many of whom were highly educated professionals or skilled and semiskilled workers (see Haddad 1999; Leonard 2002, 2003). Almost all South Asian immigrant Muslims in the United States are from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or India, and share, certain cultural traits as well a sub-continental history of Hindu, Indo-Muslim, and British colonial rule (Leonard, 2002). While most immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslims (not surprising given that these are Muslim majority countries), Leonard estimates that about 12% of Indian immigrants are Muslims.

While acknowledging the divisions among South Asian immigrant Muslims and the current divisive politics of their respective homelands, Leonard nevertheless sees them as a single diasporic population for whom the United States becomes an important site for forging connections:

These immigrants share cultural presents and “remembered” pasts. They constitute a diasporic aesthetic community, drawing on languages and cultural traditions that cross current political borders. They also bring memories of British colonialism the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, and the 1971 breakaway of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) from (West) Pakistan. Thus, these immigrants are marked by peculiar allegiances and alienations that stem from these shared, if differently interpreted, historical events. (Leonard, 2002, p. 235)

In a similar vein, Haddad (2000) argues that within the conglomeration of Muslim identities in North America “the Muslim immigrants from South Asia form what appears to be a distinct group with its particular experience in the Indian subcontinent” influencing its “perceptions of what it means to be Muslim and minority, shaping its strategies for survival in an increasingly hostile environment” (Haddad, 2000, p. 240).

Leonard (2003) argues that while South Asian Muslims are relative newcomers on the American scene, they are nevertheless playing an increasingly important leadership role in shaping an American Islam and in mobilizing American Muslims politically. As Leonard points out, South Asian Muslims are in a privileged position to lead owing to their relatively high economic and professional status and proficiency in English, their shared experience of struggle against colonial rule, experience in democratic politics post independence (including the Indian Muslim experience of being a minority), their model minority status, and their better positioning in relation to the American media and general public, as compared to Arab American Muslims. (Leonard 2002). While Leonard admits the difficulties of measuring leadership, given the absence of a centralized clergy in Islam as well as the fact that only 10% to 20% of American Muslims attend mosques, she points out that the leadership role played by South Asian Muslim immigrants can be gauged by looking at how they have been at the forefront of building and providing leadership in mosques, editing and publishing leading American Muslim journals (e.g. Islamic Horizons, Message International and The Minaret), as well as mobilizing Muslims on religious and political issues. As Haddad (2000) reminds us, despite their professional achievements, South Asian Muslims often experience subtle or

overt racial discrimination in an American society that views and treats them first and foremost as brown.

*From Suspect Citizens to Terrorists*

Through varying trajectories, Muslims in both India and the United States have come to be the objects of suspicion and hostility. In the United States, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> served as a catalyst to bring into the open simmering antagonisms against the increasing number of Muslim immigrants in the country, with a 2006 Gallup poll showing that only 49% Americans believe that Muslims are loyal to the United States (Asad, 2007) and that 39% of Americans admit to harboring prejudice against Muslims and believe that all Muslims including U.S. citizens should carry special IDs (Bayoumi, 2008).

To the extent that citizenship continues to be tied closely to national identity, Muslims in both India and the United States constitute a category of suspect citizens, under pressure to prove their loyalty to the nation-states within which they reside. Linda Bosniak notes that in recent years citizenship as a legal status has become a focal point in the public policy arena within the United States and controversial policy reforms in the United States have sought to harden the lines of distinction between citizens and non-citizens through various discriminatory measures that deprive legal and illegal immigrants of basic support, as well as through measures that increase deportability of non-citizens and restrict immigrants' access to American citizenship (Bosniak, 1998, p. 29). While the citizen/ alien distinction has been made and remade within the law at various historical junctures in the United States, the critical events of September 11<sup>th</sup>

have enabled new legal formulations of the citizen through legislations like the USA PATRIOT Act.

The USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 aimed at ‘Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism’. Title II of the Patriot Act devoted to enhancing surveillance aimed to expand the authority of law enforcement agencies to tap wire, oral, and electronic communications. The Patriot Act did this through amending the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) of 1978 in three important respects. First, it legalized the authorization of roving surveillance whereby a warrant could be issued not simply to wiretap a particular phone but to conduct surveillance on any phone used by a suspected terrorist, thus shifting the focus of surveillance from an instrument to a person. Second, while FISA allowed wiretaps to be authorized by the Attorney General only if its primary purpose was to collect foreign intelligence information, the Patriot Act amended this requirement to significant purpose. Finally, it enabled Federal investigators to access criminal investigative information including grand jury and wiretap transcripts.

Stolz notes that the 1978 FISA legislation drew a distinction between citizens and non-citizens through establishing “different standards and requirements in case of electronic surveillance of non-U.S. persons” (Stolz, 2002, p. 282), and the Patriot Act amendments to FISA have served to deepen those citizen/non-citizen distinctions. I argue, however, that in its language the Patriot Act does not clearly distinguish between citizens and non-citizens but encompasses both in the figure of the terrorist, in opposition to which federal power must be constructed in its new expanded form, enabling control over the ubiquitous carrier of terror through increased surveillance. It is precisely this lack of a



discursively performed clear distinction between the citizen and the non-citizen that led to the most stringent criticism of the Patriot Act, while the excessive powers and control it enabled over the body of the non-citizen drew relatively little criticism. This becomes clear if we look for, instance, at congressional hearings on the Patriot Act as a crucial site within which this legislation was debated, where both Republican and Democrat senators expressed criticism of the Department of Justice's interpretation of the Patriot Act amended FISA to mean that surveillance could now be legally authorized for purposes of criminal investigation and prosecution of American citizens, since such an interpretation threatens to erode the rights of citizens. Ironically, the very measures that are deemed necessary to increase the state's ability to apprehend and prevent terrorists also unleash a widespread anxiety stemming from the perceived danger of erasure of the very lines that distinguish citizens from others. It is the failure of the amendment to clearly distinguish between citizens and non-citizens that compel other related discourses to take up and reassert the distinction. This becomes evident in the repeated emphases in the senators' speeches on ensuring the rights of American citizens by placing them in a privileged position in relation to federal power, such that surveillance cannot operate on their bodies in the way that it can work on the bodies of aliens and immigrants.

While the Patriot Act blurs the distinction between citizens and non-citizens in relation to questions of surveillance, this distinction is also recreated through the elaborate constructions of the immigrant and the alien in other sections of the Act. For instance, the Act redefines an alien by expanding the grounds on which an alien may be considered inadmissible, declaring as legally inadmissible any representative of a foreign terrorist organization, or any political, social or other similar group that publicly endorses

terrorist activity. In aligning the figures of the alien and terrorist so closely, as to almost erase the distinction between the two, a dual purpose is served: locating terror outside the nation and constructing the national citizen in opposition to the alien terrorist. The citizen/alien distinction and the location of carriers of terror at the fringes of the nation are further accomplished through the active construction of the border in Title IV of the Patriot Act which authorizes an enormous legalized mobilization of state finances, personnel, scientific technology, and information databases to protect the border and identify aliens.

As scholars like Lowe (1996) and De Genova (2002) have pointed out, U.S. immigration policy has been fundamentally shaped by the needs of capital and the categories of ‘immigrant’, ‘alien’ and ‘illegal’ are economically profitable, enabling control and manipulation of a cheap and docile labor force. Moreover, the figures of the immigrant and alien are deployed to further the related projects of constructing the nation and national citizenship. The immigrant is used to attest to the openness of American democracy and the nation’s capacity to embrace and assimilate. At the same time, within the American national imaginary the Asian immigrant is “always seen as an immigrant, as the “foreigner-within”, even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before” (Lowe, 1996, p. 5). Similarly, Honig (1998) notes that within the story of an immigrant America the immigrant foreigner is represented as reinvigorating the nation through hard work and strong communitarian and family values, but at the same time immigrant foreignness is the object of suspicion.

In the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the acts of violence it generated against Muslims –Arabs, Sikhs and South Asians (see Puar, 2007) –it is not surprising that the

Patriot Act opens with Congress's condemnation of discrimination against Arab and American Muslims:

Arab Americans, Muslim Americans and Americans from South Asia play a vital role in our Nation and are entitled to nothing less than the full rights of every American....Many Arab Americans and Muslim Americans have acted heroically during the attack on the United States...It is the sense of the Congress that the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans, including Arab Americans, Muslim Americans and Americans from South Asia, must be protected. (PATRIOT Act, Title 1, Section 101)

Thus, Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Americans from South Asia can be conceived as American citizens only through their contributions to nation building, their heroic acts, and their patriotism. On the other hand, through their very naming as such Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Americans from South Asia are always already marked as the racial, religious, and ethnic 'other', the foreigner within who is the object of suspicion, who must time and again legitimize his claims to citizenship through demonstrating his patriotism, and in contrast to whom the pure American citizen may be constructed. New government legislations and policies, as well as intensified public scrutiny and hostility following 9/11, has meant that Muslims in the U.S. find themselves living in an environment vitiated by surveillance, deportations, and profiling<sup>36</sup>, within which they are represented and treated as a "problem" to which a solution must be found (Bayoumi, 2008).

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<sup>36</sup> As Moustafa Bayoumi notes, informants and spies have become part of everyday conversation among Arab American Muslim youth who feel targeted and under surveillance. Racial profiling too has come to be routinely used not only by law enforcement agents but also in "places of employment, in housing, for public-opinion polls, and in the media", all of which reinforce images of "the exceptional assimilated immigrant or the violent fundamentalist" (2008, p. 4) and reveal nothing of the complex realities of what it means to be Muslim, Arab, American and young in America today.

*Looking Inward: Building the Umma through Making Good Muslims*

Presenting evidence drawn from discourses in immigrant Muslim public spheres, as well as observed practices in different settings such as Islamic schools and mosques, I argue that New York's South Asian Sunni Muslims attempt to shape and reinvigorate the umma first and foremost through focusing on the individual Muslim self and the making of individuals who are good Muslims leading a properly Islamic life.

At the Muslim youth conference, on *The State of the Umma*, which we encountered at the beginning of this chapter, umma as a powerful category of belonging for Muslims was articulated clearly by Sheikh Abu Al-Asad in his elaboration on the special role of Muslim youth in building a strong umma. Sheikh Abu Al-Asad, an elderly man wearing a neat white beard, a light grey coat over a creamy white *shalwar kameez*, and a round cap, spoke slowly in Arabic and stopped every few sentences so that Brother Mahfouz sitting next to him could translate his sentences into English for the audience. His audience was about forty strong, consisting of teenaged boys and girls as well as young men and women of different national and ethnic origins (mainly South Asian and Egyptian), all sitting quietly on the carpeted floor of the large room where the conference was being held. I provide below a short selection from Sheikh Abu Al-Asad's speech:

If you are asked who you are, to what nation you belong, you are Muslim, you belong to the umma. The youth in any nation has a special status. If they know their role and duty the umma succeeds. If the umma ignored you and doesn't educate you the umma is lost....We read in Quran the story of Ibrahim who rejected worship of idols in which his people engaged. His dawa did not succeed. So he taught them a lesson. He broke the idols. They punished him and tried to burn him but Allah saved him. He was young at this time. The young are always at the forefront of dawa and they are the secret of success of this deen. And we cannot forget the role of young girls in the history and support of Islam. Therefore it should be obvious that the youth are the greatest resource and fortune of the umma. If the youth is upright and well prepared the umma succeeds. If the youth is corrupt the umma weakens. Scholars of the *deen* (religion) know this and so do

the enemies. That is why the enemy puts money into corrupting the youth and especially young girls.

The final speaker at the same conference was a middle-aged African-American Muslim by the name of Brother Mustafa. He was an engaging speaker and talked at length about the duties of parents towards their children and the significance of warm familiar relations in making the Islamic umma a success:

Brother Mustafa: A lot of the problems we face as Muslims are due to what we create in our minds. We think everyone is against us. But no one can infiltrate us without our permission. Muslim children are entertained with Western forms of entertainment and then we ask them to be Muslim. We must not give them mixed signals. We should not ask kids to do what we would not do at their age. Our children should be Muslim not because their parents are but because they understand that Islam will give them supreme knowledge. Above all, children have to be supported. They must be allowed to analyze for themselves. There cannot be any force or compulsion in this faith. We have to make the environment so that children can ask questions. We gotta open up. Our young people are influenced by friends. We fool ourselves by thinking we can run from the West. It is everywhere, in the movies, the music. We are influenced by American culture whether we like it or not. We gotta be very careful or we make hypocrites of our children. So think! Allah gave human beings the ability to think and see. We must teach what Islam represents and separate it from culture.”

We ask you to remember your blessings. It's very simple. Remember Allah for five minutes....Do your duty as a parent and leave the rest to Allah. Our sons and daughters observe us. Your son may hate you as father and therefore hate your religion since you mistreat your wife, his mother. Our children will learn from us if we give them the image that women have no place in Islam. Our young people are very impressionable. We must put in their minds the image of Islam as joy and knowledge. Worship Allah, fear Allah, obey Him. If you accept this message Allah will forgive all your sins. The only thing that we as parents can do is to give guidance. The rest is between them and Allah.

Allah is merciful, loving and kind. You are misrepresenting Islam when you think of it as some rigid religion. Extreme views are destroying Islam's image. You gotta be balanced. When we enter a masjid the first thing we should get at the door is a warm greeting. Let us be compassionate with each other. We need more love in our homes, in our schools. We need real support. Each and every one of us is responsible for ourselves, our deen (religion) and for the success of our umma. Sheikh Abu Al-Asad and Brother Mustafa's talks, thus, focused particularly on

the need to be and shape good Muslims in order for a strong umma to emerge, with the former highlighting the responsibility of young Muslims in the umma and the latter

emphasizing the role of parents in shaping children who take pride in being Muslim. Brother Mustafa urged parents to guide by example and make their children good Muslims by being good Muslims themselves, which entails, according to him, such qualities as being loving, supportive, compassionate, open, encouraging of children, and respectful of women in their everyday lives. While such concerns with producing good Muslims and its perceived centrality to building a vibrant umma is central to the lives of many immigrant and African-American Muslims in the United States, such efforts towards creating good Muslims also serve to open up debates about what constitutes a good Muslim. Such debates are fractured not only along lines of difference among various schools of thought within Islam, but also along lines of class, as well as regional, racial, national, and ethnic belonging. Thus the United States, in bringing together immigrant Muslims from various parts of the world, provides an impetus and an arena for the making and performing of the transnational Islamic umma, but these very attempts and interactions also bring into prominence the lines of fissure and fracture within the imagined umma and threatens at particular moments to undermine the very possibility of the umma.

In what follows, I take us on a close tour of two Islamic schools in New York City to show how good or proper Muslims are produced in these settings through particular pedagogical methods and strategies, even as the definitions of what constitutes a good Muslim are being constantly debated, made and unmade within the walls of these Islamic schools. Following this, I examine how the embodied practices of eating halal foods and guarding against the consumption of haram foods becomes another significant way in which Muslim-ness is defined, debated, and performed. Finally, I explore how the

making of Muslim spaces such as mosques both produce the umma but also threaten its significance, when the mosque becomes a community center identified with a particular ethnic group of Muslims. In detailing these everyday practices and the discourses surrounding them, my purpose is to highlight that the making of the umma requires immigrant Muslims in the United States to find strategic paths to arrive at acceptable common definitions of what it means to be a good Muslim. While specific pedagogical, embodied, and spatial practices are being re-thought and remade to enable the vision of a common Islamic umma that transcends ethnic and national barriers, the process itself is fraught with tension, conflict, and contradictions that often threaten to undermine the very idea of the umma.

*Learning to be Muslim in New York City*

An article published in the *New York Times*, on November 10, 1998, notes the growing popularity of Islamic schools among Muslims in America, particularly among immigrant Muslims in New York City:

Across the country, Islamic schools like Al Noor that offer religion and Arabic classes along with a standard academic curriculum are expanding and flourishing, with many becoming oversubscribed so quickly that principals are scrambling for money to build more....The educational structure these schools have forged - prayer, discipline and American-style teaching - has an appeal that cuts across lines of national origin and background...In a sudden growth spurt, the number of Islamic school nationwide has jumped to at least 200, according to the Council of Islamic schools in North America, an informal body that sponsors workshops for Muslim educators. But neither the council nor any other group keeps official track of school openings, and American Muslims say they believe that the national figures are even higher.....As recently as three years ago, fewer than 200 children in New York City and Long Island attended private Islamic schools. Today, with two full-time high schools in Queens and plans to build three more in Brooklyn and Manhattan, total enrollment is 2,400, spread among 13 schools, with the majority of students from immigrant families.

Schools that provide mainstream education in combination with basic knowledge of Islam, within an overarching Islamic environment, do exist in Old Delhi. However, students in these schools come mainly from lower-class and lower-middle-class families, many of whom aspire to send their children to elite English medium schools but lack the financial resources and social connections to do so. In the Islamic schools in New York City, on the other hand, the number of students has swelled over the years, as the above article mentions.

In 2003-2004, I spent a great deal of time in two such Islamic schools in New York City, where I sat in on classes in different grades, participated in school activities, and talked with the teachers and parents. The faculty and students in both of these schools were predominantly South Asian. School A was relatively new, had fewer resources, and was at that time struggling to accommodate its students and teachers in the small classrooms, even holding classes in the adjacent mosque (plans to remodel the school building were under way). School B, housed in the basement of a fairly large mosque, was well established with a larger number of students and teacher and more resources. However, the two schools are very similar in that they do not focus primarily on Islamic education. Rather, they teach the regular New York City school curriculum but provide additional classes teaching Quran reading, Islamic history, and Arabic, with the goal of providing an overarching Islamic environment in which Muslim children can learn and thrive.

In what follows, I first provide a detailed description of the content of classes, pedagogical methods, and interactions between teachers and students, to show how an overarching Islamic environment is created and religious and secular knowledge are



imparted. Thereafter, I will examine why Muslims in Old Delhi, across class divides, increasingly want to have their children educated in elite English medium schools, providing basic religious education at home, while many middle-class Muslims in New York City are making the conscious choice of sending their children to Islamic schools so that they may learn about Islam as an integral part of their education and within an Islamic environment. My argument is twofold: First, I argue that the figure of the backward Muslim looms so large and has been internalized to such an extent by middle-class Muslims in Delhi, that it precludes the possibility of creative structural changes in the knowledge system in ways that religious instruction and secular education may be conceptualized as a complementary whole in the ways in which South Asian Muslims in New York City are attempting to do, in the Islamic schools they have established. Second, I argue that a greater orientation towards the imagined community of the umma makes South Asian Muslims in New York more concerned about providing an Islamic education alongside and at par with secular education, so as to produce proper Muslims who can work to reinvigorate the umma while also ably participating in the larger non-Muslim society where they live, always keeping at the forefront their roles as representatives of the umma in a Western world where Muslims are portrayed as being anti-modern.

### *Creating an Islamic Environment*

In both the schools where I spent time, much effort was put into creating what was described as an Islamic environment, seen by the principals, faculty members, and parents as distinct from the socio-cultural environment outside the schools. This was done through various means, such as the organization of school space and the daily school schedule, the ways in which the children were taught to conduct themselves,

including comportment, clothing, and maintenance of discipline, as well as more directly through lessons in Quran reading, Islamic history, and Arabic.

The school day began at 8.30 a.m., with all students and teachers assembling to offer prayers, followed by a short instructive speech by the Principal or another teacher. The content of these speeches centered on various aspects of Islam and on being a good Muslim. In School A, this meeting was held in the mosque adjacent to the school. School B, which was housed in the basement of a large mosque, had its morning gathering in the large hall at the center around which all the classrooms and administrative offices were located. In this school, however, for the mid-day prayers the older students (grade two and up) were usually taken up to the main mosque to pray, girls and boys on separate floors, escorted by their teachers. The following field note excerpts will take you into two such morning meetings at Islamic School A:

The children, accompanied by their teachers, had already assembled when Dr. Kidwai, the principal, arrived. Walking up to the front of the room, Dr. Kidwai stood facing the children standing in orderly rows, girls on one side and boys on the other. Dr. Kidwai began with a prayer in Arabic and the children recited with him. He then talked to the children for some time about Ramadan (pronounced as Ramzan in India), reminding them that it was to start in a few weeks. He said, "At this time we must all be very good. We must be good always but at this time we must be especially good. Also, Saitan becomes very active at this time, just before the beginning of Ramadan, so we must be very careful. He (Saitan) is made of fire. He can enter our bodies and make our blood boil."

Dr. Kidwai then talked about some of the special qualities that the children, as good Muslims, must try to cultivate. The children repeated each quality after him, first in Arabic and then in English, such as "We must not lie" and "We must not hurt others' feelings." The latter especially, Dr. Kidwai explained, is a very big sin and "Allah will not forgive you unless you ask forgiveness of the person you hurt." At the end of his talk, Dr. Kidwai led the children in asking Allah for his blessings, saying, "We will now make dua. Open your hands, then look into your hands and focus." His dua included asking Allah to "give us a good school, good building, good chairs and tables, computers, a gym", and to "help our parents and teachers and those who are helping with the school." The children repeated each dua with him, while he took the time to call out to particular children by name and bring them to attention or correct their postures. Finally he asked the children to

stand up, stay in straight lines and do some simple stretching exercises, including moving their heads from left to right several times.

At Islamic School A, the day starts at 8.30 a.m. with morning assembly in the mosque next door to the school. When I entered the mosque this morning, late and a little out of breath, the Quran teacher—addressed as *Ustad-ji*—was addressing the children sitting in orderly lines. He was having them recite appropriate *surahs* (verses from the Quran), in response to his questions such as “What do we say before we break our fast?” He asked if they joined in the *iftaar* or if they went to break the daily fast during Ramadan, when their parents called them. When the kids chorused “Yes!” he jokingly said that he knew they liked joining in, even if they had not fasted because they liked all the good food. He also added, “Because you aren’t big enough now it is alright if you cannot fast the whole day. But we should make the habit. So start by fasting half day. And try to get up early and pray and eat something with your parents. Sometimes your parents may forget to pray. You must remind them and lead them in prayer. They will be very happy.” After the morning meetings, the children are led back to their classrooms by their teachers, all the while being urged to maintain their straight lines and not run around or talk amongst themselves.

#### *Classes at Islamic Schools in New York City*

In classes that I attended, from grades pre-kindergarten (pre-K) to fourth grade, mathematics, science, geography, and English lessons were interspersed with lessons in fields seen as central to the shaping of good Muslims, such as lessons in reading the Quran, Arabic, and Islamic history. For example, in grade two in Islamic School A, a segment from a typical day in the classroom would be as follows:

Sister Sara, the class teacher in Grade 2, goes over a mathematics problem in class, from a workbook, *Mathematics in Action*:

Sister Sara: She used 7 cups of grapefruit juice and 5 cups of pineapple juice.

How many more cups of grapefruit juice did she use?

Shahid:  $7 - 5 = 2$

Others disagree, and Muneera says,  $7 + 5 = 12$ .

Sister Sara reads out the problem again and when she says that the correct answer is 2 because one subtracts, there’s an enthusiastic chorus of “Yes!” from the students who got it right.

The math class is followed by a lesson in Islamic Studies, which is also taught by Sister Sara. Today the class is reading lesson number thirteen, titled *Khadijah Comforts*

*Muhammad*. Before they start, Sister Sara suggests that they review what they've previously learnt:

Sister Sara: Where was Mohammed born? Two students give incorrect answers before Rehman says, "Mecca."

Sister Sara: What happened after that?

Saba: He died in Medina.

Sister Sara: That was later. What happened after he was born?

Saba: Things changed.

Sister Sara: How?

Saba: It became nicer. Grass and flowers started growing.

Sister Sara: How old was Mohammed when his mom died?

Iqra: Six years old.

Sister Sara: Who took care of him then?

Asma: His father.

(Some of the children break out into loud laughter)

Sister Sara says: His father died before he was born. How could he take care of him?

Iqbal: His grandfather

Sister Sara: How old was Mohammed when his grandfather died?

Iqbal: Eight.

Sister Sara: So, he lost both his father and his grandfather, poor little kid. Who's supposed to take care of him?

Hasan: His uncle.

Sister Sara: Did his uncle have any children of his own?

Chorus of voices: Yes

Sister Sara: So what was his uncle doing for a living?

Iqra: He was traveling.

Sister Sara: But what did he do for a living? How did he earn money?

Safa: Oh! He bought things and sold them.

Sister Sara: So what is that person called? It starts with the letter M.

Ashraf: Mohammed.

(Everyone bursts into laughter, including the teacher)

Sister Sara: "Ashraf, wake up!"

Quran classes begin from grade one. At Islamic school A the same pedagogical

method is followed in every grade. Ustad-ji<sup>37</sup>, as the Koran teacher is addressed by the children, walks into class and asks the students to start reading aloud from a particular page. As the children read aloud, there is a sing song rhythm to their voices and some of them rock back and forth in their chairs. Despite not knowing Arabic, I can tell that all

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<sup>37</sup> Ustad means master or expert and ji is a suffix used widely in South Asia, attached to titled or proper names, to denote respect towards a teacher or an elderly person.

the children do not read in unison but recite different lines at the same time. Often one child repeats the same line or fragment, over and over again to get it right. In the second grade classroom for example, Ustad-ji is reciting surahs from the Koran and the children recite after him. After one round Ustad-ji says, “We did low sound. Now we’ll do medium sound”, and starts them off again, louder and at a higher pitch. At the end of this round, he points to Iqbal and says, “Ok, now you start and others will follow you.” Every now and then a student is called up by Ustad-ji to his desk, where he has to stand and recite, often with Ustad-ji leaning forward to hear them over the din of all the other voices reciting loudly. Occasionally one of the children raises his or her hand and says, “Ustad-ji I know it!” Sometimes Ustad-ji asks them to come up to his desk and read to him or asks them to stay in their seats and read. I notice that a few children don’t bother to read at all or do so sporadically and without much enthusiasm. Towards the end of the class, Ustad-ji goes from one student’s desk to the other and asks them to recite the section they’ve been working on. He has to lean forward to hear some of them over the non-stop chorus of voices that forms the background in this class. As each student reads, Ustad-ji sometimes corrects them and makes them repeat the words after him before moving on to the next desk. At some point in the class, it inevitably turns chaotic with Ustad-ji threatening to take one or another of the kids to the Principal! At the end of the class, before Ustad-ji leaves, he usually puts one student in charge of leading the others in reciting the closing surah.

Arabic, the language of the Quran, is also taught in both the schools. In School A, Arabic lessons begin from pre-kindergarten or pre-k, while in School B they begin from

grade one. For the children in pre-kindergarten, lessons consist mostly of learning the letters by copying them on paper. For instance:

After snack time at 10 a.m., the pre-kindergarten children had a half hour long Arabic class. During this time, their class teacher left the room and the Arabic teacher took over - a middle-aged woman wearing gold rimmed glasses and a black head scarf. She sat at the head of the table and wrote one Arabic alphabet on several sheets of plain white paper, and several images of the same alphabet in dotted lines on each sheet. Handing one of these sheets to each child, she asked them to trace the letter. When they finished, they were asked to turn over the page and write the letter by themselves.

Besides these more traditional pedagogical techniques, audio and visual media are also used to provide knowledge considered important to being a proper Muslim in ways that attempt to make religious learning fun. As they watch Islamic videos and sing along with Muslim songs, children learn what being Muslim means not only through what they see and hear but also through the interactions that these audio visual encounters trigger. For instance, in a kindergarten class we watched an Islamic video showing Muslims in Morocco. At one point the teacher asked, "Where is this?", and Hamid answered, "It's the Kaba." Habeeba, sitting next to Hamid said, "No, that's not the Kaba", but Hamid insisted, "Yes it is. My father told me that is the Kaba and he *touched* it."

In another video a puppet at the wheel of a ship said, in a comical voice, "Allah, help me!" It made the children laugh out loud. Rukhsana asked, "Teacher, is he Muslim?" and the teacher said, "Yes, he is." There is also a song in the same video thanking Allah, which goes like this: Thank you Allah for the sun so bright; Thank you Allah for the family who taught me how to love, and so on. Some of the children know the lyrics and sing along. A third video demonstrates how to do *wudu* or how to cleanse oneself properly before offering prayers. The teacher asks, "How many of you know how

to take wudu?” Most of the children raise their hands and to those who don't the teacher says, “Shame on you guys! All of you should know how to do wudu.”

An overall Islamic environment is created in many ways, other than through the most direct path of classes. For instance, students are taught to use Islamic forms of greeting in their everyday interactions. When Mrs. Ahmed, the principal of School B, visits any of the classrooms, the teacher tells the students to wish her and they say *Salam aleikum* in chorus. Sometimes, as in the kindergarten class on a particular day, Mrs. Ahmed gently corrects the children saying, “There are too many groups and I can hear many separate voices. Not so loud please.”

In the pre-kindergarten class in School A, before it is time to have snacks or lunch, the teacher, Sister Aliya, always led the children in making dua before eating (first in Arabic and then in English), thanking Allah for giving them food. She would instruct them to open their hands and each child would bring his or her hands together, palms facing towards them, and would look into their hands. “And now let us make dua”, Sister Aliya would say, and recite in Arabic a surah from the Quran with the children repeating after her. The Arabic recitation would always be followed by Sister Aliya saying, “And now let us make dua in English.”

Children are also taught which dua is appropriate for various everyday activities. For instance, the kindergarten teacher in school B would often ask her students questions such as: “When I ride the car, I say what dua? When I start eating, I say what dua? When I leave the bathroom, I say?” The speech of teachers was also peppered with such expressions as *Inshallah*, meaning “Allah willing.” When most of the students in grade three scored a full 100 on their English spelling tests, their teacher Sister Sara said,

“*Mashallah!* See, if you study you will do well.” Allah’s presence and power is reinforced throughout the day through repeated invocations of His name, to thank Him for blessings, to ask for His help and for myriad other reasons. For instance, at the end of the Arabic class in the second grade the teacher, Sister Farah, recites a new surah and the children try to follow her. Sister Farah has a sore throat and says to her students, “Ask Allah to give me strength so I can practice this with you because if my throat stays like this it is hard for me.”

Discipline and politeness are upheld as Islamic values and sought to be instilled constantly through teacher-student interactions and even in the organization of classroom spaces. For instance, on the walls of the grade three classroom in School A there are two handmade charts. One is titled *Modern Manuscript Alphabet* and lists the letters Aa to Zz. The other chart lists the *Classroom Rules* such as: Be polite, Listen to the teacher and other students, Raise your right hand and wait for your turn, Be on time, Complete your homework, Keep the room clean, Be honest, Stay in your seat. During snack time in grade two the teacher Sister Sara reminds students, “Please don’t stand when you’re eating or drinking. Cover your mouth if you cough.” When pre-kindergartener Moin complains to his teacher that Farhad is taking his legos away, the teacher responds, “No complaining. Ask Farhad nicely not to do that.” In grade four, noticing that Arbaaz did not say thank you when Iqra lent him a pencil, Arabic teacher Sister Hamza immediately said to Arbaaz, “And what do you tell her?”

Instilling a good work ethic among students is also given high priority in these schools. For instance, Sister Sara would often remind her class “If you don’t get your books, don’t do your homework, you won’t get the star for the day. And please bring a



pencil to school each day. After you've completed your homework put two pencils in your bag right away so you don't forget." After explaining mistakes she found in her students' homework the Arabic teacher Sister Hamza told them, "From the mistakes we learn. Whatever we do in class you keep on doing that at home. That's all, nothing new. You have to keep trying."

In these and myriad such other interactions, teachers attempt to instruct their students in good behavior and discipline, in attitudes and bodily comportment which they emphasize are integral to being a good Muslim. Claims that such values and discipline are Islamic rather than American or even universal are perhaps made more plausible when juxtaposed with the perceived lack of discipline in mainstream public schools. For instance, Susan Sachs reported the following in a *New York Times* article on Islamic schools in the United States:

A glance at Al Iman's handbook for students and parents further underlines the differences from public schools. The rules are strict: three demerits for taking toys, comics, cosmetics, jewelry, or other unauthorized materials to school, one for wearing nail polish, five for disrespectful behavior to teachers or for "pursuing acts of romanticism" like flirting with a schoolmate. The punishment for five demerits is detention during lunch for three days. After 30 demerits, a child is suspended for a week, and after 40, expelled...."This year we added 140 students from the public schools, all coming with the behavioral and academic problems they inherited: name calling, taunting with labels and names, casual profanity," said Abuasi at Al Noor. "Here they have to watch the way they walk, watch the way they talk and watch what comes out of their mouths". (November 10, 1998)

Besides discipline, another factor important to parents in choosing to send their children to Islamic schools is the perception that in these schools, unlike in public schools, students receive close and personal attention from their teachers. In the two schools that I frequented, teachers often did indeed seem to be well aware of the kind of homes each student came from and what was going on in their lives outside the school. For instance,

one morning Sister Hamza was clearly annoyed with one of her fourth graders, a quiet dreamy eyed girl called Saba, for not doing her homework. She reprimanded Saba and wrote a quick note for her mother but also said to Saba softly “I know your mom is sick.”

Ideas about what constitutes appropriate Muslim behavior and decorum are, of course, not static but always being shaped through everyday interactions and always subject to interpretations and debate. Conflicts over different cultural interpretations, of what being Muslim entails, come into the forefront every now and then in the classrooms. Such moments of conflict highlight the difficulties of forging the umma as a cohesive whole, while accommodating differences among immigrant Muslims from diverse backgrounds as they come together in the United States. For instance, during a science class in the third grade in School A, one of the two African-American students in the class had taken out from his bag a small grey doll with a shock of red hair. Another student (of Bangladeshi origin) took it from him and held it up for the class, while saying to the science teacher who was busy wrapping up her class, “Look teacher, he’s brought a doll that looks like *Shaitaan* (devil).” The teacher looked distinctly uncomfortable but tried her best to ignore the student’s comments and said, “Ok, you don’t have to say it.” However the Quran teacher had entered the class room a few minutes earlier and witnessed the whole exchange. Unable to restrain himself any longer he snatched the doll away, threw it into the garbage bin, and said angrily “Never play with dolls like that! Its evil, devil, Shaitaan!”

Despite such occasional conflicts the lessons in how to move and what to say, as a proper Muslim, are taken seriously by the students and often internalized by them to an extent greater than that anticipated by their teachers as some instances in the class rooms

revealed. For example, in the grade three class room one morning the children were taking out their math homework sheets for correction. There was much excitement when the teacher, Sister Batul, agreed to let them correct each other's homework. Lila, who sits next to the teacher's desk, wanted to exchange her work with Afreen, a girl sitting further away, but the teacher told her to exchange with Ibrahim, a boy sitting right across from her. Lila protested loudly, "No way! I can't exchange with a boy. I should exchange with a girl." Sister Batul looked a little taken aback and hesitated for a moment before repeating her instruction. This time Lila complied. On another occasion, Sister Deena is reading aloud to her kindergarten class from a book titled *A Dragon in a Wagon* which tells the story of a little girl's adventures with dragons. Before she starts she says, "Eyes up, ears open." At one point she reads, "They jump on a truck with three hens and two pigs." Kamran, one of the boys sitting at the back immediately says, "Teacher, pig is a bad word." The teacher ignores him and continues reading. Since children are exposed to and shaped by a wide variety of influences, their notions of what are appropriate gender roles for Muslims vary even within the same classroom. For instance, Shiraz, a fourth grader, started off a heated discussion in class when he said that he did not want a sticker from the teacher for his good work, because "those are for girls." Their teacher then asked the class "Do you think boys and girls should get separate stickers?" A jumble of yes and no-s followed her question with some very loud no-s from some of the girls.

In a globalized world, middle-class South Asian Muslim parents in New York City worry about many of the same things that middle-class Muslim parents in Old Delhi are concerned about, such as potentially corrupting Western influences, the everyday consequences of being part of a much maligned religious minority, and the difficulties of

passing on to their children religious traditions in meaningful ways. However, the growing popularity of Islamic schools among immigrant South Asian Muslims has much to do with the experience of migration which leads, as Metcalf (1996) and others have argued, to a greater concern with Islamic practice and a particular sense of merit and achievement in following what is perceived to be the path of Islam in a larger non-Islamic environment. Old Delhi, steeped in centuries of Muslim history, provides a readymade, rich Islamic environment in which to raise children as good Muslims. In New York City, on the other hand, South Asian Muslims like all other immigrant communities have to work actively to create Muslim spaces outside the home. Besides the mosque, the other most important such space is where one's children learn and grow. Moreover, the experience of migration itself produces fresh introspection and innovations stemming from a more urgent fear of losing one's identity and the connected need to preserve one's culture and traditions and pass it on to the next generation. In the U.S., particularly, other immigrant communities have provided models for South Asian Muslims to follow.

We must look beyond such arguments, however, to understand that such Islamic schools also represent an effort to bring Islam and Muslims into mainstream America and to demonstrate that a mainstream modern education can be effectively delivered within an Islamic environment. This is evident not only in the fact that these schools are described as Islamic schools rather than madrasas or traditional centers of Islamic education, that they follow a standard New York City school curriculum (supplementing it with lessons in Islamic history, Arabic and the Quran), and that they encourage student participation in mainstream school events such as national spelling or mathematics contests, taking great pride in the achievements of their students in such events, as well as

in the ability of students to gain admission to mainstream schools and colleges after completing a number of years at an Islamic school. Thus, while Delhi's middle-class Muslims have, for reasons discussed earlier, embraced a modern separation between the religious and the secular in the realm of knowledge, many middle-class South Asian Muslims in New York are in the process of reworking such a rigid division between religious and worldly education through Islamic schools that attempt to fold Islam back into one's everyday life and demonstrate that education in disciplines like geography, mathematics, and science can be provided alongside a religious education in order to craft a good Muslim who is also a modern and responsible citizen. For South Asian Muslims who work in these Islamic schools, in other words, the project of shaping good Muslims who can in turn build a strong umma is not at odds with but complementary to the project of producing modern Muslims who are well equipped to participate fully in the civic and political lives of the largely non-Muslim society in which they have chosen to make their homes.

*Making Muslim Space in New York City: The Masjid or Mosque*

Given the emphasis in Islam on the sacred word and practices shaped by it and the consequent "portability" of ritual, Barbara Metcalf (1996) and others have raised questions about what the mosque means for Muslims and whether it is held to be sacred or not. For instance, Metcalf contrasts an informant's view that the mosque is only important functionally, in providing a sheltered place of worship in cold climatic conditions, with architect Abdel Wahed el-Wakil's view that "sacred architecture" is inherent in Islam (1996, p. 17). Based on surveys of American Muslims, Haddad & Lummis (1987) conclude that there is little correlation between conceptions of being a

good Muslim and mosque attendance. Metcalf finds this “relative insignificance of the physical mosque” to be consistent with “normative Muslim resistance to sacralizing any object and thus risking *shirk* (polytheism)” (1996, p. 6). Recalling the makeshift mosque in an English home, where he offered his first Friday prayers in the West, architect Gulzar Haider (1996) agrees with Metcalf that “for ritual, it is the practice, not the mosque, that matters” (1996, p. 6).

As I have pointed out, one of the important ways in which English-medium educated, professional, middle-class Muslims in Delhi distinguish themselves as rational and modern Muslims, as compared to the majority of those who follow Islam ritualistically, is through their ambivalent attitudes towards mosque attendance. In contrast to dominant mainstream images of Muslims in prayer at a mosque, many of Delhi’s middle-class Muslims like many American Muslims (Hadad & Lummis, 1987) see no necessary relation between mosque attendance and being a good Muslim. Rather, some like Salman believe that praying is an intensely personal communication with Allah and best conducted in private.

However, in New York City I met a far greater number of middle-class South Asian Sunni Muslims who do attend prayers in mosques regularly, particularly on Fridays when mid-day prayers draw large crowds, as well as on Saturdays (given the constraints of the work week schedule many prefer to gather for prayers in a mosque on Saturdays rather than on Fridays). In both field sites, mosque building activities have increased over the years. However, in contrast to Delhi’s educated, professional, middle-class Muslims who look upon such activities with a mix of disdain, anxiety, or plain indifference, in the U.S. South Asian immigrant Muslims, particularly post-1965 Indian

and Pakistani Muslim immigrants with greater education, occupational levels, and household incomes, have taken the lead in building local mosques and in mobilizing Muslims on religious and political issues, while Arabic-speaking Muslims, owing to their greater proficiency in Arabic, fiqh and shari'a (jurisprudence and Islamic law), have tended to dominate as imams and mosque functionaries and in imparting linguistic and religious instruction (Leonard, 2003). An important reason behind this difference between educated, middle-class Muslims in Delhi and New York City lies, I argue, in the experience of migration itself within which the mosque assumes a far greater role and significance as a community<sup>38</sup> center. Further, I argue that the mosque as community center both facilitates and hinders the making of the umma. On the one hand, mosques are one of the main spaces within which immigrants from different backgrounds experience the global umma in the very acts of coming together and praying together, as well as through involvement in such activities as raising funds for Muslim victims of the Gujarat pogroms in India or through attending talks on the condition of the umma. On the other hand, because many mosques in the United States tend to serve also as centers for a particular ethnic group of Muslims, such ethnic mosques may undermine the project of making a cohesive umma in America.

Many mosques that I visited in New York City, both South Asian-dominated and others, do indeed serve as community centers. Of the two Islamic schools I worked in, one is located in the basement of a mosque building while the other held some of its classes in rooms on the upper floors of a mosque adjacent to the school building. Many mosques hold weekly classes to teach Quran reading, understanding of Hadith, Arabic

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<sup>38</sup> For an insightful analysis of the centrality and contested meanings and usages of the terms culture and community among immigrants see Gerd Baumann's (1996) study of different ethnic groups in Southall.

language, etc. Some of the larger mosques also include, within the building, a store that sell products related to Islam, such as bound copies of the Quran, audio cassettes of khutbas and Islamic songs for children, head scarves, caps, etc.

While other Muslim institutional spaces such as Islamic schools and non-profit organizations have grown over the years in New York, mosques continue to be the most numerous, easily accessible, multipurpose community spaces. As Slyomovics points out, for many immigrant Muslims in New York City, South Asians among them, it is of great significance to make a successful transition from what she calls “storefront mosques” housed in rented or bought structures that were formerly family homes or warehouses to “architecturally purposeful mosque and community center complete with designed dome, crescent moon, and minaret, the kind of mosque now typically preferred in the diaspora” (Slyomovics, 1996, p. 209). It is at least partly because mosques serve as such pivotal community centers for immigrant South Asian Muslims in New York City that these spaces are also fiercely contested. Writing of the fierce debates about mosque design among immigrant Muslims in the West, Haider notes an intensification in the demand for what is seen as visual authenticity in the mosque and argues that “Nothing is more telling of the communal fragmentation of ideas and images than the kinds of mosques people carry in their minds” (1996, p. 38). Similarly, Haddad (2000) points out that while mosques built in the 1970s tended to be ethnically pluralistic, the late 1980s saw the development of the ethnic mosque, reflecting two competing visions of community among South Asian Muslims. One envisions building an identity grounded in the idea of an Islamic brotherhood or umma, while the other is based on an idea of shared national, linguistic, cultural, and religious identity. The rise of the ethnic mosque, thus, reveals



tensions within the Muslim community, between the identity of the Muslim umma, a religious community united in their affiliation to the message of the Prophet Muhammad, and the various ethnic, linguistic, tribal and, national identities that comprise the Muslim population. As Haddad points out, in the case of the South Asian Muslim community there are also residual transplanted feelings of distrust among various constituents of the Indo-Pakistani Muslim community. The differences between the religious cultures of people from South Asia and those from the Middle East, with whom they initiated the mosque movement in the United States, also becomes a cause for dissent.

Such contestations among immigrant Muslims also revolve around the proper use of mosques as community spaces, as became evident from the following incident in Islamic school A where some classes were held in the mosque building adjacent to the school. On this particular day, I was visiting one of these classes with the principal Dr. Kidwai. The mosque is on the first floor of the three floors in the building. The second floor has a large hall used for praying by the women. There are also three small rooms on this floor, with grey carpeting and small windows that let in streams of sunlight. Dr. Kidwai knocks on the closed door of one of the rooms and asks the teacher to step outside for a moment. While we're waiting on the landing, he points to two other empty rooms and says with some satisfaction that they have managed to move classes out of these rooms and into the main school building. He adds that there is one more room in the building that they are still using as a classroom, but they will be moving this class into the actual school building as soon as the ongoing renovation is complete. Dr. Kidwai went on to say that, although the mosque board members had allowed the school to use these rooms, there were some people who didn't want to give the rooms, and although these

rooms on the top floor are not generally used, they are required on some occasions such as when corpses are brought in and readied. Thus, the making of Muslim spaces in the diaspora clearly involves both cooperation and intense contestations among Muslims with different concerns and aims and therefore demands an active involvement on the part of well educated, professionals, who are also more articulate, resourceful, and have greater symbolic capital.

### *Women in Mosques*

Another significant difference in mosque-centered practices among Muslims in Delhi and New York City is that in the former (as indeed in many parts of South Asia) women rarely offer prayers in the public space of the mosque. In New York, however, many South Asian Muslim women participate in collective prayers at mosques. When I first told a non-Muslim acquaintance in Delhi that women in New York prayed in mosques, he said, with a dismissive wave of his hand, “Oh, that is not Islam then. It is something else altogether!” That South Asian Muslim women in New York do frequent mosques is, therefore, a very significant change brought about by the experience of migration. In the diaspora, the mosque becomes an important site not only for Muslim men but also for Muslim women to meet one another, build networks, and celebrate special occasions, although the home continues to be an important locus of such activities (Qureshi, 1996). Also important in the American context is the influence of Arab Muslims, among whom it is far more common for women to go to mosques, especially following the mosque movements in countries like Egypt (Mahmood, 2005).

With the entry of women into mosques, special arrangements have been made so as to ensure that the Islamic norms of gender segregation are maintained. Thus, all

mosques I visited in New York City, large or small, had a separate section where women could gather and offer prayers. In some mosques, men and women prayed in the same large hall but were separated by different entrances, as well as by a line that divided men who were in the front of the hall from women at the back. This dividing line, though not physically marked, was maintained and never crossed except by children running back and forth. In other mosques, where the economies of space permitted, the men and women's section were located on two different levels with men on the first level and women on the second. The second floor for women would be fitted with a washing space to facilitate ritual cleansing before prayers, as well as with speakers through which they could hear the *azaan* or call to prayer, the *khutba* or sermon, and various other announcements, without seeing or being seen by the men and the imam.

This significant change has certainly not come about without resistance, and there are South Asian dominated mosques where women are still not welcome. When Amrita, a young Hindu woman of Indian origin working for a Brooklyn based Muslim non-profit organization, tried to distribute fliers announcing a workshop at a Bangladeshi mosque she was refused entry. It is also important to point out that, even though it is more common for women to go to the mosque in New York, not all the women I talked to actually do so. Their choice is undoubtedly shaped by various factors such as: they are not permitted to do so by male family members; they have previously lived in South Asia long enough to internalize and accept the notion that it is improper for women to offer namaz in a collective at mosques; or because they do not see mosque attendance as being central to their Muslim identity.

Old Delhi is saturated with built structures, often several centuries old, that stand evidence to the grandeur of Muslim Mughal architecture and power, as well as more contemporary structures, sounds, and smells that clearly mark large parts of Old Delhi as a Muslim space. New York City, on the other hand, is empty of such a spatially embedded Muslim history, and in this largely non-Muslim environment particularly Muslims sounds (e.g. the azan or call to prayer) and smells (e.g. special perfumes worn by men to congregational prayer) (Metcalf, 1996, p. 8) are also markedly absent. Thus, South Asian Muslims in New York have had to work consciously to build Muslim spaces in the city.

South Asian Muslims, along with Arab Muslims and others, have undoubtedly transformed New York City through their making of Muslim spaces ranging from small “storefront” mosques (Slyomovics, 1996) to the large imposing mosque on the corner of 96<sup>th</sup> Street that one can hardly miss. In the process, they have had to acknowledge and resolve various community conflicts, negotiate with the laws and building requirements of New York City, and be attentive to the sentiments of non-Muslim neighbors. For instance, as Susan Slyomovics writes, “Although the Queens Muslim Center has received borough permission for minarets and domes, its muezzin and the sounds of the call to prayer must remain electronically unamplified, and out of deference to the secular authorities, the Corona mosque’s imam likewise uses only the power of his voice to summon worshippers” (1996, p. 210). Thus, in New York City one has to be inside a mosque to hear the call for prayers, and the containment of Muslim sounds in this manner creates a sharper separation between the Muslim space of the mosque and the largely non-Muslim environment outside. When in the presence of such sounds, however, New

York's Muslims respond in much the same way as Muslims in Old Delhi. For instance, the former single family home that is now the main office of the Islamic Group of America (IGA) also includes a mosque. Women pray on the second floor while men pray in the basement. While waiting in the foyer to meet one of the IGA staff, I happened to be chatting with a young mother who was also waiting to pick up her daughter who was attending a Quran reading class. As we talked, we heard the *azaan* or call for prayer. The woman dressed in jeans, a sweater, and a jacket immediately pulled the hood of her jacket over her head and said to me by way of explanation, "When we hear the *azaan* we have to cover our heads. This is done as a sign of respect for Allah."

In crowded metropolitan cities like Delhi and New York, space is a scarce commodity and contestations over space are inevitable, particularly in the case of relatively new immigrants like South Asian Muslims. While some of these contestations entail conflicts of interest between Muslims representing different views, others demand negotiations with mainstream interests and norms as the following incident will demonstrate:

In one of the Islamic schools I frequented, and have referred to as school A, space was scarce and I was not allowed into some classrooms because the Principal felt they were already too crowded. In the classrooms where I did sit in, I often had a difficult time finding space to squeeze in that extra chair for myself. Spending the day in the second grade classroom on a January morning, I find myself sitting squeezed in next to the dustbin, because my usual place in the gap between the classroom wall and Sara's chairs is blocked today by an open cardboard box holding a Fedders heater. At mid morning, there is some commotion in the corridor outside the classroom. The teacher, Sister Ayesha, says, "The fire department people are here." I see one of them passing by our half open classroom door, saying loudly, "That's illegal in New York City." Sister Ayesha steps out to find out more and the children soon get restless and keep asking me what is going on. Sister Ayesha returns and explains that in the course of the ongoing renovations in the school building the workers "blocked the office exit and that's illegal. And now the fire department people are here. They're standing there and will not go until they open it up."

Such situations and many others like it demand the intervention of Muslims, like the school principal Dr. Kidwai, who is fluent in English and can communicate his position in an articulate manner. In other words, the many challenges of making Muslim space in New York City demands the active involvement of educated, middle class Muslim professionals – precisely that segment of the Muslim population which remains largely disconnected from and indifferent to such activities in Delhi.

In the context of already circulating discourses about Muslims, as being inherently overly religious and proportionately less modern, stories such as the one published in the New York Times about the growing popularity of Islamic schools in the U.S. run the risk of further fomenting suspicion and hostility against Muslims, for the distance between seeing Muslims as religious and as fanatic fundamentalists is often only too short. It becomes urgent, therefore, to understand the significance of Islamic schools and mosques not merely as religious institutions but crucially as important community centers, as well as to point out that South Asian Muslims in the United States have also formed associations based not on religion but primarily on perceived cultural, ethnic, or national ties. Such national or ethnic organizations include, for instance, the Committee of Indian Muslims in the United States and Canada and the Pakistani Student Organization of America. While there are certainly many South Asian Muslims who envision mosques narrowly, as places of religious worship primarily, there are many others, particularly middle-class Muslims, for whom mosques function primarily as community centers where they may gather for celebrating social and cultural events, come into contact with other Muslims from similar cultural backgrounds, and find relevant information about various issues ranging from Islamic schools to local halal

stores. For many such middle-class Muslims, going to a mosque is much more than a religious exercise and they see no contradiction in their ongoing efforts to live Islamic lives in a largely non-Islamic environment, while also being modern and liberal individuals who are responsible citizens.

*Offering Namaz and Eating Halal in New York City*

Among middle-class Muslims in Delhi, learning how to offer namaz—that entails the learning of specific body postures and movements along with recitation of appropriate verses from the Quran—takes place largely in the informal setting of the home. While some schools in Old Delhi do have schedules designed to accommodate the offering of namaz at the specified times, they do not offer lessons in Islam and no special effort is made in these schools to inculcate an Islamic bodily hexis in students. In New York City on the other hand, there are several Islamic schools that have been founded with the specific purpose of providing a combination of Islamic and mainstream secular education to Muslim children within an Islamic environment. In these schools, students and teachers routinely pray together collectively, teachers often instruct students on the techniques of offering namaz (even outside the specific times devoted to religious study), and there is much discussion around what constitutes the correct techniques of prayer. For instance, in one of the Islamic schools in New York I worked in, I recorded the following:

When I walked into the pre-K classroom today, the teacher, Sister Ruman, was sitting at her table cutting out shapes from colored paper while the children were playing and creating quite a din. To quiet them down, Sister Ruman asked them to put their toys away, sat on the floor with them and had them sing some songs, asked them to name the days of the week and the seasons of the year. Then she said, “Ok, we’ll do *salat*<sup>39</sup> now.” Although it is not yet time for offering the mid

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<sup>39</sup> Besides namaz, salat is another word for Islamic ritual prayer.

day prayer, this would be a sort of practice session for the children. Ruman then asked the kids, “Who wants to be Imam?” For the role, she picked Fardeen a quick and obedient boy whose parents are from Bangladesh. Ruman said that before starting they would go over the rules of how to do *wudu* - that is, how to ritually cleanse one self before praying. On one of the classroom walls there is a pink chart with hand drawn figures in black showing the outlined figures of a man going through the different steps of wudu. Below each figure is explained in writing what the step entails and how many times it must be performed. Ruman asks Fardeen to stand up and demonstrate the steps of wudu and the other children repeat after him. Fardeen performs each action and says aloud what to do with Ruman urging him on - for example, wash hands, right first, then left, three times each. Ruman points out that it is very important to wash between the fingers. Ruman then asked the children to stand in straight lines facing a wall in the direction of the Kaaba. Fardeen stands in front with the boys behind him in a line, followed by the girls. Namya, Ruman’s daughter, keeps going in front and Ruman pulls her back saying, “Girls at the back!” Namya lets out an angry cry and wanders off. Smiling at me Ruman says, “She’s lost interest.” Ruman then stands facing the kids and tells them how to properly fold their arms - girls cross their arms over their chest, right over left, while boys hold their hands similarly crossed but below their stomach. Fardeen then starts reciting the appropriate surahs. Fardeen and Hasibul seem to know the surahs perfectly, while Farid and Mushtaq seem to know it in parts and trail off sometimes, getting easily distracted. Tasneem, one of the girls, also seems to know the surahs but appears disinterested, with Ruman encouraging her to say it. All the children know the appropriate motions accompanying the verses of prayer, with Fardeen leading confidently and Ruman prompting and correcting occasionally. For instance, Ruman tells Mushtaq not to squat flat but to sit on his knees with his feet outwards. She also tells Farid to turn his head from right to left and not the other way.

After they have completed salat, the kids sat on the floor again and Ruman recited some surahs and hadith with them in Arabic, explaining the meanings in English. Afterwards, she asked the children if they do salat and practice surahs at home and they all said yes in unison. Ruman proposed that she would make a salat chart for each of them that they could take home. They could put a tick mark on it every time they prayed and later show it to her, so she could see how many times they had prayed at home.

Such specific instructions on salat and other Islamic rituals, within and outside religious class periods, were a part of the daily routine in New York’s Islamic schools but not in schools in Old Delhi. I argue that the reasons behind this pedagogical difference across the two sites is shaped in part by the migration experience, whereby South Asian Muslims in New York have to work harder and more consciously to create an Islamic



environment within which learning occurs. It is also shaped by the fact that South Asians are profoundly shaped by their interactions with immigrant Muslims, particularly those from the Middle East, and a resulting orientation to an “international Islam” (Gardner, 1995) centered in the Arab world, as well as the related attempts to build a transnational Islamic umma.

### *Debating Halal and Haram*

In Delhi, most of the data regarding norms and practices of halal and haram was gathered in response to specific questioning on my part. In New York on the other hand, talk about and around halal and haram occurred spontaneously, often and in many different spaces and contexts, pointing to a heightened awareness and greater concern with following these norms, particularly in the context of socialization of children as proper Muslims. Take, for instance, the following examples of talk that centered on halal and haram occurring spontaneously in the Islamic schools:

On my very first day at Islamic school A, I asked the pre-K teacher to suggest a place where I could get lunch. She recommended a Bosnian restaurant next door and said, “It is all halal. It is very clean. You can sit there and eat. Its good and its cheap.” I had covered my head since I had been asked by the Principal to do so, and Sister Ruman (the pre-K teacher) had assumed I was Muslim (she was to ask me directly about this later in our acquaintance). She had therefore felt it necessary to assure me of the halal quality of the food she was recommending.

During snack time in the pre-K class at Islamic school A, the children took out and ate snacks they had each brought from home, consisting of a range of items, including cookies, biscuits, chocolate donuts, sandwiches. One of the boys had brought lunch but no snack. His teacher, Sister Ruman, offered him a pack of sesame sticks and said, “This is Namya’s but you can have it. Don’t worry, it is halal.”

It is snack time (10 a.m.) in the kindergarten class and the kids are just beginning to eat. As I walk into the classroom, I hear one of the boys asking another sitting next to him in an incredulous tone, “You’re eating *hamburger*?” The other boy says yes, quite unperturbed. Snacks being consumed by the other children include cheese curls, chips, sandwiches, biscuits, grapes, fruit juices, etc. In a little while two teachers, Sister Ruman and Sister Ameena, walk into the kindergarten class and

somehow the hamburger issue arises again. Sister Ruman exclaims in the same incredulous tone, “*What! You’re eating a hamburger!*” The two teachers exchange knowing glances and Sister Ameena shakes her head disapprovingly.

In Delhi, most respondents stated that Muslims are very particular about eating halal but primarily in relation to the consumption of meat. In New York, however, concern with maintaining halal-haram norms extended to a wide range of foods, as evident from the following instances of heightened awareness among Muslim school children. At one of the schools, there was a short mid morning break between classes when students consumed snacks brought from home. On at least two such occasions during break time in the fourth grade, a bag of chips and a candy bar were subjected to close scrutiny by several of the children and those eating them were told off for eating things that were haram because they contained gelatin. On another occasion, I was with a group of students (girls) on a bus, going on a school trip to a science museum. One of the girls, Zaynab, had just taken out a pack of Skittles candy and started to put them in her mouth when the girl sitting next to her said that it was haram. When Zaynab disagreed and continued to eat, her friend grabbed the packet, turned it over to examine the manufacturer’s list of contents and triumphantly pointed out the word gelatin. Others in the group, too, became involved in the argument which soon turned vicious with Zaynab being reduced to tears.

In Old Delhi, I never witnessed this level of concern or awareness on the part of young children - that is, nothing beyond the general concern with ensuring the consumption of halal meat and the non-consumption of pork. Highlighting the significance of space in understanding dietary taboos, I argue that this difference in attitude is linked to the fact that in Old Delhi children grow up in a rapidly changing but

still largely Muslim environment, an environment in which, as Kabir sahab said, one could not eat haram even if one wanted to since only halal meat was sold in the shops. In New York, on the other hand, those parents who send their children to Islamic schools often do so in order to provide them with an Islamic environment which is seen to be lacking in the larger society outside of the home. Thus, the feeling of having to be on guard against the larger non-Muslim environment is greatly heightened and children, too, are socialized into feeling and acting that way. In this, my findings support the work of anthropologists who have pointed to the significance of food as a means for the maintenance and performance of ethnic identities, particularly in the case of migrant communities who find themselves in new and sometimes hostile social environments that threaten to disrupt their sense of selves and cultural cohesion (e.g. Harbottle, 2000; Kalka, 1988). While Muslims in Delhi can draw on a long and rich Muslim-Mughal culinary history, in India, as minorities, Muslims in both Delhi and New York work to create Muslim spaces within which the norms of halal and haram may be followed more easily. However, immigrant South Asian Muslims in New York have to work far more consciously and harder to create Muslim spaces that enable them to follow norms of halal and haram, resulting in a more heightened awareness of these norms among immigrant South Asian Muslims, reflected in the fact that there is much more everyday talk on the issue of food taboos among New York's Muslims.

Interestingly, while Muslims are constructed as modern and progressive through particular understandings of science and hygiene, represented as the basis of halal and haram norms, such a unitary construction of the hygienic, scientific, and always already modern Muslim, is fragmented by crosscutting differential links between hygiene and

particular nations, races, and ethnicities. In one of our conversations, for instance, Sister Ruman—the pre-K teacher at Islamic school A—which was primarily South Asian, was comparing it with the Turkish Islamic school in her neighborhood in Flushing. She said that there had been occasions when she had written several times to a child’s parents, asking them to wash the child’s hair. On one such occasion she had even had a parent call her, and an educated one with two degrees, to tell her that it was a ‘cultural thing’ that they didn’t take baths every day. Ruman said she couldn’t imagine not taking a shower, adding, “My people are, you know, obsessed with cleanliness”. Ruman’s comment once again points to the difficulties of making the umma and the precariousness of the imagined umma in the face of multiple differences among immigrant Muslims in the U.S. along lines of national origin, ethnicity, and class.

*Between the Nation-State, the Homeland and the Umma*

The umma is sought to be constructed by immigrant Muslims in the United States, as a strong global Islamic community not only from within, through a focus on creating “good” Muslims leading a properly Islamic life, but also from without, through shaping Muslims who can represent Islam correctly to the larger non-Muslim societies in America and the West, and through building an active engagement between American Muslims and Muslims in other parts of the world, particularly in places where they are seen to be persecuted and mistreated or in need of material assistance. Thus, Brother Mahfouz, the first speaker at the Muslim youth conference presented a talk titled ‘Muslims and the Media: Thinking Critically, Acting Intelligently’ which aimed to impress upon his audience the power of media to shape our perceptions of reality. He urged young Muslims in the United States to be actively involved in the media, to write editorials, to

make time to participate in relevant public demonstrations, to “look at the big picture,” to be the makers rather than merely the consumers of media images. He urged his audience to “dedicate” themselves “to the cause of Allah” by countering negative media images which identified Muslims “first with sheikhs and harems, then Arabs as insignificant people, now as terrorists.” He emphasized that Islam requires Muslims to “think critically” and his speech was peppered with sentences like “Allah gave you a mind, use it”, and, “As Muslims, to be superior is our natural state.” He closed by asking everyone to “Renew one’s intention for Allah, adopt the Islamic way of thinking, to speak correctly and not say Yo! Read, reflect, remember, understand. You are a Muslim. It is your job to change the world. Those who act are those who win.”

Brother Mahfouz’s engaging and professional presentation, complete with power point slides, was followed by a talk by Brother Amanullah Chaudhary, a representative of the Islamic Group of America (IGA), a Muslim non-profit organization based in New York City. Brother Amanullah is in charge of overseeing IGA’s “relief work” in the U.S. and in other countries and his talk centers on the difficult situations faced by Muslims in Afghanistan, Kashmir (India), and Chechnya, and IGA’s ongoing work to assist Muslims in these areas:

Brother Amanullah: In Afghanistan and in Kashmir, Muslims have been struggling for their rights. Afghanistan is 99% Muslim, 85% Sunni. They are traditionally very good Muslims. They don’t like people coming in from outside. When the British came they were driven back....I may have a lot of differences with the Taliban government but they are a Muslim government. I have differences with them but they are my brothers. When it comes to their struggle, their independent structure, I am with them. We hear about the lack of rights for women in Afghanistan but nothing about how the people are suffering. We (IGA) are currently running a program supporting orphans in Afghanistan. We started projects educating the Afghan people. They are very good at carpet weaving. We give them weaving machines etc. and we take the carpets they make and sell them outside Afghanistan....Children are suffering enormously. But they

have lots of good things also. Law and order is very good and any sister can walk outside at night. That's how safe it is. If anyone is caught stealing their arm is cut off. Very strict Sharia law is followed.

Now, I'll move on to another country, Kashmir – same story. There are about fifteen million Kashmiris in and outside Kashmir. The British sold the land of Kashmir to a Hindu raja for about six or seven thousand dollars. They took out the skin of the Muslim person and hung it outside the masjid. This was all pre 1947. In 1947 (formation of independent India and Pakistan) it was right for Kashmir to be joined to the Muslim dominated country (Pakistan) but this did not happen. They (Kashmiris) are very good Muslims. They are fighting for their freedom. Muslims are being killed and tortured by non-Muslims. Wherever they are Muslims are struggling for their freedom. We have to know each other. If we call them our brother we have to know them, know what they eat, wear, like. They (Indian government and army) don't even allow independent journalists and organizations like Red Cross into Kashmir. Even relief organizations like ours can't go. But a lot of the stories we hear are true. For instance, a sister jumped into the water to save herself from the Indian army, and her body was found in the river Jhelum. I met a man, a teacher whose four sons had become shahid (martyrs) in Kashmir. So many people are sacrificing for those causes. What are we doing? We say they are our brothers. The Kashmir struggle is going on. It will continue till they get what they want. It is a rightful struggle and we must support them (Kashmiri Muslims).

Next, I'll talk about Chechnya. Every good Muslim should be a fundamentalist. There is nothing wrong with that. The Chechens are fundamentalists and that's why they're in trouble, like you and me. We need to talk about the conditions of Muslim families, women and children everywhere. We need to become them. That's how we become their brothers. We can raise funds to help them. If we don't do that we're in trouble.

The efforts of immigrant Muslims in the United States to build and reinvigorate a transnational Islamic umma, bring together immigrant Muslims from different ethnic and national backgrounds and, thus, literally make visible and tangible the umma as a global Muslim community. The Muslim youth conference, thus, makes the umma real in some sense by the very bringing together of an audience composed of South Asian and Egyptian American Muslims, as well as speakers of different national origins such as Brother Mahfouz and Sheikh Al-Asad from Egypt, Brother Amanullah from Bangladesh and Brother Mustafa, an African-American born and raised in New York City. The umma is also created discursively, as each speaker encourages Muslims in America to become

aware of and involved in the plights of Muslims in different countries. Thus, as Brother Mahfouz urges young Muslims—who are “not be led by the media” but are leaders themselves—to act as conscious members of the umma, he asks them to not forget about the situation of Muslims in Chechnya even when the media “drops the issue.” Similarly, Brother Amanullah asks for the involvement of his fellow Muslims in fund raising activities for the benefit of Muslims in countries like Afghanistan and India (Kashmir), while Brother Mustafa, recently returned from Canada, holds it up as an “unique” and urges American Muslims to learn from Canadian innovations such as the establishment of “the jumma prayer in high schools there, from 1.10 to 1.30 pm” so that “students can take a pass from the teacher to go and pray.”

The building of a transnational umma by South Asian immigrant Muslims is, thus, both enabled by and productive of a complicated “transpolitics” or the formation of “political subjectivities across localities and through multiple genres of cultural production” (Silverstein 2004: x). In other words, every evocation of and attempt at realizing the umma is situated within and shapes a transpolitics by drawing into a single political field such diverse elements and modes of belonging and exclusion as immigrant identities (shaped by specific American foreign policies, American racial and immigrant politics), immigrant nostalgia for the homeland and entanglement in homeland histories and divisive politics, as well as differences in ethnicities, cultural identities and class, linked to different understandings of what being a proper Muslim entails.

Thus, as Brother Amanullah’s talk highlights, attempts at forging the umma call forth on the part of immigrant Muslims a recognition of the strained relations between their adopted country (America) and other Islamic countries (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq).

For instance, in direct opposition to and criticism of American foreign policies with regard to Afghanistan, Brother Amanullah expresses solidarity with his Muslim “brothers” in the Taliban, points to the “good things” the Taliban has accomplished, and blames America and other Western countries for exacerbating a situation of conflict in Afghanistan through the covert supply of arms. Moreover, in the case of South Asian Muslims, the work entailed in constructing a cohesive umma also often involves the reiteration of a long history and continuing conflicts between their respective homelands (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). Thus, for Brother Amanullah who is Bangladeshi, the path through forging solidarity with Indian Muslims lies through Kashmir or more specifically through a forceful critique of the policies and actions of the Indian government and army in Kashmir. At the end of his talk, when a young man in the audience asks if Muslims are represented in the Indian army, Brother Amanullah replies without hesitation, “Muslims in India are a minority and deprived of their rights. After independence Muslims in India are seen as Pakistanis and labeled as Pakistani intelligence agents.”

### *Muslims Claim Citizenship*

We do not know what citizenship means to people – particularly people whose status as citizens is either non-existent or extremely precarious – or what these meanings tell us about the goal of building inclusive societies.

- *Naila Kabeer, Inclusive Citizenship, 2005*

As Lowe (1996) points out, the law is only one, albeit a primary site within which the citizen/alien distinction is constructed. Thus, while it is important to be attentive to how, when, and where dominant formulations of citizenship are constructed in ways that



locate the immigrant or the minority in a place of inferior other-ness, it is also important to ask how such locations are contested by marginalized groups. Naming the agency of Asian immigrants through the phrase “immigrant acts”, Lowe points out that Asian American cultures are “countersites”, which produce narratives that disrupt mainstream discourses of American national culture and citizenship. Similarly, Kumar (2000) sees the diasporic cultures of immigrants as productive of identities that challenge rigidly narrow nationalist binaries, because immigrant lives are “shaped in the spaces between the pure appeals of home and adopted nation”, and thus give birth to dynamic culture which hold “possibilities that resist national wills and narrowly nationalist identities” (p. 228). Puar and Rai (2002), on the other hand, argue that the events of 9/11 and its aftermath have led to a stifling of alternative positions and identities within immigrants communities, arguing for instance that Sikh Americans “face the threat of being quarantined as the terrorist-monster by refashioning themselves as docile patriots” (2002, p. 139). How then have South Asian Muslims in New York City responded to the post 9/11 legislations like the USA Patriot Act and the widespread detentions and deportations of South Asian Muslim men?

While the events of 9/11 renewed suspicions and hostilities against Muslims in the U.S., generating fear and resentment among the latter, it has also led to a greater awareness and vigilance among South Asian Muslims about their rights as American citizens, or even as immigrants. Thus, for instance, Imtiaz, a middle class Pakistani American Muslim, who was born and brought up in New York and runs a family owned grocery store and other businesses, was moved by the plight of neighbors and acquaintances who had been picked up and detained after 9/11. Imtiaz, along with other

Muslims in his neighborhood, established a community organization called APCO, to provide legal and other kinds of assistance to men who had been detained and whose families were at a complete loss about what they could do. Within a year, APCO was not only working towards its original goal but conducting various other activities such as providing English language classes to help immigrants who were not fluent, and holding regular classes to help those who were interested in preparing to take the required test to acquire American citizenship through naturalization. What follows is an excerpt from one of the classes I attended at APCO, designed to prepare immigrants to take the test required to obtain U.S. citizenship through naturalization. The teacher, Jeet Kapoor, is a Hindu from India and a recent migrant, studying for a degree in social work at a New York City school. The students on this particular day include an old man, a middle aged man, and a woman in her late 20s to mid 30s, all South Asian. We are in a tiny second floor room in a building adjoining the APCO office. The room is very cramped even with just one small desk and some chairs facing it. Jeet stands in front of the desk, and sometimes sits on it as he speaks:

(J: Jeet, the teacher; OM: old man; M: Middle aged man; YW: young woman)

J: When did freedom come?

OM: 1779

J: 1776, 4<sup>th</sup> July. In which year was the Constitution made/ready?

OM: 17...

J: 1787. (To the young woman) Where are you from?

YW: Pakistan, from Lahore.

J: What is the form of the state? When the people choose - what is it called?

Democracy.

OM: Democracy.

J: Branches? Three.

OM: Three. (He diligently repeats everything J says, signaling a particular mode of learning, primarily through listening and repetition).

J: What is it called here? Congress.

OM: Congress.

J: How many in the Senate? Hundred. Two from each state. How many in the House of Rep.?

OM: 435.

J: Their term? Two years.

M: Two years.

J: Without knowing Urdu you went to school, how did you learn? By listening?

M: Yes, by listening.

J: President's life? Four years. Re-election, after eight years....

M: Cannot happen.

J: House of Reps., from here, Major Owens.

M: Major Owens.

J: Let us go back. 1776....(repeats questions and answers from the beginning).

J: It's ok even if there's no black board in this room (as he draws the American flag with pen on a white sheet of paper). Which colors are there (in the U.S. flag)?

M: White, blue, red.

J: Which color is placed where?

M: I know, but I can't speak English.

J: Explain in your own tongue.

Thus, at the same time as Muslims are increasingly sought to be represented as antithetical to and outside the modern American nation-state, particularly after 9/11, many South Asian Muslims in New York are actively learning the language, history, and laws of their adopted homeland, and negotiating with government functionaries and departments, in order to assert their rights as citizens, and as human beings worthy of respect and dignity. Community organizations like DRUM and the Islamic Circle of North America that have been working actively with detainees and their families post 9/11, draw on identities that transcend the nation-state, and engage in discourses of "social justice" and "human rights", which appear to challenge notions of citizenship that are tied to the nation. At the same time, in their attempts to work through such means as organizing open public forums with INS District Directors, or in organizing 'Know Your Rights' informative sessions among immigrant communities, these organizations attempt to address the state and to hold it answerable. Thus, they may be seen as drawing on transnational identities in order to organize and consolidate their positions within the state,

attempting to reclaim rather than reject the state, through renegotiating its dominant formulations of the citizen. In a striking parallel we find that survivors of the Muslim massacres in Gujarat (India), in their quest for justice and punishment of the guilty, do not use the vocabulary of “retribution and revenge” commonly used by Hindu fundamentalists but demand “the restoration of legal processes, of the constitutional order, of their citizenship rights which have been spectacularly cancelled in Gujarat” (Sarkar, 2002, p. 11).

In a set of essays written in response to the events of 9/11, Judith Butler rethinks Foucault’s argument that governmentality, as distinct from sovereignty, has come to be the form of power in late modernity. Rather, Butler argues, there is a “resurgence of sovereignty within the field of governmentality” (2003, p. 56), when sovereign power comes to be exercised as ‘prerogative power’ by a multitude of ‘petty sovereigns’, such as those in the executive branch of government, or managerial officials, who have not been elected, have no claim to legitimacy, and no accountability to the law, but make decisions independently about who is to be considered dangerous, who is to be detained and for how long. However, drawing on the above examples, I argue that just as sovereign power proliferates and comes to be experienced as arbitrary arrests, detentions, forced confessions, rapes, and killing, there is in these moments a turning back to the legitimate sources of power and the law for recourse, thus reanimating the notion of sovereignty in its traditional sense.

### *Conclusion*

Anthropology has for a long time now ceased to think about cultures as self contained, tightly bound units tied to particular localities. It is no surprise, therefore, that

the Muslim men and women I worked with in Old Delhi and New York City, despite the distances that separate them, live in shared, partially overlapping socio-economic and cultural worlds, shaped by their connections through remittances (see Levitt), through travel and communication technologies, as well as through their common ties to such cultural elements as language (Hindi, Urdu, Bengali), regional South Asian cuisines, Hindi films, and of course to Islam. Moreover, in both sites, Muslims are faced with mainstream representations of themselves and their religion as fundamentalist, violent, and anti-modern. However, as this study has shown, middle-class Muslims in Delhi are far more concerned and occupied with acquiring and exhibiting those qualities that mark them as modern, as evidenced in myriad ways such as a parent's overwhelming desire to provide an English medium education to his children, a wife's plea to her husband to switch from floor mattresses to modern furniture such as a bed, or the insistence on explaining norms of halal and haram in terms of being healthy, hygienic, and scientific. On the other hand, many of the middle-class South Asian Muslims I worked with in New York City, while clearly aware of the negative stereotypes about Muslims that abound in the America and anxious about the consequences of the same for their everyday lives, are at the same time more concerned about finding ways of living an Islamic life in an alien setting and in reinvigorating and building a strong Islamic umma.

According to Haddad, the current salience of umma for American Muslims may be at least partially explained by the fact that in the United States Muslims of various national and cultural origins are brought into contact with each other and, "Their similar experience of the West is forging some of them into a community of believers engaged in a process of creating a sense of solidarity through common traditions" (Haddad, 1999, p.

609). Focusing specially on Muslim youth, Schmidt (2002) shows how, for at least some of them, their immigrant, ethnic and national identities take a backseat in relation to their religious identity, the latter being formulated in terms of a transnational Islamic community. Schmidt reasons that such a turn to a transnational Islamic identity may be understood as one of several possible responses to the fact that Muslims, in spite of their long history in the United States, continue to be viewed with suspicion. Among several possible responses, many young Muslims are formulating their religious identity in terms of a transnational umma which highlights, according to Schmidt, the “split” condition of their identity (2002, p. 119):

They can neither identify fully with the geographical origin of their parents, nor are they fully identified (by an “other”) as “naturalized” Americans. Transnationalist religious formulations are means to fight cognitive dissonance, social isolation, and impotence. According to transnational and utopian formulations, young Muslims can, optimistically, engage in American social issues at the same time that they stay “beyond” and loyal to what they see as the essential (though culturally formulated) heritage of their fathers and mothers, i.e., Islam. (Schmidt, 2002, pp. 119-120)

In contrast to Schmidt’s argument, I found that even as immigrant Muslims attempt to evoke and realize the umma they simultaneously lay a strong claim to the American nation-state and national identity. As I have argued with reference to Islamic schools, those South Asian immigrants Muslims who are invested in forging the umma do not see their efforts to be at odds with their loyalty to the American nation-state (even though they may be critical of particular American domestic and foreign policies) and identify themselves strongly as Muslim *and* American. For instance, at the end of Brother Mahfouz’s talk on the importance of the media in the lives of Muslims in the U.S., there is a question and answer session during which a young woman asks, “Should we use American media?” Responding to her question Brother Mahfouz says, “Don’t think of

American media as separate. We are the American people and therefore the media is ours. Don't think of us as other. If you think of us as other they will too." In a similar vein, Brother Mustafa talked of the necessity of organizing events like a Muslim festival in Central Park which could be broadcast live by satellite television to make the larger American public aware of what Islam is really about. He also emphasized the need to build recreational facilities for Muslim children, citing the example of a mosque in Florida which managed to attract greater numbers of young Muslims by adding a basketball court adjacent to the mosque. Once youngsters were present on the mosque premises they were more likely to go in and pray when the call for prayer was sounded. In other words, a call to the umma is by no means a call for any simplistic kind of return to an earlier Islamic community. Rather, the umma is envisioned as a modern transnational community, cohesive and strong, yet open to the world, capable of encompassing national, regional, racial and ethnic differences, even if these differences sometimes threaten to undermine the very possibility of the umma as a viable category of belonging.

## CHAPTER 7: MUSLIM AND MODERN

“Modernity”, writes Dipesh Chakrabarty, “is easy to inhabit but difficult to define” (Chakrabarty, 2002, p. xix). As I have shown early on in this dissertation, modernity may be easy to inhabit for those in specific locations in a society (for example, for the urban, middle- or upper class, English speaker in India) but it is less easy to do so for those who are continually excluded from the modern by hegemonic discourses, as in the case of Muslims in India. Mainstream discourses on a wide range of disparate issues such as education, law, gender and family, and national security make the double move of constructing Muslims as non-modern and therefore unfit to be part of a modern democracy like India. This study is focused on urban, middle-class, educated, professional Muslims in Old Delhi, who have neither been victims of Hindu-Muslim communal violence nor have they been directly affected by laws like POTA<sup>40</sup> (Prevention of Terrorism Act). However, simply by virtue of being Muslim they must live in the shadow of charges of being anti-modern, backward, pro-Pakistani, terrorists, and traitors to the Indian nation. These accusations usually remain unvoiced in the polite social circles of which middle-class Muslims from Old Delhi are part. Yet they are always present just beneath the surface, sometimes rudely bursting out of the wings in moments, such as when Tariq’s long-time business associate says that Tariq must be supporting the Pakistani cricket team even when they are playing against India or when Farhan is refused a bank loan because he happens to live in a largely Muslim neighborhood, in Delhi, which is marked as a negative area by the bank.

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<sup>40</sup> In some parts of India like Gujarat where POTA has been used widely to target Muslims in the aftermath of the Godhra train incident, middle-class Muslims have been affected more directly, and it has created widespread fear and anxiety among them, as shown in a PUDR (People’s Union for Democratic Rights) investigative report published in 2003.



Drawing on the view that language has the power to injure because a subject is constituted in language (e.g. Butler, 1997), I have argued that these negative stereotypes about Muslims fundamentally shape the lives, identities, and religious practices of middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi. If a social existence of the body becomes possible only through ‘interpellation’ (Althusser, 1971) in language, then it is in the moment of being addressed by an other as backward, anti-modern, or a Pakistani supporter that Muslims in India come to be constituted as such. If the constitutive power of language precedes us, having already been constituted in language as backward and non-modern, then Old Delhi’s middle-class Muslims cannot ignore what has already been made a part of their identity, even if without their consent, but they can and do respond to these forms of address that cause such great injury. In so responding they reshape their own ideas of what it means to be Muslim and modern as Islam and Muslim-ness become one of the central sites for “performing” modernity (Schein, 1999). In this concluding chapter, I shall briefly recount some of the particular religious practices and attitudes towards religion that have come to be associated with being modern for Delhi’s middle-class Muslims and reflect upon the nature of the modern that emerges through this engagement.

Throughout this work, I have shown how a range of religious practices such as Quran reading, offering namaz, praying in a mosque, or going on the Hajj pilgrimage are being rethought and reworked by Old Delhi’s Muslims as they re-present themselves as modern. What emerges through these accounts, as central to middle-class Muslims modernity, is an emphasis on the individual ability and practice of applying critical thinking to all spheres of one’s life including one’s faith. Thus, it is not enough to read

the Quran simply as a form of worship or *ibadat* says Salman, but one must seek to understand and grasp its true meaning or its essence and align one's behavior in everyday life with those essential learnings. Similarly, Razia's account of her experience of the Umra performed with her husband emphasizes its significance as a moment and space for stepping back from one's daily life and looking inwards, engaging in contemplation and quiet reflection rather than focusing on performing the rituals associated with Umra.<sup>41</sup> And even as Mohsin believes that offering prayers in a collectivity in the mosque brings greater rewards, he emphasizes that offering namaz is not only about performing ritual actions correctly but also about thoughtful submission to Allah. In other words, as many of my friends told me, Islam (or religion) holds the answers to most of life's questions but only if you know how to approach it as a thinking modern individual instead of following it ritualistically (read superficially).

Importantly, in all of these instances we see the desire and recurring attempts by middle-class Muslim educated professionals to construct and highlight a difference between themselves as modern thinking Muslims, as opposed to the vast majority of less educated lower-class Muslims who simply believe and follow the religion blindly. On the one hand, modernist dichotomies, thus, become stabilized and obfuscate the ways in which many middle-class Muslim religious practices overlap with those of lower-class Muslims (for instance, many Muslims across these classes are followers of Sufi saints like Nizamuddin whose dargah in Delhi continues to be a powerful draw even for "atheist" Muslims like Kabir sahab) and denies that longings for the modern are also a

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<sup>41</sup> The two are not mutually exclusive as Razia by her own accounts engaged in contemplation and performed rituals. The point is that as Stacy Pigg (1996) has shown for Nepalese attitudes towards shamanism, it is important for Razia and others of her class to highlight the role of critical thought in their own religious practices as a way of signaling their modernity even within the religious sphere.

part of the lives of many lower-class Muslims in Delhi. Moreover, this difference can never be absolute because the thinking Muslim must also be a believer. As the accounts of Delhi's middle-class Muslims reveal, to hold critical thinking in balance with an uncritical belief in Allah is an ongoing struggle.

To use terms such as alternative or vernacular modernities (e.g. Gaonkar, 2001) is to assert that modernity is not one but many and that modernity does not unfold along a necessary and predictable path everywhere. While modernity brings particular "cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements to every site", in each such national and cultural site "those elements are put together (reticulated) in a unique and contingent formation in response to local culture and politics" (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 16). For instance, being modern for middle-class Muslims in Old Delhi is to know and be fluent in English (the language of the colonizer made one's own) while having a deep respect for the Urdu and Persian languages and the high culture of the Mughals personified in famous poets like Zauq and Ghalib. Being modern is also to have and uphold a secular outlook, while also being a good Muslim in one's everyday life and to develop the ability for applying critical thinking to one's everyday practices, including religious rituals<sup>42</sup>. Modernity also entails the adoption of, or at least a desire for, a certain lifestyle and patterns of consumption while also emphasizing the values and often mourning the loss of a "traditional" and "simple" way of life as lived by the Prophet. Thus, modernity as understood and practiced by Delhi's middle-class Muslims presents a particular combination of elements that challenges and complicates the definitions of societal and cultural modernity, as derived from the Western experience, as well as the

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<sup>42</sup> Remember for instance Salman's emphasis on not just reading but understanding the Quran even though he is well aware that many Muslims consider simply reading the Quran to be a form of ibadat or worship.

historically oppositional relationship between the two. Societal modernity refers to a set of social and cognitive transformations, which together form “the idealized self understanding of bourgeois modernity historically associated with the development of capitalism in the West” (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 2). While some of these social transformations, characteristic of societal modernization, have become a part of the experience of modernity for Delhi’s middle-class Muslims in recent times (such as the emergence of a market-driven industrial economy following India’s economic liberalization since the 1980s bureaucratically administered states, and the wide spread of mass media), other features (such as a bureaucratically administered state, literacy, urbanization) have been a part of their lives for several decades now, while yet other elements of such social transformations continue to be elusive or are experienced in limited ways by Delhi’s middle-class Muslims (such as increased mobility). Such a specific site-based reading of modernity, thus, highlights the fact that modernity does not arrive at once, nor does it follow a singular path in every place or socio-economic group. Moreover, as my fieldwork with Delhi’s Muslims revealed, in their attempts to fashion and re-present themselves as modern, they focus more closely on the cognitive rather than social changes entailed in societal modernization—particularly “the growth of scientific consciousness, the development of a secular outlook, the doctrine of progress, the primacy of instrumentalist rationality....” (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 2)—while setting aside and sometimes critiquing other cognitive transformations, thought to be inherent in modernity, such as more individualistic understandings of the self and contractualist understandings of society.

As Gaonkar rightly points out, readings of modernity in non-Western sites also throw up the impossibility of sustaining the oppositional relation between a bourgeois societal modernity and cultural modernity. Historically, cultural modernity arose in the West in opposition to societal modernization, appearing first in the aesthetic realm of art and literature and later taken up and carried forward by the engines of mass media, thus permeating everyday life:

By and large, the proponents of cultural modernity were repelled by the middle-class ethos – by its stifling conformities and banalities; by its discounting of enthusiasm, imagination, and moral passion in favor of pragmatic calculation and the soulless pursuit of money; and, more than anything else, by its pretensions, complacencies and hypocrisies as represented by the figure of the philistine (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 2).

Modernity as represented and performed by Delhi's middle class Muslims largely fits the mould of a bourgeois societal modern, but an oppositional relation between societal and cultural modernity is complicated in this particular case through the strong attachment of Delhi's middle-class Muslims to poets like Mirza Ghalib. Ghalib, Zauq, Faiz, and others who composed poetry in Persian and Urdu, formed the core of a flourishing cultural center in Delhi in the late Mughal era. Although poets like Zauq were part of the Emperor's court, Ghalib's life<sup>43</sup> in many ways embodied the "self-exploration and self-realization" that are at the center of cultural modernity in which "a high premium was placed on spontaneous expression, authentic experience, and unfettered gratification of one's creative and carnal urges" (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 2). It is striking, therefore, that it is Ghalib's poetry and life that continues to be most celebrated, and in middle-class Muslim Delhi today knowledge of or familiarity with this poetry and larger culture is taken to be an important marker of a cultured individual. On one of my first walks through Old Delhi

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<sup>43</sup> For more on Ghalib's life and work see *Ghalib: Life, Letters and Ghazals* edited by Ralph Russell and published by Oxford University Press in 2003.

with Mohsin, I was taken to see Ghalib's home in the old city and stories of his erratic nature, disordered life, and creative genius were all narrated often and with equal relish. Thus, as this specific case of modernity in a non-Western site highlights, not only does middle-class bourgeois modernity coexist with elements of cultural modernity but the latter are often drawn from non-Western sources. For middle-class Muslims in Delhi, the resources for being modern come not only from the colonizer's language and other institutions and practices but also from Islam itself, as for instance when the norms of halal and haram are explained as scientific and modern, or when Islam is represented as a religion that has always been modern in its quest for knowledge and scientific advancement.

While modernity in the West has been "obliged to dwell and grapple with that twin matrix of change and routine in which the modern self is made and unmade..." (Gaonkar, 2001, p. 3), primarily in the context of the oppositional relation between societal and cultural modernity, for Delhi's middle-class Muslims however the anxieties of modernity are framed in terms of an oppositional relation between modernity and tradition expressed in critiques of certain social practices (such as women in Western clothing) as being 'too modern' and through nostalgia for and fear of losing one's 'traditions' or 'heritage'.

An alternative modernity furthers the idea that modernity is necessarily multiple or plural, because it is always unfolding and therefore unfinished. Presenting a cultural rather than an acultural theory of modernity, scholars like Charles Taylor (2001) have forcefully argued that different modernities emerge at different cultural and national sites because the starting points at each of these sites vary. While these theorizations of

modernity are valuable in that they successfully disrupt a historically linear notion of modernity, I argue that they fall short because they fail to sufficiently examine the relation between modernity and power.

Whether writing of “societal modernity” (Gaonkar, 2001) or “political modernity” (Chakrabarty, 2000), scholars have acknowledged the complex relation between Western and non-Western modernities in pointing out that, even when we talk of alternative modernities, we cannot ignore the fundamental relation between modernity and the West, and alternative modernities, especially in postcolonial sites, must be understood at least partially in terms of appropriations of the legacy of Enlightenment Europe. An alternative modernities approach, however, in emphasizing that modernity is everywhere readily available and accessible to everyone in a globalizing world (e.g. Appadurai, 1996), has failed to recognize that to be modern is more of a struggle for some than for others, as in the case of Muslims in India who are continually placed in an oppositional relation to modernity through various powerful discourses.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) has pointed out, to designate a particular group as non-modern is necessarily a gesture of the powerful and middle-class Muslim representations of themselves as modern is constituted by such a gesture of power. As this particular study highlights, such gestures of power do not emanate only from the West but also from within a particular postcolonial site in order to mark a segment of the population as non-modern and, therefore, unfit to be a part of the modern nation-state. Moreover, in appropriating modernity for themselves, Delhi’s middle-class Muslims themselves consign an ‘other’ or multiple others to the realm of the non-modern (such as rural Muslims or less educated non-English speaking Muslims) in contrast to whom they

can then emerge as modern Muslims. Thus, while the notion of a linear model of modernity has been discredited by scholars, the power to say “not yet” to another—that is rooted in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls historicism (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 8)—is exercised not just by the powerful white Westerner or the dominant Hindu in India but even by Muslims who are themselves marginalized by the discourses of modernity. Thus, educated middle-class Muslims who are in a socio-economically more powerful position appropriate the modern for themselves through the same mechanism of excluding others—in this case the large majority of lower class, uneducated, or less educated Muslims in India.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted that debates on modernity in India have become polarized and unproductive, with some scholars like Ashis Nandy being critical of modernity and others arguing that such critiques have been useful to Hindu nationalists in their attempts to construct a traditional, pure, and homogenous Hindu national culture and past in India. Subscribing to the view that is impossible and ultimately not very useful to attempt to arrive at a broad and universal definition of modernity, this project has been my attempt to bring ethnographies of the modern (e.g. Stacy Pigg, 1996, Lisa Rofel, 1992, Lara Deeb, 1996) to bear upon my own fieldwork to understand modernity contextually, in relation to specific peoples, institutions, and practices, arguing in particular that there is much to be gained, therefore, from an analysis of modernity from the perspective of middle-class Muslims who lay claim to modernity in opposition to powerful discourses that place them on the fringes of or outside the modern. As Louisa Schein has argued, modernity is not simply “a discursive regime that shapes subjectivities” but it is also “powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance”, and it is particularly useful



to examine how modernity is constituted and negotiated through performance by “those who are seen, one way or another, to not exemplify it” (Schein, 1999, p. 361).

It is because middle-class Muslims in Delhi see themselves as an integral part of modern India that they are also most acutely aware of the misrepresentations of Muslims as a homogenized ‘other’ who is anti-modern, backward, violent, and fundamentalist. Having no choice but to carry the burden of these negative stereotypes, Delhi’s middle-class Muslims are rethinking and reshaping their religious identities and practices to fit their own interpretation, of what it means to be modern, which is continually being worked out in tension and contention with but always in relation to a paradigmatic Western modernity<sup>44</sup> as well as hegemonic Hindu elite notions of modernity. At the core of this middle-class Muslim modernity lies an emphasis on critical thinking that must be brought to bear on all aspects of their lives, including their religion. At the same time, in this process of re-presenting themselves as modern, middle-class Muslims are not setting aside their religion but presenting *Islam* as another source of and providing a means for a thoroughly *modern* way of being in the world, in ways that may enable us to rethink the tradition/modernity dichotomy and “the uniquely Western model of secular modernity” (Asad, 1996, p. 1). Thus, the very religion of Islam on account of which Muslims are marked off as non-modern is transformed in the discourses and actions of middle-class Muslims into the site for performance of modernity, for negotiating and appropriating modernity.

As for the larger question posed by Schein about “whether such repositionings,

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<sup>44</sup> While it is important to build on academic critiques of a singular dominant Western modernity, it is also equally necessary to acknowledge that in many non-Western sites ‘the West’ continues, in some significant ways, to be emblematic of modernity, as for instance among Chinese factory workers in Lisa Rofel’s (1992) study or among modern pious Shi’i Muslims in Lebanon described by Lara Deeb (2006). At the same time these are sites from which critiques of a dominant Western modernity also emerge.

such negotiations of social ordering, are in any way consequential for the social order” (1996, p. 364), the discourses and performances of middle-class Muslims that seek to reposition them as modern do not enter the public sphere in any organized fashion and emerge only in social interactions among Muslims of different classes, castes, and genders, or in the context of interactions between Hindus and Muslims. However, given that in present day India the public arenas for Hindu-Muslim interaction (beyond those forged through commerce or the fulfillment of other functional needs) have come to be very limited, re-presentations of Muslims as modern seldom reach the Hindu public which they most urgently seek to address. This study is, thus, a small but necessary intervention through which I hope to enable the voices of modern middle-class Muslims to reach across communal divides and be heard, so that we may begin to focus productively on all that we share rather than all that divides us.

APPENDIX A: A LIST OF THE MAIN RESPONDENTS

**Aamna:** In her late twenties, Aamna is married to Farhan. During my fieldwork in Delhi she gave birth to their first child, a boy named Majid. Aamna grew up in Bombay and Lucknow and has been living in Delhi since her marriage to Farhan.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Adnan:** A young man in his late thirties, Adnan belongs to a well known Muslim family which is originally from the state of Uttar Pradesh. Adnan however has lived all his life in Delhi. He currently works with a non-profit organization

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Aijaz:** In his forties, Aijaz is a professor and respected scholar of Urdu. He teaches in the same college as Mohsin. He has grown up in Old Delhi and now lives in his own apartment with his wife and two children.

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Ameena:** A vivacious and energetic young woman in her mid-twenties, Ameena works in a non-profit organization. She lives with her parents and a younger brother in Old Delhi.

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Asad:** Asad is a middle-aged gentleman married to one of Firoza's sisters. He runs his family business.

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Ayesha:** A middle-aged woman, Ayesha runs her own business and shares a home with her mother and unmarried sister.

Our conversation was conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Farhan:** Farhan is in his mid-thirties, married, with a young son. He works as a producer and script writer for a well known television channel. Farhan and Adnan are brothers.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi and Urdu.

**Firoza:** Firoza is middle-aged, married to Mohsin, and the mother of five sons. She teaches Urdu at a well known girl's college in South Delhi. She makes the most amazing biryani!

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Javed Sahab:** Javed sahab is in his early sixties. He worked in government service and retired a few years before I met him. He lives in Old Delhi with his wife and one unmarried daughter. His married son lives close by, while another daughter who is married lives in Bombay. He and his wife love to chat and I spent many wonderful hours at their home over endless cups of tea. Javed sahab never misses a cricket match on television, especially if the Indian team is playing.

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Kabir Sahab:** Kabir sahab is over seventy, and recently retired as professor of Urdu at a well known Delhi university. He is an Old Delhi old timer, having grown up in the same house where he lives today with his wife. He has a son who lives in Bombay and a daughter who was living in Qatar with her husband at the time of my fieldwork. As you will recall from your encounters with Kabir sahab, he has a wonderful sense of humor and is passionate about the Urdu language.

In conversations we frequently switched back and forth between English, Hindi and Urdu.

**Mohsin:** Mohsin is in his mid forties and a college professor teaching Persian.

Wonderfully warm and jovial, with a great sense of humor, he and his wife Firoza made me a part of their family during my stay in Delhi.

In conversations we frequently switched back and forth between English, Hindi and Urdu.

**Mushtaq:** Mushtaq is in his late thirties. He is Mohsin's brother and shares the family home in Old Delhi with Mohsin. He is married and has a son and daughter. He runs his own small but successful catering business from Old Delhi. Extremely helpful and accommodating, Mushtaq introduced me to many of his large circle of friends and acquaintances in Old Delhi and would often accompany me on my visits to their homes.

In conversations we frequently switched back and forth between English, Hindi and Urdu.

**Razia:** Razia is in her sixties. She is Adnan and Farhan's mother. She grew up in Lucknow (in Uttar Pradesh) but has lived in Delhi since she was married. She taught economics at a well known Delhi college for many years but now she spends most of her time at home with her family and her two lovely grandsons.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Tariq:** Tariq is in his late thirties and runs his own cloth business in Old Delhi while also helping in the family jewelry business.

Our conversation was conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Yasmeen:** Yasmeen is in her early thirties. She is married and has two small children. She lives with her husband and his parents in their family home in Old Delhi. Her husband runs his own printing business in Old Delhi. Looking after her children and running the household with her mother-in-law keeps Yasmeen busy.

Conversations were conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu, with occasional sentences or words in English.

**Zainab:** In her early fifties, Zainab is married and has a son. She is a homemaker and lived in Dubai for a few years before moving back to Delhi.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Zareen:** A soft-spoken, friendly young woman, Zareen lives in Old Delhi with her parents, a sister and a brother. She teaches in a local school.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.

**Zeenat:** Zeenat is in her late teens. At the time I was in Delhi Zeenat was about to graduate from a reputed English-medium school and was considering pursuing a degree in journalism or tourism.

Conversations were conducted mostly in English, with occasional sentences or words in Hindi or Urdu.



APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

*Bi'smi'llah:* A phrase which means 'In the name of Allah', and is often uttered before performing everyday activities like eating a meal or leaving the house.

*Dhikr:* The remembrance of God through the chanting of the various names of God.

*Fatwah:* A formal legal opinion or decision of a religious scholar on a matter of Islamic law.

*Hadith:* Traditions of the teachings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad.

*Hajj:* The pilgrimage to Mecca.

*Halal:* Halal refers to particular practices that are allowed in Islam, particularly regarding the consumption of meat, which must be slaughtered in a proper ritual manner in order to be considered halal and fit for consumption by Muslims.

*Haram:* Haram refers to all those practices that are prohibited in Islam, particularly regarding the consumption of meat that has not been slaughtered in the proper ritual manner and is therefore considered unclean.

*Islam:* Islam literally means surrender to God's will.

*Itjihad:* The use of independent reasoning to assess how one may apply Islamic laws to contemporary circumstances.

*Kaaba:* The Kaaba is the cube-shaped shrine in the center of Mecca. It is the focal point in the Hajj pilgrimage undertaken by thousands of Muslims every year.

*Madrasa:* Schools for the teaching of various subjects related to Islam.

*Namaz:* The ritual prayers that Muslims are supposed to offer five times daily. In India the term *namaz* is used more frequently than the term *salat*

*Ramzaan:* Ramzaan refers to the holy month when Muslims are supposed to observe a fast from sunrise to sunset. South Asian Muslims in New York used the term Ramadan rather than Ramzaan.

*Roza:* Roza refers to the fast that Muslims are supposed to observe during the month of Ramzaan.

*Sajda:* Bowing in prayer before God.

*Salat:* The ritual prayers which Muslims are supposed to offer five times daily.

*Shariah:* The body of Islamic sacred laws.

*Shia Muslims:* Those Muslims who believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's closest male relative, should have ruled after the Prophet, instead of the caliphs, and owe allegiance to a number of imams whom they believe to be direct male descendants of Ali.

*Sunni Muslims:* Sunni Muslims are those who revere the four caliphs who were the companions and immediate successors of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims form the majority worldwide while Shia Muslims are fewer in number. In India too Sunni Muslims are the majority although cities like Lucknow have a large number of Shias.

*Tawhid:* The divine unity which Muslims seek to imitate in their personal and social lives by integrating their institutions and priorities, and by recognizing the overall sovereignty of God.

*Ulama (singular, alim):* Learned men who are the guardians of the legal and religious traditions of Islam.

*Umma:* The Muslim community as a whole.

*Umra:* The ritual circumambulations around the Kaaba and other related rituals which may be conducted at any time of the year.

*Zakat*: The term used for a tax of fixed proportion of income and capital (usually 2.5 per cent), which must be paid by all Muslims each year to assist the poor.

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