CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Muslim women's donning of hijab and the various forms - niqaab and burkha has become a subject of obsessive attention and extensive interpretation which have occupied academic researchers and politicians like never before (Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Davary, 2009). Because there is this prevalent notion among many Western scholars that veil equates oppression and subjugation, a patriarchal constraint on women which denies gender equality. Moreover, after 9/11 and other forms of extremist attack that followed, hijab and other forms of Islamic dress stereotypically came to be associated with religious extremism, security, nationalism. In various parts of the globe, state prohibited the wearing of hijab, niqaab and burkha in public institutions with the aim to incorporate 'a secular regime' into the political structure. The fall out of this ideological fight is increasing discriminatory practices towards hijab wearers. A common analogy similar to Muslim women's head-body covering practices that one gets to hear is that of Christian nuns who also veils to this day. However, among these faiths there exists ideological differences of performances of womanhood and the notions of sexuality (Guindi, 2000). Nevertheless, as numerous scholars have pointed out, of all the various forms of cultural expressions used for different purposes and evidence of its manifestation in relation to different cultures and religions across history (Hindus, Christians and Ultra-Orthodox Jews), Muslim women's veil seemed to be the most controversial and stereotyped one. It is seen as 'ahistoric', 'static', 'uncivilized', 'gender-oppressive'. Droogsma (2007) quite rightly points out that despite there being a complex cluster of meanings inherent in the veils and veiling practices, which varies greatly from one phase of life to the next, there is a tendency to 'ascribe' meanings as opposed to 'describe' its functions or benefits it accrues in their lives. Given all of this reveals a 'communication gap' between the hijab wearer and the observer.

Hussein (2007) feels the debate around the hijab as being a choice or something someone is forced to wear is too naive and takes away focuses from the other complex issues Muslim women may face. Religious reason is the tip of the iceberg, many are inter and intra personal reasons. For the reader of this thesis, the results of this research would made

clear that the young, educated women are not forced into wearing the hijab but *take into consideration many moments before they make* (researcher's emphasis) the decisions. While it is a universal fact that there are political and familial instances that forces women to cover up, yet at the same it is important to acknowledge that there are others who employs willful discourse. Dismissing their calculative decision as 'false consciousness' runs the risk of sabotaging their experience, particularly during periods of rapid socio-economic upheaval, and as Hoodfar (2001) argues denying this is also to deny Muslim women their agency. The narratives provided by the women expose the wearing of the hijab to be an intricate issue than what outsiders think. Besides the political and legal battles to decide 'what is best for her' (Medina, 2014), there is a whole world of everyday experiences that goes into the construction and performance of Muslim woman.

While the scholarship on the hijab as one of several forms of Islamic dress is extremely varied to list here, it is necessary to clear the key term relevant to the Karimganj context so as to differentiate it from other popular forms of modest clothing among Muslim women. Hijab in the modern usage refers to headcover used to cover hair and neck. 'Burkha' or *Burga* is a loose-fitting dress that covers from shoulders to feet. It comes with a loose head covering (some cover the face, others do not) that falls to the waist. *Abaya* is a long, large multicolored outer dress and is most popular among young women because of its modern styles. Niqaab or *Neqaab*, is a piece of cloth that covers face from below eyes, or with slit for eyes. Worn mostly in conjunction with 'burga', but sometimes it is worn with an accompanying cultural equivalent of hijab that is 'dupatta' or *unna*. Apart from this, they choose various styles of 'appropriate' 'modest' clothing to cover, from their traditional wear to western trousers and dresses. Emma Tarlo acknowledges the diversity in how Muslim women dresses and makes an argument that in particular context a particular dress "tends to become attributed with heightened religious significance" (2010, p. 6). In short, wherever Muslims are situated, the locations value system as well as reformulations of Muslim clothing practices around the world gets embedded in their adoption of certain types of clothing.

In this research, the term hijab is referred to in two ways. When referring to the hijab in conventional terms, this research refers to the 'global' practice of the hijab, including modest dress and behaviour and not just the practice of hair-covering. When not referring

to it in conventional terms this research uses the term ‘female covering’ or other terms as used by participants unless otherwise specified.

While hijab as a scholarly topic is not unique, as there are many research studies conducted on the subject across Europe, America, Canada. While some nuances may be identical other nuances may vary in different geographical and socio-cultural context - not to mention individual perceptions. To achieve this purpose, the research employs dramaturgical framework with its focus on appearance management and self-presentation. In daily life ‘drama’ how social actors choose to manage their appearance tells a lot of their performance of self in social relations. Indeed, drawing from their responses which hinge in part upon how well the young college going hijabi women employ and manage various emergent contingencies and tensions, the ‘social performance’ appears to be one of the contributions of this study. This helps in understanding the complexity of Muslim women’s practice of navigations of everyday life situations which in a way goes drown in the broader areas of the narratives (poverty, ignorant, support for ‘resurgence’ Islamic movement) on Muslim women.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The researcher’s interest in the topic of Muslim women and their wide diversity in practice of head-body covering includes her year long experience as a Muslim woman, with people’s several questions regarding this sartorial norm. The teacher training college to which she was enrolled into was not far away from the initial research site – the participants’ college. During those times the researcher have observed the college going women are wearing hijab, which previously was not the case as mentioned time and again by parents, alumni of that college and teachers. Often accompanied by questions such as why do you cover your hair? Do you choose to wear it by yourself? Or does your family force you to do this? Don’t you feel uncomfortable with it? Whether all the Muslim women are supposed to cover themselves after puberty and marriage? Why do some of them cover and others not? Often these ‘curious’ questions are accompanied by indicating hijab as barrier to higher educational achievements. Indeed, it was hard to ignore people’s frequent apprehensions and apparent surprise in the increasing use of hijab by young college going women. Though there is use of ‘unna’ as head-covering among the Muslim students yet increasing use of hijab among college going women ‘raised’ eyebrows. The multi-faceted questions that battle in the minds of many people - teachers, peer group - suggest that

dressing is context specific: the various forms of clothing as a sign of 'tradition/ village' and 'modern/town' are questioned, speculated, evaluated and interpreted in places where it is deemed insignificant. Thus, the researcher's interest and idea for this thesis developed because of the observations, experiences and practices of women she had 'observed' around her since her childhood to adulthood.

In the Indian context, until December 2021, hijab and hijab wearers was a subject that attracted little scholarly attention as it was not considered 'controversial' and 'restrictive' practice. Prominently, academic spark in the symbolic use of hijab grew significantly after the incident of January 2022 when six students at a pre-university college in Udupi town of Karnataka were not permitted to enter classrooms as they were wearing a hijab (headscarf) (Jain, 2023) Their firm assertion of not removing hijab stands in violation of the college dress code. Their acceptance and rejection of hijab became a litmus test to access their educational knowledge. Country like India where there was no prescription and enforcement of hijab saw a sudden hue and cry over use of hijab in educational institutions which slowly spread to the other schools and colleges within and outside the state of Karnataka (ibid.). What is distinctive in this case is the changing sociopolitical ecology of the country, a unique type of 'Orientalism' where Hindus are projected as original populations of India thus the process of making of Hindu Rashtra simultaneously assisting the State and other dominant social forces to increase security practices against Muslim men and Muslim communities (Gupta et al., 2020).

The emergence of veil as a site of conflict of ideological values has a long history (Guindi, 2000; Bullock, 2003). Western colonial rulers used Muslim women's veil as a tool to meet political goals. Muslim women's veil whose roots lies in religion, and which act as a means to maintain women's agency in a given society, was and is still taken as a sign of alien culture as its presence contradicts 'secular', 'modern' values. Muslim majority countries such as Iran and Turkey though they did not experience 'formal' colonial rule, yet their interaction with the western world led to their vision to de-Islamize the nation. They have a long political history - 19th to 21st century - of disappearance and appearance of 'compulsory' veil (Zahedi, 2007).

With reference to Algeria, Guindi (2000) suggests that during the 19th and 20th century of colonial rule, attempts to unveil the local women by the French colonizers is taken as a civilizing mission to modernize Algeria to match the colonists' 'taste'. She continues to

argue that such assimilative and gallicizing attempts were aimed 'to control and uproot' the colonized culture. In 21st century similar exercise is again played out by France in their own society which bans headscarf in schools just to entertain one idea: assimilation and sexual equality (Scott, 2007). Thus, Killian (2003) while writing on 'headscarf affair in France' noted that the British and French colonizers encouraged Muslim women to take off their veil and emulate European women. With reference to South Asia, Papanek (1982) informs that missionaries, media reporters and indigenous activists showed interest in certain features of women's life including the peculiar purdah[1] system of the region. According to her, these people saw the purdah system as the cause-effect of a backward society, which it often was, but their method was not conducive to a methodical understanding of the relationship between men and women in South Asian societies (Papanek, 1982).

In the last few decades several countries around the world have put a ban on place or at some point of time has banned Muslim female clothing practices citing reasons of safety, women empowerment and integrating them in the mainstream (Rumaney & Sriram, 2023). Just as Islamic veil continued to be misunderstood, stereotyped, sanctioned and endless inconclusive debates followed in postcolonial state and colonial rulers, so it became in the words of historian Leila Ahmed, 'pregnant with meanings' (Ahmed, 1992, p. 166). Muslim women all over the world, it is important to remember that now use veil for a wide variety of political, religious, economic, domestic, psychological and fashion reasons (Patel, 2012) which is popularly known as 're-veiling phenomenon' or 'new veiling' (ibid.) in academic writing.

What is interesting is that between the 1970s and the 1980s a shift took place related to who wore the veil as well as how she wore it. While in the 1970s mostly university women who are associated with Islamic groups veiled as expression of moral, anti-fashion and political resistance dress code discourse, by the 1980s the new veiling movement laid a wider net. The 1970s new veil version was loose to the body, covered hair, neck, and shoulders; its colors were usually dark. By the late 1980s and the early 1990s extreme Islamic dressing had moved to the periphery of society and the new fashionable veiling occupied the mainstream (Macleod, 1991). The Muslim entrepreneurs and international

[1] A generic term in central and South Asia for veil and veiling practices. The purdah system refers to seclusion of women from public space by completely covering them up and limiting their mobility outside home.

brands utilized the garment market industry through which non-fashionable, austere, sombre dress got replaced with fashionable and alluring covered dress (Tarlo & Moors, 2013; Almila, 2020). In addition, accessories like matching bags, shoes, and jewelry completed the outfits of women who veiled in this fashion. While these new fashionable styles covered the hair and body, there was also a clear focus on being fashionable as well (Macleod, 1991). In this context, the meaning of Muslim dress[2] has undergone major shifts - from religious, non-consumerist statement to fashion and aesthetic statement.

It is important to note that the existing scholarship conducted in the West has widely concentrated on the experience of 'immigrant' Muslim women of second and third generation hijabis where their identity is threatened by the majority cultures. Whereas, in the Muslim majority countries hijab or veiling is about fashion, nation's piety. In the Indian context much of the scholarly work has been done in the context of 'purdah practices' (both in Hindu and Muslim communities) which is informed by the social and religious functions that it serves. Those works, although they are classics, yet they are much old and have mostly concentrated on the Muslims inhabiting the mainstream region.

The pattern of adoption of hijab and various forms of body concealment by *young, urban, educated, working, middle-class women* in Muslim countries have also witnessed its occurrence among many young Muslim women of various national backgrounds, as numerous works have claimed. The context of India, more particularly the state of Assam, which, by the by, has escaped the scholarly attention or overlooked in South Asian research. This missing feature has motivated the researcher to undertake the qualitative research.

For this research, the Muslim women who are interviewed are not famous 'hijabi activists or representatives' nor they are women who have made to front-page news. They are 'ordinary' hijabi women who lives in the district of Karimganj. And to the researcher, these are the 'ordinary' hijabi young women who experience multiple ways of being while they participate in civic life. The researcher would like to particularly mention that it is not the purpose of this research to generalize across a population of hijabi Muslim women living in Karimganj or beyond. What she is trying to suggest here is that although there is an increasing trend to adoption of hijab in the society, hijabi Muslim women at the college

[2] Dress that is modest in coverage and is accompanied with a form of head-covering.

campuses as a whole are still in the minority. Bullock (2003) when carrying out her qualitative study also emphasized that she wanted to understand completely the opinions of a 'few Muslim women' who wore the hijab and hence do not want to generalize the results to all Muslims (Bullock, 2003). Because purdah/hijab is flexible and differs in how it is lived out in different countries, across communities, social classes, families, and individuals (Kirmani, 2009).

The present study aims to explain the adoption of hijab by young college going middle class women through the lens of multiple factors – sociocultural, economic and family dynamics. Their narratives offer a comprehensive context of a number of important issues which are peculiarly shaped by a complex inter-linkage with their home lives and vice versa. This open new domains of understanding the experience of Muslim women better. Furthermore, with every passing decade stereotype on Muslim women also shifts – from oppressed to co-conspiring Muslim women (Rumaney & Sriram, 2023). Despite the acknowledgement that hijabi women experiences stigma, there is a dearth of experience of 'young' Indian Muslim women in research literature. This research seeks to develop and fill this gap by paying careful insights into the growing stigma towards the practice of hijab and its wearers. The study includes a discussion of the influence of technology in their changed public behaviour, attire and dialogue which is a departure from the understanding of conventional influence of socio-political 'association' or 'organization' or 'Islamist movements' that work to produce a specific distinct form of gender normative discourse. By illustrating from their embodied experiences and practices they often find ways to engage with the specificities of Muslimness on their own terms, and in doing so, they potentially modify discourses around gender, religion and space.

1.3 Research Objectives

The present study is built on the following research objectives:

1. To provide a background on arrival of Islam in Karimganj and contextualize Karimganj Muslim women.
2. To examine the pattern of inter-generational religious upbringing in their home space which influences the religious experiences of young hijabi women.
3. To explore the hijabi women's social experience of college life in relation to their adoption of hijab.

4. To understand their everyday experiences which informed their decision to wear hijab.

1.4 Research Questions

The present research study adopts an empirical method to collectively highlight the interplay between the inner domain and outer domain of hijabi participants on the subject of their hijab practices. The following are the central questions that have explored the complexities of practice of Muslim female:

1. How do parents (mothers) put effort into defining, illustrating and regulating religious teachings to the participants?
2. How did the hijabi participants' mothers understand and practice bodily concealment in their everyday lives?
3. In what ways did their understanding of bodily concealment registered on their daughter's (young college going participants) adoption of hijab and other modest respectable dress?
4. What are the areas in their daily life in which hijabi participants draw canonical sources to resolve the practical problems posed by familial and societal rules?
5. How do hijabi participants experience their practice of hijab outside of home in a college campus?
6. What experience do their hijab brings in their interaction with teachers, family members and other peers (non-Muslims)?
7. For those who experience negative stereotypical outlook, what are the strategies they consider countering it?
8. How do participants who wear hijab decide to do so?
9. What does wearing hijab mean to these participants?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

The theoretical framework for the research study is largely based upon symbolic interactionist perspective which is largely associated with George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, and Herbert Blumer, amongst others. Symbolic Interactionism operates on three basic premises:

(1) that the action of human beings towards things or objects takes place in response to the meanings the things have for them,
(2) that these meanings do not emanate from an intrinsic source but are derived from social interaction, and
(3) that such meanings are created and modified through an interpretative social process under which interaction takes place (Blumer, 1969).

The principle, then is, there is no self without self-consciousness. By virtue of one's reflexive capacity – that is viewing oneself from the standpoint of *generalised* others do one embodies self. So, in a sense, self and society are inextricably bound (Tseelon, 1995).

Given this insight of microscopic interaction, this also enables us to apply it in clothing behaviour. Erving Goffman, a renowned symbolic interactionist and student of Blumer, made important contributions to body practices in social interaction by focusing on self, act and social interaction. Goffman's most famous work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, provides an account of social life in the form of dramaturgical approach especially in the manner individuals present and manage themselves to others in interaction through their performative self and enactment of roles (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman, in all facets of everyday life which include dressing and dressing behaviour, individuals must undertake practices of labourious action of self-presentation in order to be taken as legitimate social members. He writes that 'a status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is nonetheless something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realised' (Goffman, 1959, p. 75).

In his book he articulated self-presentation as a form of impression management which he modelled on his dramaturgical metaphor. The self for Goffman is an outcome of a social process and is not an independent, fixed entity which resides in the inner core of the individual.

> This self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses…The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the actual crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (Goffman,1959, p. 252-253).

According to Goffman, an interaction or an encounter occurs on any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's immediate physical presence (1959). Goffman proposed the notion of self-presentation as a special type of social performance, of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participant and which is acted or played out in everyday routine (ibid.). Once we are in the company of others, we want to acquire information (for 'practical reasons') about the situation and the participants to be able to fully predict the outcome of the social interaction (Goffman, 1959). For this purpose, as much as possible we rely on inherent cues or 'documentary evidence' such as signs, hints, gestures and cultural symbols to assess the situation and relate our identity to our audience. In other words, we must rely on appearances to tell us how to react to and behave with the people involved in social situations (Goffman, 1959).

In his formulation, when we come in contact with other people, we attempt to control or guide the 'review' (Stone, 1962) treatment that people might have of us. Stone noted that when an individual appears before others, he/she will have many motives to control the impression they receive of the situation. Social practice such as appearance is an important dimension of communication of which clothing plays a significant role as non-verbal symbolic communication. Apart from providing physiological comfort, it adds beauty to the person who wears it, in their own eyes as well as to the ones who see them (Stone, 1962). However, there is a danger that this unified intended correspondence in particular

to clothing may not always result in consistent meaning. Ambivalence in shared meaning is bound to arise as appearance message of dress is a polyvalent form of communication.

Central to Goffman's 'dramatic realization' of myriad selves in different social situations and settings is the notion of impression management. This means that in constructing a front we as performers, audiences, observers, co-participants put time and effort and constantly work together to express and produce ourselves and each other as knowable and predictable in the respective social roles as to what is and as to what they *ought* (emphasis in the main text) to see as the "is", so as to avoid disruptions to normative standardized social expectations (Goffman,1959, p.13).

Goffman's dramaturgical approach rests on the fundamental assumptions that human beings perform series of performances across two distinct regions, with strictly controlled boundaries between these two regions, each with its own set of behavioral norms. The physical setting where the role is performed is also the setting where impression is managed. This is like the role of an actor who on front stage has to accentuate and perform his best behaviour in front of an audience to make a good impression while holding back on negative behavior (Goffman, 1959). In front stage, people are conscious of 'being observed' and perform particular values, norms, and rules; while backstage (personal) presentations occur when people turn out to be themselves, where they can relax can express their informal performance and where 'suppressed facts make an appearance'. For Goffman (1959) front stage include emblem of office or rank, racial characteristics, clothing, sex, age, posture, speech patterns, facial expression, bodily gestures. Hence, as a collective representation, the front establishes proper 'setting', 'appearance,' and 'manner' for the social role assumed by the actor, uniting the line of action with the personal front. Backstage, on the other hand, is the process of managing the self to become presentable in public space.

Goffman's concept of stage (front and back) is not a structural one but refers to the collection of 'faces' each of which activates in front of a different audience for the purpose of creating and maintaining a given social definition of the situation. In other words, it is the distinction between 'unself-conscious' and 'self-conscious' behaviour (Tseelon, 1995, p. 41). At this point, a crucial point is that regions can change. They are not fixed or permanent territories to be marked out. In fact, at one point the same physical space can be the front region for one group of people as well as the back region for the same or a

different group of people at another time. Goffman (1959) contends that when one speaks of front and back regions, one speak from the reference point of a particular performance, and the function that the place happens to serve at that time for the given performance.

However, critical voices of Goffman's work debate on the question of sincerity in the social construction of self. They believe since performances are carefully managed, they are cynical. Tseelon (1995) interprets this issue of the motivation behind the presentation of self or selves not as an act of manipulation but rather a negotiated process. This management of dressed body in front of other people is especially necessary for stigmatized people who do not have complete social acceptance and who constantly strive to adjust their social identities in order to fit into a definition of the situations (Goffman, 1959). They are aware that stigmatized bodies are political. Hence, they exert a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat them in the manner that human beings have a right to expect.

Drawing ideas from Goffman's framework the present study examines the Muslim middle-class homes as habitus where Muslim women's performative self is made up of various 'shared vocabulary'. As Donner observes (2011) home is the most important site of middle-class socialization and differentiation. A sociological approach therefore entails that we look at the role of Muslim women's dressed body as both the property of the individual and the social world (Entwistle, 2001). The thesis pays attention to the lived realities of these hijabi women and asks what happens when they move between different types of regions which include home and their educational space, each space offers different kinds of normative and unwritten rules of physical interaction. Critically analysing the specific discourses and practices associated with each space entails exploring the implicit moral norms that govern all forms of social communication. The extent to which a hijabi Muslim woman is able to 'perform' and negotiate on the front stage determines how successfully she is able to manage her social roles according to the space that she encounters in everyday life.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided to structure the interviews, research findings and analysis are discussed below. These are the key concepts used in this study, which runs in all the chapters. Although the concepts mentioned below are discussed separately however,

they are intertwined which highlight the ways how reflexively and carefully they (Muslim women) navigate and manage their impression in taken-for-granted everyday life.

1.6.1 Middle Class

In the last few decades, social analysts have used a wide variety of approaches to identify the Indian middle-class, which ranges from assessing their income to durable property and assets, occupation, structural position, consumption practices, cultural and social capital and attitudes (Dickey, 2012). Yet, they have failed to achieve an agreed conception regarding the exact size and composition of the middle-class in India, with estimates between 78 million to 604 million (Patel, 2021) which shows an increase in proportion than Dickey' s (2012) estimates of 50 million to 350 million. This accounts that the middle class has grown in significant proportion and construction of this social group is not sealed off from others, as other segments of middle-class or upwardly mobile working class too, has the competence to be a part of it, thereby, making the boundaries of this social group dynamic in nature (Fernandes, 2006). Adding to the already complexities of the criteria in defining middle-class, a class which is as Liechty (2003) notes is 'notoriously' difficult to "pin down" in objective configurations (p. 64), Beteille termed it as the most "polymorphous" category in the world. It is not only shaped by internal stratification and differentiation and classificatory practices based on occupation, income and education they are also diverse in terms of language, religion, caste, region, class (Beteille, 2018, p. 79). Considering the highly differentiated structure of the group formation, 'middle-class' as a sociocultural category, is argued, cannot be an exclusive category because of which Beteille felt it 'appropriate' to call 'middle classes' in India, to indicate the inclusiveness nature of it (Beteille, 2018).

Having said that there is no precise way conceptually as well as numerically to know the distribution of income of various household groups as there is variations in income and expenditure from year to year, moreover households do not reveal their accurate income (Shaban & Sattar, 2022); nevertheless, scholars talked about subjective and objective operational measures to delineate the economic behaviour of middle class such as occupational function, employment status, education, income, consumption patterns of goods (conspicuous in nature and adds to the already established status marker), possession of durable property and assets (Dickey, 2012; Beteille, 2018; Shaban & Sattar, 2022). Others talked about middle class values and moralities which effectively express

and define class groups from above and below- how the middle classes view themselves and how they experience their lives as middle-class people (Liechty, 2003; Dickey, 2012; Fazal, 2021). Thus, a speedy review of the scholarly engagements on the Indian middle-class makes it apparent that several criteria - material possession to social and moral values have been used to identify the middle class, and they vary from one place to another.

In line with the recent studies on contemporary articulations of middle-classness in India, the present study confines to the study of Karimganj middle class Muslim women. The defining criteria through which the study locates middle-class families in Karimganj are educational and occupational aspects, inherited property, symbolic aspects like their practices of consumption, embodied lifestyle informed and influenced by technological advertisements and possession of certain conspicuous assets such as two-wheeler and four-wheeler vehicle.

Although the studied social research group do not identify themselves as 'new' middle class in the wake of neoliberal era, they traditionally referred to as *'bhodro/Shorif foribar'* which represent the old hegemonic middle class of public sector salaried employees, landed gentry and business or merchants' class. Among upper class Bengali Hindus in South Asia, the middle class holds distinctive Bhadralok respectability, which is closely tied to education, wealth, and religious practices (Fernandes & Heller, 2006). The female equivalent to the term *Bhadralok* is *Bhodromohila* or *Shorif beti* among Sylheti Muslims. Yet, they represent, as like Mark Liechty's (2003, p. 67) middle-class informants in Kathmandu speak of "a notion of middleness, of occupying a position between social others". The maternal participants in the present study present themselves as dealing with a wide range of 'reference to relational' extremes- holding on to their erstwhile dominant class-conscious lineage as well as inclined in making of extravagance and ostentatious material consumption in constructing and negotiating a way of 'urban/town' life that is acceptable to their middle-class Muslim like-minded families. Thus, they have found 'new' ways of being middle class that involve changing orientations towards socio, political and material identity. On the one hand the older generation while growing up received support from single male breadwinner; saw their parents as more responsible and maintained a careful approach in managing finances (for illnesses and unseen emergencies). Basically, they lived a modest life living within their own means. Having more than one earner in a family, in the case of younger generation, their membership to the household they spent a

part of their wealth in maintaining a lifestyle which allegedly challenges traditional lifestyle values and ideologies and indicates high purchasing capacity. Today's younger generation are exposed to global lifestyle, they introduce new patterns of consumption habits to the family, such as going out to an eatery, ordering food and medicines online, visits to beauty salons etc. These values and tastes establish and reinforce their boundaries from other social classes and thus aid in shaping the middle-class lifestyle. Thus, the participants, especially the older generations define their class position as 'precarious' as being always subjected to heightened sense of critical looks from those who are below their standard. This is very evident to what Bourdieu (1990) and Dickey (2012) declares that class is defined by its 'being' as a process of continuous production, reproduction and conservation which is 'being-perceived' as a factor of respect rather than a fixed state of being. This therefore provides a distinct explanatory framework for showing off certain distinctive registers/ attribute to continue themselves as hegemonic social group and to mark themselves off from as they explicitly call out as *uttonto* (newly emergent non-elite middle class) who lack critical sensibilities to socio-cultural and religious behaviour.

1.6.1.1 Habitus and Respectable Femininity

While discussing middle-class lifestyles, Donner (2011) explains that previously marked collective identities of upper-caste norms like 'morality and respectability, gendered identities, material cultures, and the symbolic role of family values continues in contemporary times while articulating middle-class concepts. She further notes that, though more and more Indian people identify themselves as middle-class; in reality, they differ widely not only in terms of economic position and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values (p. 3). Economic capital, thus, is often not enough in the construction of ideal middle-class homes, as Bourdieu (1984) and Fernandes (2000) rightfully claims. Besides economic capital, which is easily convertible into money, Bourdieu identifies two non-economic capitals - social and cultural, combining all of which provides benefit, power and strength to the holder. Social capital comprises of 'social obligations' or the network of valuable relationships that can secure material or symbolic gains (Bourdieu, 1986); Cultural capital, Bourdieu further divides it into three forms: embodied (internal and imperceptible), objectified (cultural products), and institutionalized (officially accredited).

As a symbol of capital, embodied capital is imbued during socialization which involves speech, taste, skills, and demeanour. In its embodied state, it assumes "long lasting dispositions of mind and body" and is ultimately tied to the habitus of the individuals. Objectified capital refers not only to the possession and appropriation of material goods or artefacts, but also the ability to consume them. Institutionalized capital refers to academic credentials 'a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture'. Accumulation of academic qualification enables an individual to directly convert between cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

When considering how capital operates as social and cultural reproduction in the eyes of the collective, Bourdieu (1986) sees the forms of capital as 'mutually constitutive' in that economic capital allows time and resources for investing in the future academic and occupational endeavour, which, in turn, contributes to the accumulation of economic capital. Greater socioeconomic success results in wielding influence and which gets associate with greater social capital in that as one's social network expands it creates opportunity further enriching one's other capital stock. Thus, the different forms of capital are based upon, but not determined by, economic capital. Capital, in its different fundamental form functions as 'actually usable resources and powers' (1984, p. 114) takes time to accumulate and hence its ability to pass different forms of capital differs. Which means different segments of 'capital in identical or expanded form' have different strengths as class barriers. Individuals occupying different class hierarchy, while struggling with each other, use different forms of capital to defend or take an advantageous social position. In this study one of the focuses is on how the participants mothers materializes their influence on their daughter's lives through certain dispositions which occurs through formal and informal institutions.

Accordingly, in Bourdieu's view on distinct and identifiable society, individual of different groups and classes can never escape the 'logic of distinction' which manifests itself in 'relations' of material and symbolic, namely objective status position and inner ideas and tastes (its different amalgamations form 'habitus') (Bourdieu, 1984; Hong & Zhao, 2015). The logic of distinction is generated not only from the capital, it also depends on a unique lifestyle associated with a particular habitus formation (Bourdieu, 1984).

Habitus, as the word implies is a system of 'acquired social dispositions' by which one understands the social world and one's prospects within it. It is long-lasting (but not permanent), transposable, cognitive 'schemata or structures of perception, conception and action' (Bourdieu, 2002). Habitus is rooted within the framework of socialization (primary and secondary resource of knowledge) and conditioned by the position one occupies in the social structure. The process has been designated as 'socialized subjectivity' or subjectivity conditioned by structural circumstances of social rules and organizational values (ibid.). Thus, acquiring habitus by the individual is done unconsciously at the level of bodily movement, dispositions and styles.

Individuals occupying the same habitus (class) position will display similar or same characteristics conditions necessary in maintaining their status. It is not that member of the same class do not share identical class experiences. More likely, members of the same class compared to members of other classes do manifest similar cultural temperament conditions (Bourdieu, 1990) for e.g. taste and consumption practices, which is linked to cultural capital. Tastes, according to Bourdieu (1984, p. 56), are 'the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference'. This classificatory scheme of lifestyle (status) provides an account of taste as something socially conditioned, a 'social weapon' and is largely defined by the ability of the middle classes to quarantine their own preferences as superior and to maintain their social distance from other class position. Taste is strongly demarcated by educational level and social origin of class and is very much in accordance with the possession of different amounts of different kinds of external 'capitals or wealth' possessed by subjects.

Since taste is an element of habitus, it is nonetheless related to consumption which in turn reveals and reinforces class positions. Consumption of (for) 'luxury and freedom' and of 'necessity' is defined as a set of practices which reflect lifestyles, and therefore, particular social statuses (Guimaraes et al., 2010, p. 2). She conceptualises lifestyle as everyday habitual practices that structure the lives of groups and communities and is associated to one's social standing.

Thus, habitus constructed through, and (in turn) constructs capital, is an interactive element of social groups and classes' construction of the borders between each other, in which certain things are valued above everything else. Capital is more involved in the construction of social boundaries, while habitus is closely related to the creation of the

symbolic boundary (Fan 2012, cited in Hong and Zou, 2015). However, the two types of boundaries differ in relation to permeability. Habitus needs historical accumulation. It comes with time, practice and engagement. Hence it is more rigid and cannot be easily penetrated. Therefore, it generally stays with the individuals across contexts. Bourdieu (1990) quoting Durkheim (1977, p. 11):

> In each one of us, in differing degrees, is contained the person we were yesterday, and indeed, in the nature of things it is even true that our past personae predominate in us (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56).

If we consider values, tastes, politeness and other embodied attributes that goes into the socializing of middle-class homes as habitus then the performance of women becomes actively prominent in the gendered construction of respectable femininity. Skeggs conceptualises respectable femininity as a complex set of behavioural norms as a class practice, central to the organization of gender that embodies moral authority (Skeggs, 1997). Since the ideology of 'izzat' is one of the major bids in the construction of respectable femininity such that it becomes a *"constitutive element of symbolically authorized middle-classness* (author's emphasis) (Radhakrishnan, 2009, p. 200-201). In this framework, it is not only education or taste that constitutes symbolic capital; respectable femininity and its association with the family constitute equally critical forms of symbolic capital" (ibid.), such that it functions as a boundary marker from other classes and social groups. Respectability is (usually) not only the concern of those who are not seen to have it as Skeggs (1997) argues but it is also a concern for those who are seen as being at risk of losing it, in this context it is the young college going women, as the intergenerational relationship outlook demonstrates of the studied research work. Furthermore, the grammar of respectable femininity also gets 'enacted' in different 'metaphors of capital' institutionalizing in such a way that leveraging each of these capitals results in success by becoming *particular kind of aspirational subjects* (researcher's emphasis) as expressed through their (participants mothers) notions of *somajik chetona* (social consciousness).

The examination of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the notion of respectable femininity as a form of embodied capital has been fulfilling to the research findings. This study, hence, pays attention to the construction of habitus as 'structured structure' and a 'structuring structure' in domestic spaces wherein the hegemonic values and practices of gendered

performances that dominated their mother's generations (past) continue to orient the present-day young's perceptual and behavioral dispositions, and their consequent actions (practices) in strategic ways. Both are essential embodiments that produce 'order' to act in structured ways. They are an integral to daily life, intimately bound up in social and religious rituals and activities.

1.6.2 Stigma

Stigma, a social constructive phenomenon owes its origin to Greece society wherein ostracized and individuals of less worth were corporeally marked by cutting or burning markings onto their bodies, symbolizing their disgraced position in social structure. However, contemporary times have abandoned the practice of physical bodily marking and hence the term stigma primarily refers to the devalued situation of disgrace itself (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman (1963), Stigma describes a situation where the attribute of the individual is deeply discrediting which disqualifies them from full social acceptance and that lessens the bearer from a whole person to a spoiled one. Goffman (1963) explains that usually stigmatization involves stigma symbols which are signs that convey social information and are frequently and steadily available. Depending on the circumstance, many things can act as stigma symbols, which differentiate normal people from the pathological ones.

Goffman (1963) discusses three distinct forms of stigma. These are: physical deformities (e.g., deaf, blind, leprosy); blemishes of individual character (weak will, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and radical political behaviour); and tribal stigma of (race, ethnicity, nation and religion) (p. 4). In the case of Muslim women, one of the most important stigma symbols has been niqaab, burkha and hijab. The outward display of hijab not only allows those around her, to identify her as Muslim women, but also because theological edicts mandate the Muslim women to continuously wear it when in public, thus on the one hand, it strengthens intragroup cooperation and solidarity and simultaneously make outgroup interactions bitter.

The stigmatization that young hijabi participant face exists in an overlap of 'blemishes of personal character' and because of recent political narratives in the Indian context the 'religious group membership' category. In this respect, actions performed by powerful state apparatuses in specific social contexts construct the relationship between an 'attribute

and stereotype'. To put it in another way, given the prominence 'oriental' discourse on hijab and place of Muslims in both global north and south, the visual presence of hijab in public space activates almost-scripted stereotypical traits and metaphorical figures based on initial information commonly circulated in media. These misleading often contradictory representations, together with others' assignment of pathological opinions about it, potentially results in the distancing or undesired treatment of the stigmatized individual. The not-so-quite-human treatment both at the macro and micro social life serves as tangible proof of the presence of stigma.

Indeed, stigma is not an inherent quality of an individual trait, but rather it is constructed over time on what people 'hear' and 'watch' which generates and generalizes an understanding of certain symbols as unacceptable. This discomfortable truth emerges via interactions with other individuals and groups who are considered as 'normal' in Goffmanian framework. Those who are considered as 'normal' espoused the discourse of the 'Orientalized oriental' which Bucar (2017) argues constitutes a kind of social actor who internalizes and projects the western judgement of the 'Eastern' (Islamic) things as being backward and pitied upon (p. 153).

Furthermore, stigma manifests simply not just through explicit gendered Islamophobic (Zine, 2006) attitudes, but also entails inconspicuous forms that are part of the similarities and differences to others. Babacan (2022) observed that only explicit verbal abuse, violence, and physical harm do not constitute the experience of Muslim women. In his study of 'visible' (displaying stigma symbol in public space) young Turkish Muslim women he examined subtle and implicit forms of Islamophobia that is enacted at daily level in mundane interactions without ever making it blatant. These observed forms of socially marked 'microaggression' which are consciously coded as 'humour' communicates the message that various stigmatized attributes were ascribed to that differentness (Goffman, 1963). Babacan further contends that owing to their 'double consciousness', quoting Du Bois (1969), the stigmatized individuals are aware that their possession of religious and cultural traits such as Muslim clothing and names are subject to opinions and disdained by the people they encounter. Link and Phelan's framework (2001, p. 367) provided five different interrelated elements which when it comes together constitutes and sustains the process of stigma. The social process starts with identification and classification of human differences. Once the social selection of differences deemed

to be matter of significance is singled out, the dominant cultural ideas link these identified 'labeled' differences with undesirable characteristics or negative stereotypes. Accordingly, those who are stereotypically categorized fundamentally constitute as 'others, and hence separate from 'them'. As a result, individuals experience a decline in their social status and are subjected to discriminatory treatment, resulting in unfair treatment and disparities in life-chances. The full weight of these components of stigma ultimately lies in power, as they say, 'it takes power to stigmatize' (p. 375).

Especially in contexts marked by a culture of taking offence at the slightest visible display of Muslim faith, an upsurge of anti-Muslim sentiments, increase public surveillance and awareness of 'Muslimness' of which Muslims (men as well as women) are the worst sufferers of it; nevertheless, it would be wrong in saying that the individual in question believe and apply to themselves stigmatizing assumptions and stereotypes linked to their religion and religious attribute. It is argued that the ethnocentric universal approach of Muslim women as voiceless and politically immature often works in a reverse manner which in turn strengthens their understandings of appropriate behaviour, management of the self, and in some situations may lead to changing or modifying behaviour to off-set any stereotypical suppositions of them. In an ethnographic study of the Muslim Youth Program held in a mosque in a major American city, O'Brien (2011) reported of Muslim American youth rehearsing strategies for stigma management. O'Brien (2011) discussed two types of stigma management rehearsals and what they involve: 'direct preparation stigma rehearsals involve literally acting out and practicing responses to stigmatizing scenarios,' and in 'deep education stigma rehearsals' mosque leaders provide 'religious reasoning' for the rehearsed response (O'Brien, 2011, p. 301).

The concept of stigma has been employed to understand the young hijabis experiences in their college. A closer look at their experience and response points that they negotiate between two conflicting world sets of cultural expectations.

1.6.3 Space

If the Muslim women's covered body is fraught with sartorial expectations of others, so too are they fraught with the sartorial expectations linked with space thereby spatially commanding attention to women's existence in public space. While acknowledging the social system of purdah as not a fixed practice among the lower income women in

Bangladesh Jennings et al (2022) took issue with purdah as 'restrictive' yet 'interpretive' such that "where they go is assumed to say something about who they are" (p. 2). Veiling not only produces gender, but it also produces space. This happens not only through the ideas which people ascribe and informs the social practice but also through the ways in which women practice and negotiate the rules of veiling (Abraham, 2018). The social meaning people ascribe to space is particularly illustrated by Massey who views space as multi-dimensional spaces which are not absolute and empty but interrelated, as they are constructed out of social relations' particularly race, class and gendered relations (1994). In other words, space is not a neutral setting but rather space and gender constitutes a mutually constitutive 'sets of relationships' which is contingent upon context and entities (Niranjana, 2001). The idea of gender-space is embedded in culturally specific ideas or rules for drawing boundaries in the real world that structure one's mode of thinking and social interaction which Shirley Ardener terms as 'ground rules' and 'social maps'. They play a significant role in the development of social relations, and that mapping of social relations and reading their meanings in turn influences how spaces define, experience and speak of themselves. One could also consider spaces in Goffmanian ideological frameworks of backstage and frontstage where he suggests a certain degree of fluidity in terms of performers and audiences according to who is present and how spaces are protected against outsiders in order to secure a level of privacy.

Massey (1994) argues that space-time matters in the construction of gender relations in the context of specific societies, that the spatial is social relations 'stretched out' (Massey, 1994). This point proves to be extremely relevant for understanding who is present in which space and in which historical time. This struggle over the nature of space-time is imbued with power relations, and symbolism. Most evidently this is so, because the social relations across space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it, as kinship network, caste, religion, geographical location and sexual culture will ensure that spaces are experienced in multiple ways.

Rendell (2000) took into consideration gendered spaces through representation of the divisional and hierarchical paradigm of the 'separate spheres'-public and private which are characterized by masculine and feminine ideologies. Contrary to this, Prerna Siwach while working among the scheduled caste of Haryana suggests that "the gendering of space is not restricted to the public space only, but it extends into the very private sphere of the

household, the so-called female space" (2020, p. 36). By this she meant within the four walls of the household women's access to the areas - *baithak* (sitting room) and *Gher* – is 'conditional'. This suggest that 'public' and 'private' are western dichotomous notions of gendered spaces and many feminist scholarships have pointed out their flawed application to non-western societies that have flexible and contested understanding of private and public modes of division (Guindi, 2000; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001; Almila, 2020).

The space discussed in the thesis is domestic space, considered as 'safe' and site of socialization and educational institutions considered as 'contested' spaces. The former is the space where ideas, connections, and privacy are positioned in relation to social relationships. When considering the notion of home, it is important to remember that the Muslims held family life as important. The centre of the family is the woman who is most exposed to strangers and threat from outside; travelling to a 'place' outside the home, increases the chance of meeting na-mahram kin and non-kin which attests symbolic or physical risk. Their ordering of space expressed here is more related to the 'presence of 'male' who determine the nature of the spatial interaction'. Although Muslim society divides space according to male and female roles, but they do not necessarily subscribe to a static portrayal of public and private space. While they tend to believe in an ideal structure, they also acquiesce to the realistic demands of contemporary society. As such, they acknowledge that they have new roles to fulfill, without disrupting societal cohesion and the stability of the family. Being an aspirational consumer citizen, they actively participate in the process of higher education, paid work force and leisure activities. Many of which entail manoeuvring spatial-temporal boundaries, across various spaces and encounters. They mediate their social interactional experiences within domestic and non-domestic 'public' spaces by adopting 'regulatory mechanisms' such as dress parallel that with their gendered proxemics. Their adoption of middle-class habitus gendered embodiment can be approached as spatial ethical performance in non-religious public spaces. Writing on Islam in Turkish public sphere, Nilufer Gole (2002) tells us:

> When Muslim women cross the borders between inside and out, multiple senses—sight, smell, touch, and hearing—feature in mental concerns over redefining borders, preserving decency, and separating genders. These notions are not alien to Muslim memory and culture. A public Islam needs to redefine and recreate the borders of the interior, intimate, illicit gendered space. The notion of modesty underpins the Muslim

> self and her relation to private and public spaces. The veiling suggests the importance of the ocular and the segregation of spaces regulates gender sociability. These acts - counter aesthetics, body postures, and modes of address are public performances which they seek to gain authority and legitimacy through their repetitions and rehearsals. They are rooted in past traditions and in religious habitus (Gole, 2002).

What is seen as enabling in one context has also the effect of disabling the material component of public self. As Shirley Ardener notes, "the environment imposes certain restraints on our mobility, and, in turn, our perceptions of space are shaped by our own capacity to move about… behaviour and space are mutually dependent" (p. 113). The connection between visibility and difference with long free-flowing burkha, hijab and face-veiling in public spaces has much to do with material presence of 'covered clad bodies' that carves out the presence of Islam in public spaces. On the one hand, it testifies the prominent presence of signifiers of Islamic identities in the public spaces which earlier times used to be confined to Muslim ghettos and on the other hand the self-assured expressions pose a challenge to the meaning of their assimilative contexts. In such circumstances the covered woman is both hyper-conspicuous and hyper-concealed. Tarlo's (2010) analysis of the three-stage sequence -glancing, averting and staring is unique as a 'common response' in public spaces where 'covered women' makes presence and disrupts the visual conventions dominant in that particular space. Such 'conspicuous privacy', Tarlo argues breaks the glances of mutual acknowledgement that happens through sensory portals- eyes and facial expressions.

This research study uses Massey's (1994) notion of space making processes as cross cutting power relations that are forged at multiple levels from the Muslim houses in Karimganj to the local neighborhoods, streets and colleges. To think of spaces and spatiality is to consider the social relations, power constellations and interactions within regimes of [veiling] spaces, as well the dialectical relation between these and the symbolic and cultural meanings attached to spaces, in turn to their embodied practices. Inside and outside spaces do not exist in vacuum, they are mutually constructed via multiple reference points [audiences], held within a pincushion of million stories that may affect their positionality within familial and extended kin network. As participants move in and out of different space activity – home and educational setting which operate on different sets of rules, hence their myriad lived experiences across these spaces determine the norms of

self-presentation. They manage their gendered expectations through a set of 'interactional tactics' which help to neutralize or minimize the dangers of stranger-filled public settings.

1.6.4 Agency

Agency is synonymously used with the 'free acting subject' which requires an underlying sense of critical conscious self, exercise of choice, and perceptual understanding of one's own position. Because it is unevenly distributed among women of different religion, race, caste and class, hence, some people have more opportunity than others to identify and make obvious choices (Mahmood, 2005). This means that the agency of the subjects is not straightforward but is always informed and mediated by social, cultural and institutional contexts.

According to Burke (2012) there are four approaches - resistance, empowerment, instrumental and compliant – to understand agency which though not mutually exclusive but often appears when working on gender-traditional religions. The first three approaches focus on individuals acting for themselves, such as empowerment approach notes how women use religion as 'internal feelings of power' to empower themselves in daily lives; whereas instrumental agency focus on non-religious advantages of participating in religious activities and compliant agency argues that individuals strive to act not for themselves, but for obedience to Supreme God.

Resistance approach as we all know is the most romanticized form of women's agency which challenges or attempts to change gender-religious beliefs and practices. Hence the exercise of resistance is a form of collective action of the individual against oppressive patriarchal forces. This is a dominant view in the West, especially when it concerns women with a Muslim (educated and hijabi) background. This was what Katherine Bullock (2003), in her introduction to the book *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil* expressed. When she converted to Islam her well-wishers express the concern that she has been duped in adopting an oppressive practice (hijab) when in her circle she was known as a strong and committed feminist. In this context, absence of resistance to oppressive norms is wrongly associated with an absence of an agency. The conflation of the concept of agency with emancipatory desire, according to Mahmood, is a manifestation of a Western tradition that celebrates the fiction of the autonomous individual whose actions must be the consequence

of her ‘own free will’ rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion (Mahmood 2005, p. 11).

On the contrary, more recent work such as that of Saba Mahmood has identified that women assert themselves to enhance their authority not by challenging, but by mastering gendered roles available to them within these patriarchal systems. Thus, they are ‘doing/compliant religion’ (Avishai, 2008, cited in Burke, 2012). The pious Muslim women in her study focuses on agency in the context of ethical formation and issues of moral selfhood. Mahmood posits that agency takes different forms both within and out of the liberal world. Drawing on poststructuralist insight, Mahmood argues that such a separation between an ‘autonomous individual’ and ‘external’ forces like custom, tradition, and social coercion is impossible.

Agency, therefore, should not be understood as the individual’s ability to act for self-realization in opposition to and against the weight of external customs, traditions, or norms. Rather, agency could also be understood as the work individuals perform on themselves to better comply with the external norms that constitute them. Pious Muslim women, she theorizes, can experience agency as religious practitioners in acts of submission and instruments of their oppression (Mahmood quoting Boddy 1989) rather than in resistance to male authority.

> …what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressive point of view, may actually be a form of agency but one that can be understood in the context of the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. (2005, p. 212)

In other words, Mahmood argues, agency as the ‘capacity for action’ that is to realize one’s own interests and make concomitant choices, to perform one’s religious observances in a way they deemed appropriate, meaningful, and ethically sound, and to develop pious practices, including those which seem to be highlighting or celebrating patriarchal Islam. Thus Mahmood (2005) quoting Asad (1993) argues to keep the meaning of agency open, as the understanding of the concept needs to emerge from within the semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of relating to people, things and oneself (p. 34).

Adding to the discussion of women's capability to make choices, to take actions consequently developing more power to act for herself by participating in the piety movement (Rinaldo, 2010) Rinaldo suggested the piety movement as a religious revival. A revival which seeks to reinvigorate religious teachings and practices and have appeared within all the major religious traditions. In this context, Rinaldo (2014) introduces the concept of 'pious critical agency' to denote the capacity to engage critically and publicly with religious texts through training, organizing workshop, and publishing articles in journals which surpass traditional religious spaces.

In the context of third world women, post-colonial feminist thinker Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) has critiqued the habit of western scholarship who turns a blind eye or deny the existence of feminisms indigenous to third-world women's unique experiences. In doing so it is recognisable to particular observers and sometimes overlooked, misunderstood or underestimated by outside observers. In a similar line Lila Abu Lughod (2002) emphasizes on the importance of 'acceptance' 'cultural relativism' and 'respecting' the differences of other people who might want different things.

These scholars work demonstrates that the concept of agency is a much debated concept in social science yet it is also inherently seen as positive (Evans, 2013; Rinaldo, 2014) because it denotes 'the ability for individuals to have some kind of transforming effect or impact' in their own lives and 'on the world' around them (McNay, 2018, p. 39). For example, Guindi (2000) while citing Abbott (1942) states that after the death of Prophet one of his wives Aisha became doubly active in public and political affairs. On the occasion of Uthman's (the third caliph) murder she went to the mosque and delivered a public speech. There she was ceremoniously veiled. Guindi (2000) recognizes Aisha's public veiling as a sign of her political power.

Taking Mahmood's argument that agency is 'constituted in different cultural and political locations' (Mahmood, 2001), the researchers have gained an empirically informed understanding of how agency works out in a diverse setting, in which Islamically informed and liberal understandings of choice and agency coexist. By choosing the dialogic perspective of agency, the research study has explored the situations in which they (younger participants) assert what the findings would like to call delicate and diplomatic expressions of agency and hence enhance their autonomy.

1.7 Literature Review

1.7.1 Terms, terrains, tensions- some reflections

Veil (noun), Veiling (verb), and Veiled (adjective), are used as a universal term to understand the bodily appearances and practices as performed by groups and individuals inhabiting different cultures (Daly, 2005, p. 391). Daly (2005) describes a veil that functions as an item of dress. It is a piece of fabric draped as a head and upper or full body covering. She explains that the terms veil, veiling and veiled have two-fold meanings and function to perform as an item of clothing or adornment. The act of veiling, she argues physically covers and conceals some visual and social aspects of the wearer yet by doing so the veil inadvertently, marks their identity.

Another widely used term throughout the South Asian continent is *purdah*. Tracing its roots in Persian language, the term Purdah literally means curtain. In the field of scholarship on feminist writings, it has been identified as an institutionalized socio-cultural system that operates at three levels: physical and social segregation and concealment of the female body. This is largely achieved by adopting seclusionary practices in an enclosed space i.e., curtains, high walls, as well as covering of the face or the body before men of the appropriate relationship categories. It also includes deference and respectful avoidance by not making eye contact, speaking in a hushed tone, avoiding producing loud laughter (in the presence of men). Hence sartorial veiling thus acts as a part of a larger complex of veiling (Abraham, 2018). However, according to Papanek (1982) the term purdah does not carry the same semantic content everywhere in South Asia and the local vocabularies have a variety of words to refer to different aspects of these complex behaviors, which is lumped together under the term purdah.

While discussing the regional differences in terminology of veiling, Roald (2001) assumes that that there is a likelihood that pre-Islamic term and non-religious sources of influence linked to certain forms of veiling has got embedded in the local Islamic expressions for veiling. Anna-Mari Almila (2020) noted that although the terminology associated with Muslim women's dress are adopted without any controversy, nevertheless depending on geographical, political, cultural, linguistic and ethnic context some would understand the term hijab to mean the headscarf, whereas others would understand it to mean the long overcoat which women frequently wear (Roald, 2001).

Noting the complexity in the meaning of veil, Daly notes that an understanding and meaning of head coverings worn is highly dependent on personal, social and cultural perspectives. Thus, the understanding of the term hijab carries no universal definition, and it's use, and content differs not only in various Arab countries but also within each country. The diversification Roald (2001) attributes to the varied understanding of what 'female Islamic covering' means in various parts of the Muslim world. Similarly, in the context of South Asian purdah societies, Sylvia Vatuk (1982) pose this huge question of what it means to be a 'woman' in a patriarchal society.

Guindi (2000) states that The Encyclopedia of Islam identifies over a hundred terms as pieces of clothing, many of which are used for covering of women's body. But in the western world, Muslim women's' clothing is denoted by the single word 'veil' which is inefficient to convey the intricacies of the practice involved in its observance. Hence, she regards the usage of the term veil as 'indiscriminate' 'monolithic' and 'ambiguous'. The terms hijab and veil are often used interchangeably, which according to Ruby (2006) is an error. She argues that the term hijab carries significant Islamic underpinnings of the wearer's behaviours and attitudes. Whereas the term veil does not carry any religious Islamic underpinnings and can be practiced by non-Muslim women. Fadwa El Guindi (2000) pointed to a Christian definition of the term veil that is not commonly recognized by Western literature where veil is defined as "seclusion from worldly life and sex (celibacy), as in the case of the life vows of nuns" (p. 6). The definition clarifies the real meaning of veil in Christianity, which exceeded the physical covering to include the whole life.

Shirazi (2000), notes that in the mainstream Islamic community, hijab is commonly perceived in two distinct ways: 1) covering worn by females as a religious duty stated in the Quran with its diverse interpretations in terms of fashion, and 2) as implemented or comprehended by Muslim females in diverse Islamic communities. Accordingly, one cannot claim a universal understanding of hijab valid for all time. In this context Guindi (2000) proposes that the understanding must be based on "what it reveals, what it conceals and what it communicates" (p. 9). According to Egyptian anthropologists Fadwa El Guindi (2000), hijab is a complex notion that has gradually developed a set of related meanings. She adds that when referring to women's dress the pertinent meaning combines sanctity, reserve and privacy.

In contemporary parlance, hijab is understood as the concealment of women's hair. Ruby (2006), Tarlo (2010), Siraj (2011) defined hijab as more than a headscarf. It represents modest clothing that covers the natural contours, appearances of the body and includes etiquette for men-women relations, regulate sexual desires between men and women and create public space organized around Islamic moral principles This has facilitated and encouraged modes of 'religiously informed modest dressing' for women from diverse religious background that goes beyond headscarf. Bucar (2017) refer to the process as 'pious fashion' because it captures several ethical and religious dimensions.

1.7.2 What is hijab and how it has to be observed - perspective from a divine decree and Prophetic tradition

Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah in her book chapter Women's Modesty in Quranic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse noted that, the term hijab in Quran appears seven times. The five times it describes the non-gendered contexts and deals with the mystical quality of physical or metaphorical screening between groups and categories. The metaphysical aspect of the usage of the word hijab in the Quran, Ruby notes have both positive and negative connotations, as both protection and as obstacle. She defines the term hijab as "a thing that prevents, hinders, debars, or precludes; a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or protects, because it prevents seeing, or beholding…a partition, a bar, a barrier, or an obstacle" (2006, p. 55).

Only on two occasions out of five of these occurrences do the term hijab is used in relation to women, though in neither case it refers to women's clothing. The first of these two is the chapter on 'Maryam' (Virgin Mary) and the hijab is described here as 'space of seclusion' and physical removal from worldly life. The second chapter on 'The Clans' and here hijab is described as a screen or a spatial separation between Prophet's wives and his companions as noted by Saher Amer (2014) in her comprehensive study on *What is Veiling*.

Amer (2014) notes that Verse 53 of chapter 33 is known as the 'verse of hijab' and is regarded as the earliest revelation on the issue of Islamic veiling. A number of traditions exist surrounding the circumstances resulting in the origin of the hijab verse. According to hadith report, which Goto (2004) regards as the widely recognized with reference to hijab and seclusion. The Hadith report says that some guests overstayed their visit after Prophet's wedding to Zaynab Bint Jahsh. The overstay of the inconsiderate guests delayed

the couple's privacy. To aid the polite Prophet who was unsure of how to ask the guest to depart, the verse of hijab (53) was revealed, then, and the prophet set a curtain between himself and Zaynab and his male companion Anas Ibn Malik who was there in their nuptial chamber. Fatima Mernissi (1991), Leila Ahmed (1992), and L. Clarke (2003) also agree with the occasion of the revelation of the above-mentioned verse.

However, the dropping of the curtain in the presence of two men and a woman, Bullock (2003) points out that this is the verse that many people use to justify women's face-veiling. Mernissi (1991) a Moroccon Muslim feminist believes that the dropping of curtain was actually to separate two men, while ignoring Zaynab in the room. Bullock in her book strongly disagrees with Mernissi's interpretation because when the Prophet separated himself and Zaynab from Anas with a curtain, Zaynab was also present in the room.

The significance of the verse can be understood from the fact that during the initial days of expansion of Islam, Guindi (2000) notes that the Prophet had hardly any division between his public and private sphere. The living quarters of his wives were in proximity to the mosque which functioned as a gathering place for the Prophet and his Companions. Many pious and immoral visitors used to visit Prophet's residence to seek guidance in matters on political, religious, and personal reasons. Some of these immoral visitors tell the commoners that they would marry wives of the Prophet after his death. So, in order to protect the familial privacy of the Prophet and to distinguish his wives from everyone else, the necessity of hijab was felt. Here, in a material sense, the term hijab meant a 'curtain' which aimed to guard and respect the privacy in Prophet's lives. Thus, taken in its historical context, hijab served as a general social education to his fellow companions in teaching them the proper ways of much needed decency such as seeking permission to enter and then a strict rule of segregation as of ask them from behind a curtain observing the sanctity of the prophet's place. This in turn aided the Prophet wives to protect their dignity and high status. Thus materially, hijab symbolized the division of space between public and private life for the Prophet whose essence lies in educating its followers the social etiquettes upon entering his house (Guindi, 2000). Ahmed (1992) notes that during the lifetime of Muhammad his wives were the first to be secluded and they were the only ones to be secluded. By instituting seclusion on his doorstep, Ahmed argues that Muhammad created a social distance between his wives and the commoners.

The extraordinary status of the wives of prophet is understood from the passages in Quran such as ‘you are not like any other women’, ‘not to be complacent in speech’, ‘to stay in the houses’, and ‘not to exhibit their finery like the day of ignorance’, ‘not to marry again after his death’ (Guindi, 2000). It is to be noted that the wives of the Prophet are being conferred the title “Mothers of the Believers” as they are considered exceptional among humankind. It is believed that before the verse on hijab was revealed, the women of the pre–Islamic Arab land were oblivious to the concept of bodily modesty. The women used to move freely and indulge in shameless and flirtatious talk with strangers. The wives of the Prophet, given their special status as Mothers of Believers, were commanded to observe the rulings so that they can set an example for the rest of the community to follow. The spatial verses of hijab, Ruby (2006) believes is originally intended as command for the interaction between Prophets wives and outsiders which in later times been applied to all believing women in their interaction with non-mahram. How this happened is not entirely clear although Ahmed (1992) thinks that a combination of factors such as the raised status of Arabs and the wives of the Prophet, increased wealth, and Muslim conquests of areas where veiling was common amongst the elite, all contributed to the adoption of the veil by the rest of the Muslim community.

Seclusion defies the logic of hijab. The logic of the hijab is its precise ability to allow any Muslim women to construct her private space. Guindi argues on the unique construction of Islam’s understanding of space. She says, “… It enables ordinary Muslims temporarily to convert any worldly space into a sacred space set apart, simply by marking and occupying it in a ritually pure state facing Makka” (2000, p. 77-78). Each time when Muslim prays and this phenomenon happens it can be argued that it also happens every time a Muslim woman wears hijab and steps into the outside world. If the Quranic intention was to prohibit women’s movement out of their homes, then ruling of covering (jilbab/hijab) would not have been accentuated. Although seclusion seems to have been divinely ordained but reasons like ‘urgent’, or on ‘good’ purpose to go out could reverse the rule as stated by Clarke (2003). Numerous exegetical traditional references have been highlighted by Goto (2004) which examines the concept of hijab in terms of seclusion and covering even outside home. Those traditions provide scant evidence that they were restricted in their movements or secluded in their residences.

1.7.2.1 Practices of Women's Head Covering in Traditions Other than Islam

Faegheh Shirazi in her book *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in modern culture* (2001) acknowledged that how little is known of the history and legacy of the ancient veiling practices. She informs that in the Assyrian, Greco-Roman, and Byzantine empires, veiling and seclusion were marks of prestige and symbols of status. Keddie (1991) writes, that the first known reference to veiling is there in an Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century B.C. Ahmed (1992) notes in ancient Mesopotamia, veiling was the sign of respectable, upper class, free women while slaves and prostitutes were not allowed to veil and were actually fined and punished if caught illegally veiling. The law categorizes the women into 'respectable' and 'unrespectable women'. Guindi (2000) argues that it is with the rise of Assyrian power that the ancient Mediterranean world witnessed a connection between women's veiling practices and social stratification. Before the Muslim conquest, same social and class representations existed in all the Mesopotamian Mediterranean cultures such as the Canaanites, ancient Greeks, and Romans (Amer, 2014).

Although academics opinion differs on whether veiling was a part of Judaism or not. According to Ahmed (1982) it was not, while Guindi (2000) provided biblical evidence to support the presence of facial veiling. In early Jewish societies, all women were required to dress modestly, cover the body from neck to knee, and expose only the face and hands. There were more restrictions on married women, as they were required to cover their hair in public as a sign of beauty and privacy (Guindi, 2000; Heath, 2008; Amer, 2014). Today in Israel, Haredi women cover their heads and bodies using a black veil, a burqa that is similar to Muslim women's veil, which makes it impossible to differentiate between a Heredi Jewish woman and a Muslim woman (Amer, 2014). In early Christianity, there were more restrictive attitudes towards women because women's hair was not allowed to appear in churches. The restrictions on hair covering are still a common practice in conservative Catholic communities and in some Protestant denominations today (ibid.).

Overtime, back-to-back annexations of the Mesopotamian region, Syria and other areas of the Middle East by Alexander, Parthians, Sasanians and eventually Muslims, led each culture to retained practices that both controlled and diminished women, and each of these cultures and religions also apparently borrowed the controlling practices from their neighboring cultures and countries. Leila Ahmed (1982) has made the argument that

although women wore hair coverings largely as a pre-Islamic cultural tradition, yet it was Islam which appropriated it and institutionalized it.

1.7.3 Elucidation of specific Quranic passages related to Female Dress Code

Although Quran has never treated the subject matter of hijab in the sphere of women's clothing, there are other Quranic verses that define the specific mode and terms of dress for Muslim females. These are the same verses that general Muslims and scholars refer too, to justify their use of hijab that is verse 33 of chapter 59, and verse 24: 30-31 (the khimar verse) As we will see below, both the verse puts covering of women's body in a wider context. In these verses there is a specific narration about clothing and public behavior; segregation and staying in the inner domain.

The verse 33:59 is known as 'mantle verse' as Stowasser (1994) notes the divine order of wearing jilbab for 'self-protection' was received in the time of civic tension and moral decadence in Arabia. In contrast to 33:53 (hijab verse) which deals with prophet's wives, Stowasser (1994) underlines that the verse 33:59 deals with all Muslim women and the focus is on female appearance outside the home, not their privacy or seclusion within. Goto (2004) noted how and in what way jilbab was worn remained open to interpretation. She referred to the work of various religious experts of that period who defined the term differently. Some have defined it as an 'outer garment' or a large cloth that is wrapped around the body from head to toe. Guindi (2000) defined it as a long loose shirtdress. Overall, Bucar (2012) in her book *Islamic Veil* notes that the scholars accept it as full body covering. These definitions and translations are followed by traditions explaining and offering contrasting opinions on how this garment was worn. Bucar (2012) calls into question that there is no way to tell for sure the appearance of the 7th century jilbab.

The verse 24:30-31is referred to as the verse on modesty. It deals with the conduct between men and women. Both men and women are ordered to cast their glances and guard their chastity in the greater interest of modesty. In case of women adding to the restraining of their gaze and guarding their chastity the verse also detailed on the dress code and ornamentation of women. Finally, the verse gives the list of the mahram male family members in whose presence hijab is not required, such as the women's husband, her father, father-in-law, her son(s), and others as listed in the verse. The content of the verse such as 'what makes up the category of ornament', 'what must be revealed and concealed' are not

specified. This has left enough room for discussion, and debates among religious exegetes. This gives the clue that there lacks specific meaning to the words contained in the verse as Amer (2014) notes that they are still being 'hotly debated'. Hajjaji-Jarrah believes that the reason the Quran did not define these terms is because their interpretations may vary in different social settings. By leaving them open to interpretation and application according to the different times is exactly what makes the Quran "valid for all nations, times and places" (p. 209).

According to Goto (2004) 'khimar' is a kind of veil whose use predates Islam. It has been defined as women's head-covering, for the head and neck, as well as a form of veil that covers the head and extends over the chest, abdomen, pelvis and back (Stowasser, 1994; Guindi, 2000; Jarrah 2003; Mahmood, 2005), In majority of the instances, khimar is established as a piece of head cover. It was worn commonly by women of all faiths and culture in the pre-Islamic era (Amer, 2014). Muhammad Asad in his translation of the Quranic Chapter An-Nur (The Light) noted that women's fashion in ancient Near East allowed khimar to be worn as an ornament as an 'ornamental shawl' over their head or neck and the wearer used to throw it behind their backs exposing ear, necks and cleavage (Guindi, 2000). Hence, Jarrah (2003) says that the divine saying that 'women should draw their khimar over their bosoms meant "they should bring their existing headscarves (which they were wearing atop their head, tied and tucked behind their back) over their bosoms to cover their chests that has been left open. This implies that when Quran was talking about covering for women, it was suggesting to use their existing clothing to cover their chest. Asad (1980, cited in Ruby, 2006) argues that Quran by issuing directives to cover the breast by khimar has made it clear that women's breast cannot be displayed and hence does not come under the concept of "what (must ordinarily) appear" of her body. The divine ordinance thus recommended a specific minor action on the part of the believing women that is to cover the upper part of their bosoms when they are in public (Jarrah, 2003). Guindi (2000) and Jarrah (2003) states that the two items of clothing - jilbab and khimar were not newly introduced by Islam. They already had been part of Arab dress and were very familiar with the contemporaries of Prophet. What Islam did it recommended them to use their existing usual clothing i.e., khimar and jilbab in a new way to cover their head and body, and hence by action 'attached specific and characteristic meaning to their use' (Guindi, 2000) the very least measure is to protect, distinguish, and maintain decency (Jarrah, 2003).

Delving into the hadith text and interpretation, Clarke (2003) in his extensive analysis on hijab argues that there does not seem like much hadith writings that are concerned with the female covering. In fact, hadith collections deal with the men's clothing such as instructing them to appropriately cover their private parts. The dress code of men should not be designed in a way to draw attention, and it should be loose, thick, should cover the area from the navel downward. Additionally, men are told to avoid wearing silk and gold. (Guindi, 2000). Although the Quran tells the believing women to cover their hair and chests, but the hadith is devoid of any mention or application of this instruction (Clarke, 2003). Mostly, the hadith tell the women to avoid flashy and clothing through which a woman's body can be seen. Since the hadiths talk about ambiguities in cases of female head or hair covering which according to Clarke (2003) suggests that women were already covering at the time and so there was no requirement to publish the obvious existing basic norms of the society. This assumption is also supported by the khimar's verse where women are told to pull their khimars to cover their chests. Important enough to note that the basic rule of bodily modesty and avoiding ostentatiousness in dress applies to men and women with the difference being in degree. Despite attaching the rules of dressing and behaving modestly for both the sexes, the burden of following modest dressing becomes the onus of women. The underlying assumption to this Clarke notes is rooted in the idea of 'women as fitnah' (2003, p. 251). While discussing numerous scholar's viewpoint Clarke noted that they associate the idea of fitnah with women's sexuality. The idea rests on the notion that women are symbol of passion and carnal temptation. By contrast men's sexuality is described as untamed and uncontrollable. In their writing, Clarke argues, that women as fitnah therefore is to be chiefly managed through hijab as covering. Clarke argues that injunction such as fitnah of women are a misogynist transmogrification of Quranic revelation because Quran used the word fitna on non-sexual contexts such as 'wealth and worldly attachments' and it never meant anything as sexual mischief. In same line, Roald (2001) argues that verses on covering came with the idea that men are the assailants and women is the victim which in the process of content translation got changed into women are the perpetrators and men are the victims. In the process, the Quranic emphasis on gender-neutral definition of modest behavior lost its significance (Clarke, 2003).

In the process of viewing women's beauty as tempting, what needs to be covered and what to be concealed, how the women should wear the dress to achieve this end, numerous

materials have been published by religious intellectuals. Roald (2001) notes that rather than a fixed form of dress there is a agreement that women should cover in one way or the other. Having said this she adds that across centuries there exist diverse opinions among the classical and contemporary scholars on the extent of Muslim women's covering. What is interesting in their interpretation is that they do not limit their writing to the concealment of bodily beauty with the exception made to exposure of face and hand. But in later period these writings also extended to covering of 'acquire' beauty- makeup, jewellery to domestic segregation (Clarke, 2003; Amer, 2014).

Thus, it seems, however clear the Quranic instructions on hijab might be, later Quranic commentaries tailored their interpretations according to the social forces of their times (Jarrah, 2003). Besides, from the literature on hijab, it is unclear how the word hijab spread throughout the modern Muslim world as a description of female Muslim clothing instead of two Quranic referred word khimar or jilbab. As a response to this, an assumption can be made which is that translations depend on the decisive culture, knowledge, background and intent of the person doing the translation (Roald, 2001, p. 128). Muslim Scholars and lay people from one cultural value system to another draws their understanding from the complexities of interpretation of these verses, argues of head and body covering for women, which nowadays popularly known as hijab. All these accounts explain that the 'descent of hijab' (Mernissi, 1991), hence, has several circumstantial episodes which according to Ahmed (1992) does not mean that they are all incorrect, rather… these "represents the kinds of the situations that were unacceptable to new Muslim eyes" (p. 54-55).

1.7.3.1 To cover or not to: Critical engagement on Muslim women's covering practices

Fatima Mernissi arguably heralded as the most prominent Muslim feminist whose book *Beyond the Veil and Male Elite*, discusses hijab from her personal experience. The Moroccan feminist explores the history of the word hijab and its original linguistic meanings by journeying back in time to the Prophet's community. By using Islamic scholarship, she arrives at the conclusion that hijab meant an architectural partition between the private and public spaces used by Prophet. During that historical time, nowhere it referred to women's headcovering. While exploring the Qur'anic instructions in Islamic commentaries and interpretations she believes that the hijab incorporated a

'three-dimensional' view linked to the time of the era of revelation and is therefore never meant to be practiced at a universal level after the death of the Prophet.

By exploring the different perspective of the term hijab, Mernissi (1991) investigates the ways the ways different sections of Islam have appropriated it. She acknowledges hijab as a 'vestige of a civil war' (Mernissi, 1991, p. 191) and a tradition of 'mediocrity and servility' (Mernissi, 1991, p. 194) in Islam because it reflects injustice of psychologically suppressing women, by dominating, controlling and maintaining them. She disagrees and criticizes Islamic patriarchal interpreters of the manual with regards to dressing of Muslim women and the male authority who enforces the wearing of the hijab on Muslim women. She states that to reduce or assimilate the Quranic concept of hijab to a scrap of veil that men have imposed on women when they go into the street is truly to impoverish and drain the term of its meaning. Similar to Mernissi's thoughts on hijab as 'tradition', Leila Ahmed's historical analysis on Islamic veiling (1992) believes that the obligation to veil applies only to the wives of the prophet as a device of distinguishing them from other women. Her analysis reveals that a range of veiling cultural practices exists before Islam came into contact with other foreign cultures.

By employing hermeneutical approach, Barlas, a Pakistani born American scholar contests the oppressive interpretations of the Quran. In her book, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (2019) she argues that the Quran has historically been read as a patriarchal text, not because of the actual content of the text but because of the contexts and methods of its readings. She highlighted the role of state interference in defining religion which has directly influenced the translation and the interpretation of the Quran by male scholars of Middle Ages. Calling herself as a 'believing woman', Barlas argues for an approach to focus on the actual divine content of the text and urges not to conflate with its oppressive exegesis.

Barlas (2019) while critically questioning the restrictive patriarchal reading into the Quran illustrated her understanding of the 'mantle verse' in her book *Believing Women in Islam*. According to what she believes, Quran while commanding Muslim women to draw their jilbabs over themselves, does not suggest anything about the women's body nor does it suggest that women ought to wear jilbab as protection from Muslim men, but rather from non-Muslim men. Historically, Nel (2002) noted that veiling signified "which women were untouchable as the property of the citizens, and which were freely available for sexual

play," (p. 59). According to Barlas, this indicates that non-Muslim men would not attempt to harm a covered woman, because she 'belongs' to another man and doing so would result him in receiving punishment. To her, mandate of wearing an outer cloak/mantle was the norm in a particular socio-historical setting, which is not necessarily relevant in contemporary times as there exists state laws for women's protection.

Furthermore, with respect to modesty verses 24:30 and 24:31 Barlas argumentation centres on both dressing and behaving modestly. Although she acknowledges the ambiguity of the verse, particularly related to the phrase 'what must ordinarily appear of', Barlas argues that the purpose of that ambiguity is to present a universal concept of modesty, rather than tapping all attention on women's dress. Like other scholars have argued, Barlas also believes that the veil/hijab is "more than an article of clothing because the verse focuses on action/behavior, (lowering of one's gaze).

Professor Amina Wadud, an internationally known American scholar of Islam and Quran exegesis, in her semi-autobiographical book *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006) does not consider or ascribe hijab to religious obligation, despite wearing it on herself. Moreover, she disagrees with the statement that hijab acts as a protection from unwanted sexual advances. Specifically drawing on the verse of garment of God-consciousness is the best of all garments (7:26), Wadud argues that hijab, a physical article of clothing, cannot be the ultimate signifier of modesty.

On the contrary, Katherine Bullock a convert to Islam and author of *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (2003) advocates a 'alternative' and 'positive' understanding of hijab. Bullock analyses and critically discusses the writings of Mernissi's two widely cited book *Beyond the Veil* and *The Veil and the Male Elite*. As a recent convert to the religion and a hijab wearer, Bullock believes that in order to put her own point of view forward, Mernissi's work ignores the voices of those women who choose to wear the hijab and by doing this Mernissi only reinscribes the colonist and Orientalist view of the 'passive veiled woman'. Although Mernissi is seen as holding an authoritative view on Muslim women nevertheless, much of her work is autobiographical and relates to her childhood memory. Where the heart of the issue is, her acceptance of the Moroccan cultural practices as 'true' normative practice of Islam. According to Bullock, Mernissi extends and equates her 'experience of veiling' with the

experience of the entire Muslim world. Mernissi's vision is reductive as it ignores the sociological complexity of covering', Bullock notes (2003, p. 180).

Anne Sofie Roald, a converted Muslim of Swedish origin and a historian of religion examines the Quranic instructions and their interpretations, and then explores some of the feminist discourse regarding the wearing of the hijab in the West today, in one of the chapter Islamic female dress of her book *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*. In particular, Roald looks at the incorrect interpretations and views of Mernissi and Ahmed. Roald expresses her concern with the way some 'Muslim feminists' contests the idea that the veil is Islamic and believe that it is 'an ancient tradition'. Roald explains how intentionally or unintentionally Mernissi has omitted to talk about the Quranic term khimar (veil) by entirely concentrating on the issue of hijab as segregation. This she calls Muslim feminist's 'strategy'.

Exploring and discussing in depth the Quranic words and verses used for understanding the concept of covering, Guindi talks about the utilisation of the term 'libas'. The term denotes not only material form of clothing and ornament for women and men, but also includes diverse forms of the veil and veiling. Moreover, it embodies an invisible, intangible realms of the sacred in which cultural ideas are relationally embedded. The symbolic nature of clothing, Guindi says lies in the Islamic construction of dress as material connotation as it links the notions of "gender, sexuality, sanctuary and sacred privacy" metaphorically (p. 69-74).

While doing ethnographic historical research on veiling practices across different civilizations she brings reader's attention as to how the word hijab conveys the notions of sacred separation and seclusion 'between two worlds or two spaces' rather than being an instruction on women to cover. She explains that that at a much later date in history the word hijab was attributed to the head covering of a Muslim. At the time of revelations, the idea of the hijab was present, but it was different in meaning from the contemporary understanding of hijab as women's headcover.

Huda Khattab, a British born female author (1996) outlines the instructions on female covering. According to her, the way a Muslim woman acts is just as important as the way she dresses. She proposes two distinct meanings of hijab: the external hijab and the internal hijab. While exploring her understanding of external hijab (what the woman should be

wearing), she says women can wear any dress as long as it complies with the Quranic instructions. However, she then explains how it should look like – it should not like those of non-Muslims. For example, when a Muslim women wear western clothes, which should be thick, loose and not revealing or tight, they should always wear a head covering for easy identification from any other religion or Western women. Moreover, if a woman wishes to wear trousers, it should be of a design made for women. This highlights that they must not imitate the looks of opposite gender either. Furthermore, Khattab explains that the dress should not be woven with valuable threads or have gems attached as it would reflect the wearer's wealth. As for internal hijab, Khattab describes it as attitude and behaviour and relates this to the wearing of the external hijab. To her, if a woman achieves success in her internal hijab, then as a consequence the external hijab will be put on as an outward show of her Muslim identity.

1.7.4 Empirical works

However, even though Muslim women throughout the world are recognized by their hijab, Heath (2008) states that "not all people who veil are Muslims, nor do all Muslims veil" (p. 6). Within the Muslim as well as larger mainstream society, it means different things to different people. Furthermore, their decision to adoption of veil is shaped by their minority and majority position with differences in power relations (Read & Bartkowski 2000; Bullock, 2003; Droogsma, 2007; Williams &Vashi 2007; Rumaney & Sriram, 2023). In what follows, the researcher will discuss the literature regarding Muslim women who wear the hijab.

Muslim women wear the hijab primarily to carve out a cultural space for themselves, and to negotiate the conflicting cultural values between their faith and their country. In essence, they are creating what Williams and Vashi call 'practical dimensions of an American Islam' (2007). And for some women, their Muslim identity overrides all other identities and is sometimes more important than their ethnic identity (Droogsma, 2007; Furseth, 2011).

Commonly defined as a headscarf, hijab covers the hair, neck, ears and shoulders, leaving the face uncovered. Studies on Muslim women have found that they believe covering one's body is *farz* (religious obligation). Fulfilling which acts as a symbol of religious devotion (Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Bullock, 2003; Ali, 2005; Willams & Vashi, 2007; Gurbuz & Gurbuz- Kucuksari, 2009; Furseth, 2011; Riffat, Jannat et.al., 2021). As noted earlier, it

has been prescribed in religious doctrine as the Islamic standard of modesty that women are expected to observe. Aside from the head covering, the standard of dress code also includes obfuscating the bodyshape with loose clothing, specifically in the presence of any non-mahram men, which is any men outside of the woman's immediate family. However, across various Muslim and non-Muslim countries the loose dress comes in various forms and is subject to regional traditions, tailored according to latest fashions, which gives hijabis - the colloquial term of hijab-wearers - the freedom to express their aesthetic sense while remaining within the bounds of what is accepted in Islam (Al-Kazi & Gonzalez, 2018).

Contrary to popular belief that Muslim women are forced into wearing the hijab, empirical work finds that the majority of the women are proud to wear the hijab, they have adopted it out of their own free choice and will, and there is no one forcing them to dress in a certain way. Moreover, many of them rely on legitimate understanding of Islam derived from religious organizations and associations as opposed to their assimilative nature of parents and their 'teflon constructions of Islam' (Brenner, 1996; Ali, 2005; Williams & Vashi, 2007; Furseth, 2011). In fact, studies have reported that most Muslim women took up the hijab against the wishes of their families who often think it is not required for them to veil and see the hijab as a backward step in a forward civilization, as opposed to the common notion that they are forced into wearing it (Read & Bartkowski 2000; Bullock, 2003; Ali, 2005; Williams & Vashi, 2007; Furseth, 2011).

Hijab has been defined as a significant 'cultural practice' because of the symbolic role it plays in distinguishing Muslims in secular countries where the hijab is not the cultural 'norm' (Al-Kazi & Gonzalez, 2018). Read & Bartkowski (2000, p. 397) has argued that the meanings attributed to the hijab are not intrinsic to the veil itself, but rather produced through cultural discourse and social practices that are circulated and reinforced through social networks. They also employed their 'theories of discourse' to argue that cultural symbols, such as the hijab, can be interpreted in different ways by people within the same society, often making a "site of struggle and contestation".

Views on the veil have also been found to vary from Muslim minority to Muslim majority positions. Wagner et al., (2012) compared the views of Indonesian Muslim women with that of Indian Muslim women. In Indonesia reasons for veiling include convenience, fashion and modesty with little to no reference on religion. On the contrary, reasons given

by Indian women for veiling include religious reasons, convenience, opposition to stereotypes and discrimination, and a means for asserting their cultural identity. The responses received from both the countries question the classic dominant view of seeing the veil as a symbol of religious fundamentalism and oppression.

In the 1970's, the Middle East saw the resurgence of the veil, which took on new meanings and new styles. Leila Ahmed in her book *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America (2011)* provides a comprehensive analysis of the new veiling with particular focus on Egypt and the USA. Ahmed (2011) notes that Egypt was the first 'country in which the new hijab and Islamic dress appeared'. She describes how a marginal 'campus phenomenon' of her home country (p. 83) has assumed a 'quiet revolution' in the soil of Muslim as well as non-Muslim societies such as America through [immigration] of people and ideas. In her book, she reviews the historical influences that resulted in unveiling and re-veiling in Egypt, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) more generally, as well as women's personal motivations for veiling during the 1970s and 1980s in Egypt. Within the contemporary US context Ahmed traces the establishment of two major Islamist organizations the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), from the 1960s through the 1980s. The development of these activist associations not only happened through network of immigrant Muslims but also through international connections between Islamists and through Afro-American Muslims. She also tells the dominant themes and elements in media and American foreign policies towards Islam and Muslim women and the increasingly hostile environment that the post 9/11 has generated for American Muslims. Furthermore, based on her observation and participation in the annual conventions through the ensuing years she also discusses the impact of 9/11 on Muslim American organizations, particularly ISNA and its women member. While concluding her book, she poignantly remarks that "it is after all Islamists and the children of Islamist—the very people whose presence in this country had initially alarmed me—who were now in the vanguard of those who were most fully and rapidly assimilating into the distinctively American tradition of activism in pursuit of justice…and women's rights in Islam" (p. 303). Ahmed considers this development as the first stirrings of a new era in the history of Islam in the West.

Fadwa El Guindi's 1981 article Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement examines the new veiling in Egypt during the 1970s and 1980s. In her

book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance* (2000) she elaborates the revival of Islam and the new veiling, tracing the grassroots movement that later became 'organized' Islamism. She also argues that contemporary veiling, starting from the 1970s, is about resistance, authenticity, and identity as opposed to more traditionally understood and strict notions of piety. The 1967 Six Day War left Egyptians, and much of the Arab world, humiliated. Believers interpreted the loss as "God's will to punish Egypt for the increasing decline in people's morals" (Guindi, 2000, p. 131) In this context, a religious revival of intense Islamic consciousness arose among all sectors of Muslim society and hijab was revived. The movement also sprang from changes in social and economic reform policy in Egypt and in many other places in the Middle East. The economic reform policy was accompanied by westernization, materialism, and consumerism whose unintended moral consequences were social disintegration (Guindi, 1981).

The Islamic Revival movement came face-to-face with such modernizing social changes and its effects. Islamic Revival was an overwhelmingly voluntary, grassroots youth movement characterized by non-interference of the state. The movement spread in Arab cities, through college campuses connections. Though unrelated by blood, Islamic Revivalists addressed each other as 'brother' and 'sister'. Membership in these communities was characterized by informality. Once a person reached *iqtina* (inner spiritual conviction), this person became a member of the community (Guindi, 2000). College students, as a member of this spiritual community, adhered to certain rituals and prescriptions through modest dress and behavior and they became exemplars to emulate. Hence, they differed from the urban population who wore western dress. Interaction between the sexes on co-ed university campuses was marked and guided by Islamic values of reserve and austerity, almost ritualized (Guindi, 2000).

The specific styles of acceptable dress came to be called *al-ziyy al Islami* (the Islamic dress) which became a transnational dress code shared by both men and women of the informal movement (Guindi, 2000). These new styles were new and innovative as they reflect "neither the traditional dress of Egypt nor the dress of any other part of the Arab world or the West, though they often combined features of all three" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 220). Soon women called themselves 'covered women' as they replaced their western outfits of colorful and silky skirts and blouses with long, loosefitting dresses and headscarves (Macleod, 1991). The steps involved in the degree of coverage in Islamic

clothing became associated with the degree of "belief, conviction, religious research and Islamic knowledge" (Guindi, 1981, p. 475). More importantly, through their symbols and rituals, they expressed egalitarianism and sexual segregation, the two fundamental features of Muslim ethics. In addition, this served as a way to mediate the public space that had to be shared by the sexes due to modernizing social and economic changes. Their beliefs and behavior (including dress) provided a welcome resistance to the established status quo in modernized Arab states. This resurgence of allegiance to traditional Islamic values and behavior expressed 'alternative', 'oppositional Islam' against both the state and the religious establishment (Macleod, 1991).

The ethnographic work *Accommodating Protest* (1991), by political scientist Arlene MacLeod, states that during moments of rapid modernization and economic change, traditional symbols, customs, images, and behavior form an important countertrend. Her work helps us to understand the Egypt's new veiling in the context of a new economic social class. The 1960s brought many economic reforms to Egypt in the sectors of education and employment and women from lower-middle-class families reaped the benefits of it. They were the first to receive education, hence they were the first in their families to step outside their safe and protected home spaces to work in government and clerical jobs. During this time, most women of lower-middle class families began to veil as a matter of decision at the intersection of work-family dilemma. For Cairene lower-middle-class women, the reason for wearing the veil was not embedded in larger political or transnational resistance movements but in immediate relationships and their 'trivial' 'confused' lived experience with it. Veiling was tied more to their traditional gendered roles as wives and mothers in families than to the larger expression of oppositional anti-western feelings or nationalism. In the face of modern identity as 'working women' in which their value and respect as mothers and wives were being replaced, appropriation of the veil played a more practical and instrumental role in their lives. It expressed the tensions these women felt between their traditional and their modern identities, and thus acted as symbolic reconciliation by creating a new identity: the covered working woman.

Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) provides an ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement that is part of the larger Islamic Revival in Cairo. Unlike the Islamic revival and Islamist movements that made its appearance before, the piety movement did not challenge, nor it confront the

secular nature of the political state. It was less concerned with resistance and authenticity that characterizes the veiling movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The movement aimed to provide a solution to the problem of an increasingly secularizing society. The mosque movement in which women were receiving religious lessons also known as *dawa* not only instructed the women on how to carry out religious duties and worship but more importantly it educates them on how to conduct and organize their daily lives in accordance with Islamic piety and virtuous behaviour so as to realize the ideal virtuous self. Thus, the mosque movement incorporated various spheres of life with religious ethos and values rather than modern secular ethics. Mahmood critiques contemporary studies on Muslim women's veil which tend to explain the reasons of Muslim women's adoption of hijab within a 'model of sociological causality' (Mahmood, 2005). She proposed the academics to include religion-oriented categories like morality, divinity and virtue although such approaches are incomprehensible in secular understanding. However, critical to the way Muslim women frequently frame their explanation within these religion-oriented terms, such categories are especially relevant.

According to Mahmood (2005), among these Egyptian Muslim women, there is a consensus that female modesty is important and an 'Islamic virtue'. In the Islamic belief system, privacy, humility, piety, moderation, and modesty are considered as cornerstones (Guindi, 2000). Modesty is viewed within Muslim communities as a necessity for achieving a certain status of piety. Muslims of this mosque movement draw a link between virtue of modesty, and the physical form it often takes, the veil. In doing so, veil and the veiled body, a display of religious sociability, Mahmood (2005) argues is only one of the many palpable practices of this piety movement through which the virtue of modesty is created and expressed.

Mahmood (2005) presents the idea of 'exteriority as a means to interiority'. Drawing on the Aristotelian model, Mahmood concludes that moral virtues, of which modesty is one, "are acquired through a coordination of outward behaviours with inward dispositions through the repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 136). In other words, the external performative act of wearing hijab transforms inward temperament and thought. Thus, not only the veil expresses the self's interiority but is the means by which it is acquired (Mahmood, 2005, p. 160). Hence the focus of the effort lies in proper enactment of movements, behaviours, gestures through which the

proper, ideal Muslim subjects become. Hijab, one outward performative behaviour of modesty, when worn consistently, serves as the means through which Muslim women can internalize modesty. Like the Egyptian Muslims of Mahmood's study who utilize their body as active terrain through which they perform their moral self-work, Winchester's (2008) Missouri converts produce new moral ethical selves through embodied religious practices.

Bullock (2003) highlighted three different approaches to the study of veil and veiled Muslim women. These are pop cultural view, liberal feminists and contextual approach. In her book, she traces the reasons for contemporary attacks on the veil back to the era of modern colonialism when the 'priority is given to looking'. The veiled Muslim women violate this requirement of the world-as-exhibition and reverses the power relations between superior Europeans and inferior Middle eastern. While highlighting Canadian hijabi Muslim women's voices about the hijab, Bullock (2003) demonstrated the discrimination that many veiled Muslim women experience in Toronto 'based upon the way they dress and that the public perception see Islam as 'promoting violence'. She laments over the fact that 'Muslim women's voices are still not heard' stating that the intention of her book is to allow the voices of some 'Muslim Canadian women who cover' to be heard.

The book *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (2010) contextualise Muslim dress practices in Britain that is undergoing major transformations, and which reflect issues of faithful identity, belonging, politics, ethics and aesthetics. Through an ethnographer's eyes Emma Tarlo (2010) discusses the high-level trans cultural experiences of different diasporic Muslim women whose lives are characterized by identification of what the clothes mean to them and what impact can their dress has on their engagement with public space. Tarlo demonstrates that for these diasporic Muslim women, dressing as a Muslim is a dynamic, experimental process which is carried out through the medium of colour, pattern, and fabric. This involves the 'complicated' negotiation of fashion and faith, thus preserving aspects of one's Muslim self, and the cultivation of a transnational Islamic sensibilities. At the same time, the dressing biographies of these women contend with the static perceptions of black, shapeless Muslim dress shared by many non-Muslim members of British society, through tapping into their sartorial 'performative' experimentation, they deliberately seek to manage and subvert the reductionist gaze of others who try to put them

down. In her book, Tarlo also touched upon dress politics - jilbab controversy and niqaab related encounters. The former involved school uniform and radical activist ideology and the latter involved a series of actors- radical, conservative and right-wing leaders and the thread of their theological and conceptual conversation – disagreements and dialogue both online and offline. She also explores websites of fashion designers, retailers and their contribution in bringing consumers to new global religious fashion scape which transcends ethnic distinctions.

Elizabeth's Bucar *Pious Fashion* (2017) is a comparative study of modest clothing practices of three major Islamic fashion capitals- Tehran, Yogyakarta and Istanbul. Exploring the complexities of Muslim women's sartorial practices - their decisions surrounding whether and how to cover, and the context in which those decisions are made. She notes, Islam may be an important factor in what Muslim women choose to wear, but it is not all in all. Because women negotiate a variety of aesthetic, moral and political pressures while participating in consumer culture. For example, Tehran's (Iran) government mandates hijab and it enforces this law through various agents and tactics such as through 'visual pedagogy'. Conversely in Indonesia jilbab is a new phenomenon and the state apparatus does not enforce it. Here it is more of a mainstream style which many views it as sign of cosmopolitanism. The case of Turkey is fraught with dress restrictions by state government at different moments of history. Under Kemal Atatürk's first presidentship rule headscarves was viewed as ugly and backward and urban women refrain from hair-covering but dressed modestly, as a sign of professionalism rather than piety. In rural areas, women wore başörtüsü, a loose scarf knotted under the chin and was ridiculed by the ruling power for embodying the 'wrong' kind of Islamic identity.

In *Veiling in Fashion: Space and the Hijab in minority communities* Anna-Mari Almila explores the "mundane everyday fashions and dress practices" (p. 2) amongst Finnish Muslim women with different class, ethnic, age and sect background. Drawing on two theoretical frameworks – Lefebvre's understanding of space and Bourdieu's understanding of capital and habitus the book weaves together individual experiences in diverse spaces. Almila discusses the movement of veiled body through different kinds of social and physical spaces concentrating on the idea of comfort and discomfort in its broadest sense- physical, religious and social sense. Furthermore, she demonstrates dress adaptions in multilayered spaces- mosques, schools, work and leisure spaces which operates on the

formulation of inclusion and exclusion while shaping the Muslim community. She does a remarkable job by highlighting public, private spaces and in 'in-between' space which can have a direct impact on the degree and flexibility of performance of veiling (relaxed or strict veiling). In addition, she also provides a concise examination of the consumption, production, distribution, mediation and production of fashion as part of the global Islamic and EuroAmerican fashion system.

In South Asia/Global South, the term *purdah* is often used more or less in a similar context, to signify relationship between dress, self and other, though it is not restricted to Muslim women. Jasbir Jain (2008), enumerates various local terms that refer either, symbolically or synonymously to the South Asia Purdah system. These include, *ghunghat* (a veil pulled over the face), *odhni* (a head scarf that is used for the *ghunghat*), *chunri*, and *chadri* (sheet, mantle, cloak) to name a few (Jain, 2008, p. 231). Jain identifies the framework of masculinity and femininity within the purdah system whose overriding social concern links with women's purity. It functions as a social controlling mechanism as according to her, the idea of family honour, and its purity of lineage are linked with the bodies of women. In making women as [male] honour of the family, the purdah system uses the psychological mechanism that of women's 'shame' to restrain the human impulse. 'Unsheltered women' in the purdah observing social settings are assumed to be lacking in modesty and shame (Papanek, 1973). In this context, Papanek's symbolic shelter explains complementary and asymmetrical relations between the sexes. The segregation of the sexes as per symbolic shelter implies that women, who are vulnerable, need to be protected from the real dangers which exist in the aggressive world as well as against the strong impulses such as sexual desire. Individuals, according to symbolic shelter paradigm, are not viewed as 'autonomous' individuals rather their sheltered self is in reference to asymmetry, dominance and dependency to their social context (ibid.).

David G. Mandelbaum (1988) introduced the term 'purdah zone', to refer to areas of Pakistan and Bangladesh plus the Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, together with adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh, Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh. In these places extensive purdah practices are practised in social life. He observes that observance of purdah in the 'purdah regions' is so ordinary, frequent that it is a reflex action which is taken-for-granted and 'scarcely noticed' by those who observe it (p. 3). Within the sub-continental region, Mandelbaum writes elaborately on the reciprocal

relationship of purdah-izzat duo as manifested in gender relations. This is further complimented by dwelling, that is separating out the women's space from the sphere of men.

Mandelbaum studies, among Hindus and Muslims the distinct relational performances that purdah functions. Among Hindus, purdah is observed to avoid the 'separatist tendencies' (1988). The arrival of daughter-in-law is viewed as arrival of strangers who has the potential to cause disruption in the domestic space thus causing danger to family's 'unity and honour' from within. Among Muslims, it is to protect family's honour from world of mistrustful strangers. Ursula Sharma (1978) in her study on the *'ghungat nikalna'* practice amongst women of Ghanyari village argue that the use of 'ghungat' is more than household organization or to control women's sexuality. The practice of 'ghungat' constitutes village exogamy which stresses that her relation to and status in the village is defined through her husband.

Regarding the justification for strongly use of purdah, Mandelbaum (1988) notes that among Muslims they associate purdah as ordained in the Quran while for Hindus, it is a matter of family and caste-group, and religion is not an integral part of its observance. Equally interesting is the 'time' the practices start in these two differentiated contexts. For Muslim, Purdah [seclusion] practices begin at puberty whereas Hindu seclusion commences after marriage (Papanek, 1973).

Keeping Muslim women in seclusion, Jeffery (1979) argues is a matter of 'luxury' a status symbol and is not a rural phenomenon, yet which only the relatively wealthy can afford to indulge themselves. Both Jeffery (1979) and Mandelbaum (1988) points out, a close link between purdah and prosperity. Mandelbaum (1988) argues that purdah rules are followed by only those families who can 'afford' to seclude their women while the ones who have to worry about the 'daily food', their women often do not observe purdah, because it involves 'expenses' which the poor is unable to meet. However, in a hierarchized society a common feature is the emulation of the rich by the less wealthy; and to this day, in India, purdah is widely associated with respectability and family honour. Purdah is part and parcel of stratification in India (Jeffery, 1979).

The seclusion observed through purdah and the asymmetry in power relationship does not necessarily imply deprivation of women's agency. Jeffery (1979) in her ethnographic study

of the pirzada in India suggests that the secluded women are active agents within the domestic sphere. They render considerable influence and power within areas of marriage, motherhood and seniority. Her study reflects on internalization of purdah and purdah as a habit of the wearers. She calls purdah a 'negotiated privilege' (p. 171). Because their elite pedigree (*Syed*) legitimates their separation from non-*Syed* or non-*pirzada* at the same time it also shelters them from harsh economic brutalities of life. Among Muslim women, Purdah is an ambiguous practice, a practice which is both abhorrent, yet attractive, both deprivation and privilege.

Hanna Papanek (1973) studies purdah as division of labour which operates at two levels which she calls 'separate worlds' and 'symbolic shelter'. Separate worlds refer to the division of actual work allocated to the segregated sexes. As the name suggests, the two worlds are separated sharply, yet the separation is accompanied by mutual dependence between men and women. The separation is based upon the beliefs on human nature and is guided by the rules about utilization of the space: the public spaces allocated to the men while the private sphere of home, housework and childcare to women. This prohibits their access to work outside. More so, this reflects the moral importance attached to the idea of space (Jennings et.al., 2022). Jennings et.al., (2022) in the context of Bangladesh lower income families emphasised that women manage their movements in specific ways while successfully reaping the benefits of increasing employment opportunities in garment sector. While engaging in different forms of work they are governed by strict purdah rules which continues to play out through the gendered social and moral meanings attached to where women go and what they do. In this, their choice of work is determined by the kind of places they occupy because of moral associations with spaces. In this light, Jennings warns about the maintenance of socially acceptable identities in their work, at the same time adapting and bending these rules according to their needs.

The Hijab: Islam, Women and the Politics of clothing is a collection of essays and is the first of this kind after the hijab ban in Karnataka (Arafath & Arunima, 2022). Apparently, the collections argues that the 'local' ban needs to be read keeping the Indian context of [violent] socio-political turbulent times. The edited volume spans between political to personal and while distancing from predictable interpretations such as religious and sexual oppression it complicates the relationship between Muslim women and the hijab. In the wake of the hijab protests and the subsequent ban, Saba Hussain (2023) engages with

textual and video interviews of Muslim girls (in Hindi and English) in popular media as an instance of Muslim girls 'voice performance' of their political agency in the shadow of hegemonic narratives. In this context she argued that the "feminist counter-authoritarian political agency of Muslim girls is tied to their lived experiences of loss and fear, the re/designification of hijab and their commitment to constitutional values" (p. 7).

'Not without my hijab' (2023) is a phenomenological study in the context of Mumbai which highlighted the different level of processes that influences in the practice of hijab. The study observes that their loyalty to the country is being questioned in which they can prove their integration with the nation by eschewing their overt identification. Saba Hussain's (2019) work on school-going Muslim girls of Assam's Nagaon district examines the different subjectivities conferred to them by three significant actors: government educational policies, teachers and parents. At the level of key educational policies and teacher as one of its stakeholders, Hussain highlights teacher's viewpoint on Muslim minorities as visibly religious, oppressed and lacks in merit. Added to this, Hussain addresses teacher's ethnic biases wherein 'middle class Hindu-Assamese identity' as normal contrary to Bengali-speaking Muslim student. The teacher's biases reside on the Muslim girl's appearance, poor living conditions, and perceived linguistic deficit, rendering them incapable of being educated in the eyes of the teachers. Moreover, Hussain highlights parent's commitment to girls education is committed to certain forms of femininity such as *bhal suwali* that allows performance of good girlhood 'through respectable negotiation of poverty, prioritisation of gendered discipline over academic achievements and merging of career aspirations with marital prospects'. The implication of these conferred subjectivities on Muslim girls, Hussain argues is that they result in resilience which they do so by reconstructing aspired new identities: 'Good (Indian) Muslim self', 'the proud Miyah self', 'decently modern self' and 'aspirational victim self'.

Tabassum Ruhi Khan's (2015) book Beyond Hybridity and Fundamentalism: Emerging Muslim Identity in Globalized India is an ethnographic study of Indian Muslim youths of Delhi's Jamia Nagar. The author introduces the concept of 'convoluted modernity' which she defines as "one step forward and two-step backward processes of transformation" (p. 41) In order to substantiate her proposition, she highlights contradictory elements evident in the everyday life of her studied youth such as they watch MTV channel along with, they watch one televangelist persona who appears in Peace TV, an Islamic channel. This

intersection scenario created by media technologies presents them with multiple subjective positions and what is most important about this new dynamism is the shifts in the practices and symbolism that have occurred among the Muslim youths of contemporary generations. Religious identity, the author argues thus becomes not a 'resurrection of inherited and undermined past' but is located in 'new circuits of communication, travel and exposure' and is connected to global Islam through satellite television and internet. Standing in contrast to their forefathers who are characterized by narratives of 'segregation' and 'provinciality' the younger generations experience with the mediated discourses have impinged their aspirations, dreams and life choices in a manner that have diluted the stereotypes of 'stuck-in-time', 'inward-looking'.

Examining what is said in the scholarship of East and West, it becomes evident that this is a piece of article which is highly differentiated in symbol and use, with elaborate terminology and shifting meanings across region, religion and culture. Building on these highly cited scholarly works within their respective fields for their work on Muslim women, this thesis is a timely intervention in the Indian context where Muslim women are discussed mostly in terms of 'political subject' rather than a subject matter of 'how they feel' experience.

1.8 Research Methodology and Methods

To explore and understand hijabis experience residing in Karimganj, the research employs qualitative approach. The research employed the snowball sampling technique, where participants gave the researcher the names of other potential participants, whom they knew would like to participate, who may then provide the names of others. This was followed by a search for participants through colleges and family networks who agreed to take part in this research. The sample consisted of middle-class Muslim women, who follows the Hanafi school of thought, self-define themselves as 'practicing' and 'visible' Muslims and belong to Sunni sect. The homogenous nature of class and their actual observance of religious identification is apparent due to the adoption of snowball technique. Indeed, it is essential to recognise that though, the research participants share similar ethnicity, and religious background, the researcher found that interpretations of the religious practices varied considerably depending on the interpreter's general understanding of Islam, his/her educational background, personality, and cultural and social affiliations (Roald, 2001).

The research area is Karimganj district (recently renamed as Sribhumi district by the Government of Assam). And empirical data is gathered from three settings, that is, two college campuses and participants home. The Muslim population makes up the majority in Karimganj district. The participants are born and brought up in Karimganj district and they are all located in and around the Karimganj area. Most of the participants are owner-occupiers of their home, with the exception of three participants where one lived in rented accommodation (as paying guest) and the other two in rented apartments. In general, many of the participants resided in prosperous areas: Settlement, Maizdhi, Mubarakpur, Kanishail with some living in less prosperous areas like Nilambazar, Asimganj, Kaliganj, Latu, and Fakirabazar.

A total of 40 Muslim females, aged between 18-50 years took part in the research process. Included in the age group are the participants and their mothers. Mothers were chosen to interview because familial context influences religious faith and practice, and therefore, it is necessary to undertake them in cognizance in local settings. Besides, generational age allows opportunity to obtain opinions and capture experiences from women of different stages. Among the 40 participants, 30 are college students who were unmarried during the time of interview. The age bracket of college students was from 18-24 years. The researcher chose this age bracket because this was the group who are wearing hijab. In addition to being college students they are, therefore, more exposed to modernization and its effects. In addition, this age group are heavily willing to share their dress and overall transformative experience at length. Within the specified age group, majority of them wear the hijab and a minority of their friends do not (in the beginning of the interview). Without this combination it would not have been possible to identify if any changes in interaction took place.

The rest 10 participants are their maternal figures whose ages fall between 45-50 years of age. Of these 10 women, one is widow. The educational level of the participants mother was with the exception of four women who have a bachelor's degree, five studied till higher secondary level and one remained illiterate. Of these 10 women, only two women are working women -one works as a teacher and the other works in Block office and rest are homemakers.

The interviews are conducted in English and Bengali, as per each participants' preference. At the request of all participants, interviews and FGD took place at their homes, where

doors were closed to keep all disturbances to a minimum so that the interview went undisturbed. Welcoming the researcher into their private setting was particularly significant in terms of the *'didi'* relationship and not as guest which the researcher was able to form. Within the privacy of their own home, participants freely shared their personal experiences.

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher was diligent about ensuring that none of the information provided by the younger subjects was shared with their maternal figures and vice versa. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. The research participants self-consciously have assigned themselves new names based on their most-liked soap operas' performers to protect their identity. Participants were assured that anonymity would be observed. As the research findings is to be written up and uploaded as a doctoral thesis the women were promised that their identities and the photographs would be blurred. Besides, the designation, department and name of the teachers are nowhere mentioned in the work due to their 'official status'. The name of the colleges in which they are enrolled has not been mentioned in any of the thesis chapters.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, participant observation, followed by four focus group discussion combining young participants and their mothers. The interviews began with familiarizing the participants with the nature of the study. Snippets of the interview questions were read out to them based around intergenerational transmission of religious teachings – the role of religion in their childhood period, how their views and beliefs around religion and their understanding of women's dress/modesty in religious text have evolved over time, the role of culture in shaping their ideas about 'appropriate' female dress, important life transition periods, or social changes which might have spurred their journey to start wearing the hijab. They were also asked to reflect upon the ways in which the hijab regulated social relations between the sexes in the private and public world, their navigation of college life situations.

To gather data for this research, interviews were carried in the time frame between October 2020 and continued till March 2023 followed by short visits. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in its different mutated variations at different times and related restrictions with it, data collection during these periods got extended at various intervals.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with younger participants to access and explore their perspective which could not have been possible in mere observation. The interview questions were mostly open-ended. The interaction was more like a dialogue which allowed the women to describe their experience, feeling and action as freely and as precisely as possible. Starting with straightforward questions about education and their socio-demographic features put participants more at ease and build up their confidence. Once the ice is broken between the researcher and participants, the researcher moved on to interview questions of the particular subject area.

Since the questions are open-ended, it allowed when needed for impromptu flexibility and prompting such as what do you mean? Tell me more about that. This approach allowed the researcher to ask certain questions which provided the participants to delve, clarify or formulate their responses more thoroughly. Some women provided detail on their experiences and sometimes they provide answers to questions which the researcher was going to ask them later. Other women provided less detailed answers and gave more detail when the researcher asked follow-up questions. Individual interviews generated rich data as it was more personal in nature. The young hijabi participants feel more at ease talking about personal aspects of their lives which they would have hesitate in revealing in FGD.

Once the researcher completed one-on-one interviews she ran the focus group discussion. By getting the mother and daughter together, the FGD facilitated the researcher to observe age dynamics conversation of their experience of the social world by contextualising their personal experiences within specific social, cultural and historical events. This enabled her to cross-analyze and corroborate details across interviews. Having two generation of young women and their maternal figures also allowed the researcher to dive deeper into their relationship with each other and identify any hierarchical knowledge relations, which is essential for understanding the extent of the younger women's vision of their understanding of themselves in relation to their families and norms ascribed to them by the broader society. This intergenerational approach also allowed the researcher to observe events 'inside out' and how the social structures and constraints that shaped their mother's beliefs and gendered actions changed over time and consequently resulted in contrasting and negotiated experiences in the spaces of education, family and self.

As maternal figures and their daughters had been involved in the FGD set up, the researcher was aware that this method of setting would likely influence the response or

behaviour of the young women once the interviews proceeds. The researcher found that few young participants speak less or remain silent in the focus group discussion and that they generally shared less personal information in the group setting. Consensus view arising out of the elderly women's responses obscured the young participants responses. For example, in certain family settings the young participants were extremely formal in their speech and behaviour. To eliminate this danger, once the mothers left for household chores, the researcher reiterated to them that the responses gathered from research are confidential and would not be heard by anyone else other than the researcher. On the other hand, many of the young women got opportunity to listen to their mother's closer to life experiential learning related to larger issues of being a Muslim girl going to outside world. FGD revealed that contradiction exists between what the young hijabi participants shared and how they generally behaved in outer and inner settings. Kvale claims that because we exist in a conversational circle, our understanding of the human world depends on conversation and our understanding of conversation is based on our understanding of the human world. (Kvale, 1996, p. 296)

Researcher's initial entry into the college and verification of her research work 'as valuable' was carried out by a gatekeeper. At this point, it was the senior college professors under whom the researcher studied during her senior secondary days. They vouched for the researcher and helped her in locating contacts among the teachers and students. This helped to build trust and familiarity with the college students who share the information of the research study with their family and friends.

As the researcher started her fieldwork, one of the most difficult tasks was to find 'hijabi' participants for the research study. Because the debate around hijab is 'intense','emotional' and 'global' (Giddens, 2004). Initially, the researcher used the college campus area for recruitment of participants. The selection of the colleges was due to the fact that studies have shown educational institutions is the place where Muslim students face challenges in terms of asserting and practicing their belief system. Further in the initial stage, this research particularly sought to explore the hijabis and non-hijabis (Muslim and non-Muslim's) college experience where hijabi students are a small minority. Considering the beginning of their classes for new sessions, participants were busy collecting the academic schedule and getting admission. The task proved daunting when the researcher finds it difficult to get hijabi students to agree to speak to her for about thirty minutes.

Nevertheless, through the gatekeepers, she managed to meet potential hijabi students who expressed their willingness to participate in the research study. Throughout her fieldwork, she kept a research diary so as to keep a steady record of her research findings. As a result, she was addressed by using fictive kinship terms 'PhD doing didi' writing on hijabi women and their experiences. During the first few weeks of pilot study speaking to students, a cursory glance to their facial expressions revealed that they were experiencing uneasiness to speak on their experience. Moreover, during the early stage of interviewing, the inquisitiveness on the part of the teachers to know what type of questions the researcher is asking the students also seemed like an extra burden. All this together entailed in coming to the decision of ruling out interviewing participants in colleges. It is noteworthy that such an approach does not limit the study, as it significantly led both the groups to share their experiences without any inhibition by doing away with pre-conceived ideas about the researcher's whereabouts. Further it is noteworthy to mention that due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in parallel with the lockdown of educational institutions at different point of academic year resulted the pilot study to come at a standstill and hence unpredictable disruptions shifted the initial focus from college as primary research sites to participants household.

Once the researcher received the contact numbers of the participants, she introduced herself and requested a time to speak in detail about the study. She and her potential participants felt more comfortable having a phone conversation as it provided opportunities for the young minds to ask questions and feel comfortable with the nature and structure of the research study. At the end of the conversation, if they express interest in participating, the researcher consulting with the participants set up a time for the interview. During the initial phone conversation or at the end of the interview, a few participants shared the names of interested friends who willingly want to be a part of the study. She also asked the participants' if their mothers would be interested in taking part in the study to which they wanted some time to discuss with their mothers about the context of research. The researcher then left the participants with time to decide. She was aware of the commitment of the mothers towards their household tasks and soon realized that not all mothers could spare their time and a few of them nonetheless voluntarily agreed to be a part of the study. Others who even agreed in the first place, confirm the date and time of interview (later understood that they offered to help out of courtesy due to the social connection that referred them) but when the day of interview was due, a morning

confirmation was needed from the participants side, but unfortunately no text or call received despite numerous calls and texts from the researcher's side. Other potential participants excused unplanned and unforeseen circumstances in the course of their daily lives to cancel the interview. For some participants it was more convenient to meet with the researcher on weekends or in the weekday evenings.

Unlike mothers who are often available during the day, the fathers were difficult to get in touch with as some of them are government employees in other districts, others due to their business activities remained on trip, while others stay in Gulf. Even if some of them visit their homes during vacation/ weekend time they refuse to appear for interview citing reasons as "its women topic, listen to what they have to say".

Furthermore, teachers were often reluctant to speak, and they advised the researcher not to take photographs of college campus. Explanations such as fixed time slot, engage in administrative works which meant that they are 'busy people with busy schedule'; hence the process of obtaining information from them was a challenging task. Nonetheless, during their free time few teachers volunteer to share their thoughts towards hijab and hijabi students. The researcher felt to include their responses in her doctoral thesis as they had many different perceptions on Muslim women throughout their teaching period.

1.9 Field Experience and Researcher's Positionality

It is important to note the positionality of the researcher vis a vis the participants with whom the researcher interacted. While writing in the context of lack of self-reflection in social science Nida Kirmani writes, "our work often directly grows out of our personal journeys – journeys that are physical, emotional, intellectual, and political" (2021, p. 220). An occupier of multiple subjective dimensions - Muslim background, middle class Sylheti speaking, (liberal) religiously observant was particularly helpful in this research. However, religious part of the researcher's positionality did not prevent her from establishing a trustworthy rapport with the teachers. Throughout the fieldwork, she presented an empathetic worldview that does not conflict with other religious beliefs.

In her private life the researcher tries to practice the 'pillars' of Islam although she did not divulge this to any of the research participants, even though some assumed that she was, because of her name. The researcher's name Ferdowsee implies 'paradise', which

participants mother believe as the 'highest level of heaven' and according to their belief her name must have a bearing on her embodied disposition. This was often highlighted by participants and elderly women's remarks on decency of her dressing practice which according to them represents a 'fine' balance between 'adab' (modest), fashionable and work purpose.

As a Muslim woman growing up in a middle-class household, the researcher was quite familiar with the unspoken emphasis[3] on modest dressing and behaviour which kind of help to 'blend-in' to the surroundings and not make her stand out in any way. She wants to add that when she began her field journey, she was apprehensive that the participants might see her as an outsider as she does not wear hijab nor cover the head as they do. She also felt that they may try to educate her on the 'benefit' of headcovering from the light of Islam. The researcher wants to clarify here that nothing of this happened in any manner. Instead, continuous interaction with them she realized that hijab, their modest dressing (Eastern and Western wear) and their knowledge on 'true' Islam had an aesthetic and moral effect on her.

A minor challenge arose to ethical choice of the researcher's dress as all women are expected to cover their head and body when they are in a state of praying (namaz). This meant that her visit to participants' house at different times of the day coincided with their daily prayer. This meant that even though she is a performing Muslim, the rules of the prayer time had to be adhered to and a namaz hijab and loose dress covering ankle had to be worn. On these occasions, participants warm extension of their prayer dress had to be accepted to show respect to their belief and practices of performing prayer 'on time'. Although the researcher could excuse herself as not to pray in their home, without a doubt there was a fear that in those moments, her participants could view her with suspicions on her religious practice and this could run counter to building of trust among the participants.

While reporting and updating her field experience to her Ph.D supervisor he once suggested that she should participate in their private lives which include wearing headcover if necessary, to join with them in prayer time. The researcher responded by saying: she never covers her head, nor does she perform her timely prayer. If she does just

[3] It was unspoken because neither my mother nor sister-in-law ever clearly articulated these ideas, but I was aware of them.

for their sake, she would be called a hypocrite. He instantly responded that, “Your PhD is not on Islamic morality, you’re doing PhD in Sociology”. This highlights the predicament issue of a researcher as a researcher and as a practicing Muslim, and how this would impinge and influence her sociological inquiry. Better late than never, the researcher reflected on her supervisor’s statement and recognised that everyone engages in some level of field work astuteness. Just as we expect something from the field, the field has performative expectations for the investigator, and these expectations implicitly reveal the complexities of social structures. The researcher made ‘dramaturgical’ (Goffman, 1959) adjustments in order to present herself as an appropriate Muslim and alleviate the suspicions that otherwise would have arisen on her non-participation.

Furthermore, researcher being a Muslim woman who completed her graduation and post-graduation course from outside of her district implies a privileged subject position. Belonging to a middle-class Muslim family she engaged in specific struggles within, rather than going against the institutions of family, community, and faith (Khurshid, 2015). Acquiring and pursuing dreams of education with its inherent struggles as something one as a Muslim woman could relate to. As participants often expressed the wish to pursue further courses beyond degree, they want to know how the researcher who also inhabits the same social world when she was of their age could confront social difficulties.

Other ‘ideal’ habitus practices followed during the fieldwork such as chaperoned by family members when it gets dark, informing the family members after reaching and leaving the interviewee’s place seamlessly aligns to the ideal of respectability shared by the middle-class elderly women. In essence, as an insider, the researcher belong to and shares an understanding of the prescriptive rules of the community which would have been inconceivable for a non-Muslim academician.

It would be biased on the part of the researcher if she discounts the feelings of emotional involvement. In the research process this cannot be totally avoided, especially when nervous breakdown situations are being described or recounted. It happened that some participants felt distressed when they recount death of one of their parents and dysfunctional family relationships. Lack of professional counseling support services, or taboo around mental health, which the researcher was aware of, were necessary, to some extent she shared her personal side of story with a view to express solidarity and to ensure a fair exchange of subjective social reality. This participatory step, the researcher felt,

helped to maintain a non-hierarchical relationship with the participants and thus enhance reciprocal participation.

1.9.1 Women interviewing women- a special bond of womenhood

The general feeling, especially among mothers and their daughters, was one of surprises when they came to know that 'someone' is investing their time to hear 'their' story. As I visited my participants' house, and described my research to them in many cases, the younger participants gave the researcher curious glances assuming my ignorance about the rules of religion and my naïve approach towards the world of technology.

Many of the young participants affirmed that the areas under research questions are experiences and feelings that they had never disclosed to anyone else. The researcher felt inevitable nervousness looming on participants' face but once the researcher asked them questions of their interest they got relaxed and engaged themselves in the interview process. Most of the participants, at the beginning of the conversation and other participants, when the interview ended, made it clear that it was a great opportunity for them to have someone to share their feelings and experiences. The elderly women expressed their gratitude that they are pleased to see a young Muslim women working in the area of gender and Islam and gave the impression that they would not have expressed their honest views in the same way to another non-Muslim woman. Roald (2001) argues that the knowledge Muslim researchers gain while studying Muslims differs from the knowledge a researcher from non-Muslim background acquires. This she writes is due to different approaches and due to the difference in 'cultural language', i.e. perceptions of objects statements, between Muslim and non-Muslim researchers' (Roald, 2001; p. 70).

More importantly, some of them reiterated that they felt gratified that the voice of women is in fact considered to be valuable for research, and that the 'conversation', to their own surprise, for the first time made them critically reflect on their own understanding of certain experiences, which in detail they had never thought before. In the process of researching, participants often gave their time and generosity in providing the researcher with relevant information. Quite often the participants make her have lunch with them, rendering the interview experience informal. Thus, for the researcher, her 'gender and religious familiarity' was an advantage in data collection.

Having said this, the researcher acknowledges that she has also experienced limitations or distancing herself while conducting the research. Although we (researchers and participants) identify with common religious bonds yet our standpoints on the issues discussed during the interview differed. Thus, while on the one hand participants' diverse responses add richness to the study, the researcher often struggled to distance herself from her own excessive critical point of view.

1.10 Chapterization

This thesis is divided into six chapters. What follows is the structure of the thesis. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study consisting of a statement of the problem, research objectives and research questions. This chapter also discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework in which the study is situated. It also discusses plethora of research undertaken on hijab from different perspectives by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, which have fruitfully guided the analysis of the present study. Further, the chapter discusses the research procedure used in collecting data, and also includes in detail the researcher's positionality along with the challenges encountered during fieldwork.

Chapter 2 provides the historical and socio-cultural setting where the research work is conducted. It briefly discusses the spread of Islam in Barak valley from a historical perspective. Widespread of Islam by different social groups in different geographical location of the valley led to the process of Muslim settlement in the valley. Through these discussions, the chapter locates the normative understanding of 'good' Muslim women is largely embedded in tradition and class status. It briefly discusses the socio-economic background of the women which highlights on the social structural issues that has shaped their middle class embodied habitus. The chapter further throws light to the context of change - social, economic and technological impetus in a way that women feel about their presentation with new reasons bringing new norms of Muslim embodiment.

Chapter 3 addresses the first research objective of the study. This chapter focusses on the Muslim middle-class homes and its creation of particular kind of Muslim subjects as part of habitus. The chapter analyses the social world of elder (mothers) and younger (daughters) participants - and underscores the context under which habitus as a form of socialized subjectivity are made real. The homes discussed in this chapter are sites of diverse influences; practices within the home cannot be understood as divorced from the

larger socio-cultural context in which the home is a part of it. In this sense, what lies beyond the boundaries of home can affect the social relations within the home. The home is also viewed in relation to 'backstage' ground of 'performance' of the 'rules of game' (class, gendered forms of ethical values) which is formed through interaction and affectionate relations with their mothers and showed that for younger participants negotiations of gender relations, and responsibilities of managing the middle-class moral values embodied and enacted in home space are experienced as everchanging, self-contradictory and relational. Hence, the private and public space is truly in each other's company.

Chapter 4 addresses the second objective of the study. This chapter focusses on the younger participants (hijabi students) experience with their teachers and non-Muslim peers in colleges in Karimganj. The chapter in part also underscores the perspectives of teachers towards their hijabi students and their practices. As a Muslim and a hijabi students they also face certain issues which are 'poorly misunderstood' by the outside people. Greater understanding of participants before and after taking hijab experiences speaks of the conflict, struggle and hardship they experience within the college spaces. By employing Erving Goffman's concept of stigma, the chapter examines tension of opposites 'stigma and respectability' and looks at how such tensions of opposites inform their embodied selves which seem to directly correspond with the distinct background they come from. The tension of opposites is theoretically explained through the notion of 'symbolic interaction', where the message conveyed by the young participant does not correspond with the one perceived by the observer, in the process the 'intended' messages lose their meanings (Shirazi, 2000, p.115). This has caused stigmatization and how they respond and navigate to these challenging expectations reflects their individual selves.

Chapter 5 addresses the final objectives of the study. This chapter builds upon the preceding two chapters' exploration of stigma and respectable habitus inside the lives of younger unmarried hijabi participants and expands the analysis to include it in the process of understanding their agency in their everyday 'generative effects' of the middle-class Muslim habitus.

Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings of the study, outlines the limitations of the present research and suggest future possible research directions.

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