CHAPTER 3

Visibility and Performance of Religious Practices in Everyday Lives: Looking where and how Sacred Presence is invoked

3.1 Introduction

The chapter is an attempt to show how Muslim families socialize their children (here the researcher is specifically focusing on daughters) into a set of religious values, roles, and norms to perform a middle class 'good Muslim' woman. The first section of the chapter pays attention to the process of early religious socialization that takes place in the homes of the Muslim middle-class participants, as the home is considered primary cornerstone of formation of religious lives, "the setting where personal faith is practiced, expressed, transmitted, and transformed" (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004, p.74). Further, each family is unique, has their own mechanisms and strategies to engage with the religious values and beliefs to the children, nevertheless they do reflect a common pattern.

The second section of the chapter reflects on the social world of their mothers, briefly throwing light on their accumulation of religious teachings focusing on their religious learning trajectories by travelling briefly into their time. It is to be noted that a preliminary glimpse into their social world would enable us to understand the patriarchal structures embedded in their take away of religious knowledge. More specifically, by focusing on the 'covering 'experience of maternal figures, the section would show how the notions of middleclass and its embodied respectability gets enmeshed in their understanding of religion and culture in the context of Karimganj. In shaping the argument, the last section of the chapter will throw light on the shift in understanding of religious teachings and examines the phenomenon of 'then' versus -now' by focusing on the group discussion between participant and their mothers. Given that, religious teachings cannot simply be passed down from parents to children, listening to mother and adult daughter conversation on their 'received knowledge' not only allowed the researcher to witness things changing through the eyes of young women but it also gave clue about the constant negotiation and limited exercise of agency between mother and daughter, theologically and culturally. Therefore, the first and second section of the chapter is a necessary preparatory step to observe change and continuity in implementation of religious teachings in their everyday lives. The final section of the chapter shows that although beliefs and behaviours hold

mirrors to their childhood teachings, nevertheless, the capacity to question, and reason reflects the young adults exercise of agency.

The researcher believes that it is important to focus on the process of early religious socialization of the child that happens in a family for the following reasons:

Religious socialization, in the traditional sense is understood as purely a transmission and internalization of faith from preceding generations. It has been defined as an "interactive process through which social agents - parents, family, peers, and the educational system influence individuals' religious beliefs and understandings" (Sherkat, 2003). Such a facile understanding of religious socialization as 'predefined' and 'unilinear' has been heavily criticized. In recent times, it has been argued that children are not passive recipients of socialization, but they actively take part in constructing religious behaviour (Klingenberg & Sjo, 2019). The transmission of religious practice not just takes place in childhood, but it also continues up through adult years (Hyde, 1990). In a situation like this, the family becomes the primary site to observe the interactive process between actors [between mothers and adult daughters] - processes that involve change and continuity in practicing a set of religiously sanctioned behavioral prescriptions. Research has shown that the family is 'generally' considered the leading and the most influential actor in the process of religious socialization (Hyde, 1990; Bader & Desmond, 2006; Klingenberg & Sjo, 2019).

According to the participants' mothers, Islam is an 'earthly' religion whose presence can be seen and felt in the 'banal acts of everyday life' (Mernissi, 1991, p. 27). The right way of sleeping to drinking water to right conduct of a pious Muslim are part of the Islamic way of life. While encompassing the worldly chores it also encourages its practitioners 'to constantly situate themselves in the cosmos' (ibid.). Starting from birth, the participants have received overt and subtle guidance to inculcate habits which conforms with the practices of Islam. For all of them, religion is the 'foundation' and 'justification' in which 'all social encounters are conducted' (Macleod, 1991, p. 40). Considering this, accordingly, religion forms the principal guide and regulator of all behaviors and practices in public and private spaces. Surprisingly, the maternal figures consistent referencing to their class position to create the template of their 'daughter belonging to a good Muslim family' also emerged in their description.

Image 3.1: Middle-class Muslim home

3.2 Early childhood: Richly and textured religious socialization at home

When the researcher asked how the younger participants first learned about their religion, all the mothers explained that because they are born into the religion, they are exposed to rituals and beliefs from a very early age. Though the participants are born, raised, and exposed to Islamic practices in Muslim homes, yet, as one mother puts it, "they still need to acquire religious discourses to preserve their religion and to identify themselves as Muslims". This makes it interesting to explore how practicing religion becomes central to their homes. Parents consider it as their duty and obligation to impart religious teachings to them so that they become practicing Muslims. Yet answers such as, "we are born as Muslim", "teaching religion to the children is necessary for them to remain in 'straight path' as outlined in Quran and the teachings of Prophet", "to secure them [children] a good life in this world as well as hereafter" are also heard from mothers. This illustrates that teaching religion to one's child can be a highly *bektigoto* (personal), pious sentiment, and religious decision.

At the same time, the mothers consider it as their duty to encourage the child to participate in regular religious practice. According to the mothers *deeni shikka* (religious education) should start at tender age, because the child's mind is like a sponge that soaks in what it comes into contact with. More than simply learning them as part of religious practice, the mothers argue that the moral rules of the religious practices must become internalized by the body, thus, stressing the status of embodied habitus. They believe that if the children are not inculcated to the ground rules of religion in their early period of life, they would reject the lifestyle of Muslim while growing up. By the age of six or seven, parents actively try to teach them religion. Even before they reach the stipulated age, the families try to

make the child familiar with the words of Allah. For instance, while putting them to sleep they recite small supplication of Allah in the form of lullabies. Though the words may mean nothing to them, yet they hear and learn to use religious words (Hyde, 1990). Therefore, in many cases, the visible and audible expressions of religiosity performed by families provide the foundation of early childhoods' religious development.

3.2.1 The setting: Informal religious teachings

In general, initial exposure to the basic principles of Islam is usually provided by mother. While the involvement of the father in imparting religious education is generally limited and varies across families; it is observed that the mothers are more observant and entrusted with passing religious practices on to the children. In general, the reason could be usually mothers are more religious (Nelsen, 1990) or because mothers share a bond with girls during their early childhood (Lindsey, 2005).

When asked what kind of religious things they taught their daughters when she was in her early childhood, they gave the researcher a list that includes narrating the Prophets' stories to them, tutoring the children on reciting the Qur'an. S*unnah* teaching etiquettes such as, saying *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah) before performing any action or work. Thus, the parents want their children to learn about Islamic practices and moral dimensions of religion.

Most of the participants families in the present research lived in ostensibly nuclear families, nevertheless, their ancestral homes consist of three-generational unit. Even though they have moved out of their ancestral homes, the visit of extended family members, especially grandparents to their new home are a regular affair. They [parents] consider it as their religious obligation to look after their emotional and material need of them. Consequently, sending one's parents to an old age home or leaving them on their own or under the caretaker is usually disapproved of. Thus, it was not unusual to see them [grandparents] at participants' home during the process of interview. At times, the religious and practice of grandparents[1], act as an important reference point to the growing consciousness of an Islamic way of life.

[1] Grandparents as they grow older and hence free from familial obligations devotes more time to optional and compulsory religious practices.

3.2.2 To remain tactful

When it comes to introducing religious practices to their children the mother makes sure not to overburden them nor force them to follow. This sense of conscious and dynamic effort to provide Islamic teachings to them is extensively applied in majority of the families. The families are conscious that they are not going to accomplish anything if they force their children to do something. Many mothers rationalized this saying by quoting that they know some families where the children showed disinterest in learning Islamic teachings and they forced them to practice it, resulting in inconspicuous religious performance. That is why among these families, the most common theme the researcher heard is to be a good role model for the child without imposing anything.

This involves families using certain tacit strategies to encourage them to co-participate in learning particular practices. For example, they decrease certain elements that are required to perform the practices. As one mother told the researcher that when her daughter was a child the family did not burden her to perform all the namaz or too fast during the fasting month. In case of fasting, they tell their children to perform *kaia roza* (half day fast). In this way, they prepare them for the day when they will be required to fast for an entire month. As one mother says, when we pray, we used to call them to join our prayers. Yet, we used to tell them, you do not have to do all the *rakhat* (ritual cycles, in each prayer - two, three or four depending on the time of the day). Another mother said that we used to tell them you do not have to do *uzu* (ablutions - physical purity), come just wash your face and stand with me. When the children are very small, say two or three years they were not specifically instructed to follow Islam, but nevertheless they learn about Islamic practices simply from observing and sometimes copying their parents, for instance as small children imitate their parents' positions when they pray. Petts and Desmond (2016, p. 249) stressed the importance of observational religious learning. According to them, children's religious development occurs through the observation and imitation of religious prototypes that surround them.

The mother' s attempt to provide basic religious training is confirmed by many participants of which one participant[2] who has a daughter emphasizes that with respect to daily prayers,

[2] At the time of interview (2021), she was in her final year of graduation. When writing the thesis, her daughter's age was 2 years, and she confirmed this social pattern.

the introduction often takes the form of imitation. She informs the researcher over a casual telephone call:

"When I pray, my little daughter joins me too. She saw the way I dress when I pray. So, she takes my *unna* from the shelf and tries to drape it. Seeing her doing this, her father brought her a hijab and sometimes, she herself wears hijab and says 'Allah'. Even though she doesn't know how to pray, she would pretend to perform praying gestures".

At a very young age the children - sons put on *toki* (skull cap) like their fathers and daughters cover their heads like their mothers do. They often unconsciously imitate the religious practices performed by the parents. Indeed, Albert Bandura (1977) as part of his social learning theory, argued that when parents act like a convincing role model, children tend to emulate them. All these practices are embodiments of Islamic piety. In this way, Islamic bodily practices are gradually entrenched in the children, and it is further reinforced by other agents and experiences in life.

Image 3.2: Participant and her maternal grandparent

Image 3.3: Mother helping one of the participant's younger sisters in reciting Quran

3.2.3 Looking in the most obvious spaces – Formal religious teaching

This initiation into the basic religious socialization processes at home is usually supplemented by more focused training in formal and official space, *mosid* (Muslim's house of worship), where the children learn and read the Koran in Arabic. Some families arrange homeschooling (private teaching with *mesab* (prayer leader of the mosque)) and sometimes the older female members of the family play an active and exclusive role; often becomes the guardians of faith by displaying their expertise and knowledge in teaching Quran. Sending children to *mosid* or allowing *mesab* to visit home, in either way, is considered as a matter of living up to the standards of what it means to be a 'good Muslim' parents for others, they want to continue their religious tradition which have been going for generations after generations, while for other parents they are too busy to sit with their children, or they believe they lack confidence in teaching them religious alphabets and pronunciations.

The mosque training focuses on cramming the short verses of the *suras* (chapters) of Quran without much understanding. The focus is more on fluency and pronunciation of the verses. The teacher recites and the student repeats after him. The process continues till the children can recite correctly. On other days, the *mesab* teaches them pillars of Islam, pillars of faith, stories of Prophets, on *uzu* and *namaz*. Most of the participants reported receiving this type of deliberate instruction until they attained puberty. The reasons for discontinuation, participant cited is that they have 'grown up', had learned as much as they could or increase in schoolwork. The participants reported that the discontinuation to visit mosque did not hinder their continuation of Islamic lessons because at home, mothers or their aunt continued to guide them when they read Quran. But as they come of age the role of the mother's shifted from direct involvement to monitoring of the basics of Islam such as performing five daily prayer and reading Quran on time and fasting.

The participants recalled that no translation of Quranic verses was taught, and they lacked the agency to question the religious teachings. Lacking in agency to question certain religious teachings has to do with how their mothers learnt about the religion. A widely held notion among the mothers is that "If one reads Qur'an even without understanding the meaning of it, Allah rewards the person for its hard effort." Interestingly, similar statement is uttered by grandmothers of the participants who states that reading the Qur'an will earn the reciter more divine blessings than not reading at all. This kind of

encouragement of performing the religious practices instead of pragmatically feeling and understanding it remained constant throughout the life course of three generations - grandmother, mother, and young adult women. What changed over the life course of the participants is the perception, understanding, and acceptance of integrating Quranic concepts with daily life as well as rejecting certain socio-cultural practices.

3.2.3.1 An additional observation on dressing – embodied moral habitus

An additional observation is that as part of studying Quranic verses, small girls from an early age are trained to dress modestly. The participants, when they were small, they wore small scarf to cover their head and underneath their frock or skirts they wore long pants, in part motivated by a desire to cover their legs. Perhaps the reason lies in religious significance, as Siraj poignantly remarks "religious spaces are instrumental in creating and raising awareness about appropriate modes of dress and behaviour, inevitably binding followers to behave and dress in accordance with those customs and norms" (2011, p. 720). Nevertheless, an additional reason could be the adaptability of the body to the required dress code. Dress is worn on a living, moving body. It's presence on the body guides the body in a way on how one should sit, stand, or restrain ultimately means that dress and body come together as a 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle, 2001) and is the outcome of a learning process called embodied competence (ibid.). In discussing the specific dress code of a young girl in the context of attending the Quranic classes, it is precisely such an understanding of dress, body and space which is helpful. Concurring with Secor (2002), the researcher couldn't agree more that as individuals move in and out of different spaces of activity, these 'different spaces' (reading the qur'anic verses in mosque or at home) 'operate by different sets of rules' (one must dress in a specific way to negotiate with the space) 'that determine the norms of self-presentation' (Muslim woman is more likely to be conscious of her body and dress in public spaces than in her personal space)[3]. As covered body forms part of the micro-social order of the sacred space, the mothers in their role as a significant actor in the continuation of religious lives at home, makes their daughter dress in a particular way to attend to the norms of distinct spatial situations.

[3] When the participants were children, the mothers are aware of the territorial nature of the space and internalize in them the norms of dress. 'Space is experienced territorially' (Entwistle, 2001 p. 50) by these women who routinely made their daughters [when they were children] wear scarf and long bottoms underneath their skirt or frock when they go to mosque or when the mesab comes at home to tutor them on religious books.

3.2.4 Sacralising domestic spaces

Apart from observing the basic mandatory tenet of Islam, that is ablutions and praying five times per day; celebrations of Islamic festivals, spirituality of Ramzan and Hajj, in the everyday religious practice, the house becomes the locus of expression of 'Islamic self' (Metcalf, 1996). The interiority of middle-class Muslim houses is aestheticized in visual and verbal ways making the process of religious socialization - articulation and action, in sync with Muslim values.

In every household, there is a Quran, sometimes two or more copies of it in each of the family members' room (with meanings in Bangla, English or Urdu). Usually, the Quran is placed at an elevated level such as, on top of a bookshelf or on the table and is never placed on the ground. Everything within the house that has sacred significance is kept on an *oocha jaga* (high place). Material objects such as, *musallah* (prayer-rug), *tasbih* (Islamic prayer beads), any artefacts in which verses of Quran are inscribe, sufficient care is taken to ensure that it is not lying on the floor.

In the house of the participants, one can see calligraphic inscriptions of verses from the Quran etched in the house wall[4]. This becomes important reminders of faith. Since Islam strictly prohibits the depiction of human or animal pictures in any decorative art form, Allah or the Prophet Muhammad or are never depicted in sculptures, paintings, figures, or statues. What is evident is the sacred word, such as, *'Bismillah'* (In the name of Allah) from the Quran (Metcalf, 1996; Qureshi, 1996). Calligraphically written verses from the Quran are found, particularly in the living and bedrooms. Occasionally there are displays of wall hangings of Muslims two holy sites - Mecca and Medina.

Besides calligraphic inscriptions and the presence of Quran and other Hadith literature, other important artefacts that adorn the spaces of Muslim household are those that enable the families to lead a good Muslim life such as an Islamic calendar to help celebrate significant holidays according to the lunar cycle (Qureshi, 1996), prayer mats to pray on, *tasbihs*, smell of *attar* bottles (essential oils) and aural devices (for example: setting prayer alarm in mobile phone), *azaan* (Islamic call to prayer that is given in mosques). All these material objects through sensual experiences of sight, sound and touch play an important

[4] These range from framed verses to calligraphic etchings on brass and copper plates to self-made calligraphy by some participants.

role in the formation of religious subjects. In this way, before the children clearly learn the doctrines of Islam, it becomes embodied through various visual-verbal practices and techniques of the self, and the 'objectified cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) in the process, as we saw, itself supports this.

Image 3.4: Islamic artifact adorning one of the participant's houses

3.3 Going back in time – Mother's look at their religious knowledge

With a view to understand how the younger participants learn about religion, it is important to examine how mothers themselves have acquired it. In more than half of the families the researcher interviewed, the mothers replied that since they were raised in religious homes[5] , throughout their lives they have had a constant relationship to Islam.

When it comes to religious teachings, one mother thought that, "The pattern of religious teachings that we received in our time was of dominating style, it was more of fear of eternal consequences". To simplify this, another mother states, "when I was young, I used to hear that if we do not pray, Allah will punish us in hellfire. We further ask no questions to our elders".

Thus, the participants' mother went through a religious socialization process whose long-term results was to hold 'religious preferences' which Sherkat defines as – "favoured supernatural explanations about the meaning, purpose, and origins of life – explanations

[5] By this the mothers refer to their great grandparents (either from maternal or paternal side) who acquired competence in terms of religious knowledge or religious practice.

that cannot be proven nor disproved. These preferences will help drive choices in the realm of religion" (2003, p.152).

These mothers emphasized that they tried to convey the teachings of Islam on in the same way as they had received and taught by their parents. The mothers' emphasis that the replication of the religious teachings did not mean changes did not happen, but that they can witness change as their daughters entered adulthood; changes specifically took place in terms of female dress and an increasing awareness of Islamic knowledge on different matters.

This section indicates that religious teachings occupied an important part in the process of their (mothers) upbringing. The way they imparted religious teachings to their children (discussed in preceding section) likewise, they received religious education from their female members, and from religious teachers who were hired by their male relatives. Receiving mosque training was like a continuation of religious tradition in a deliberate manner. The mother of all the participants agreed upon that their orientation to religious practices was a result from observing their family members practicing the Islamic practices. And the women also shared that sometimes their father used to go to Tablighi Jamaat and after coming back to home they used to share *"virtues of performing traditional Islamic injunctions"* [participants emphasis] (Rauf, 2022). The sharing of 'what they have learnt' was to indicate that the women folk also learn, implement the same and *Allah sawab diba* (earn Allah's rewards/ blessings).

Most of these elderly women mentioned that in terms of imparting religious knowledge they were only instructed to recite the Quran, to pray, perform fast and necessary *dua'*s (supplications) and optional prayers. Thus, the recitation of the Quran, timely execution of the daily five times prayer and *roza* (fasting) comprised their religious education. These Islamic discourses outline the script for the performance of acts that are expected for a woman to be a *'dindaar beti'* (pious women). In this entire discourse of imparting Islamic knowledge, there is considerable emphasis on bodily practices which becomes the means through which a pious Muslim woman comes into 'being'.

3.3.1 Through their eyes: Unveiling the social significance of *matat unna deo aa* (head-covering)

When asked how the maternal figures were introduced into the practice of head-covering. Most of the women narrated that as part of the discourse of *boro oi geso* (has grown-up), their social lives were characterized with all-female groupings (mothers, aunts, grandmothers) of all ages which in turn become their universe within which they spend most part of their lives. Unlike their daughters who practiced 'situational head-covering'[6], the mothers explained that with the onset of puberty they started practising it 'strictly'. Therefore, the onset of puberty marks a critical turning point in the life of women- both in terms of social understanding as well as changes in self-orientation to the biological body (Niranjana, 2001). Further, because their grandmother, mother, and aunts covered their head with *unna* at home all time and were extra careful with it, they also imitated the same. Thus, their initial exposure to head-covering was subtly provided by their women members of the family.

Again, there were also few narratives where the elderly participants recollected that they were explicitly *koa oise* (told to) cover the head by female figures and in that case, they directly influenced them. These women upon being told to cover their head consider it as the 'right' thing to do to please their parents [as their mother told them covering your head would enhance your father's *izzat*]. It is worth noting that these few women were brought up in an atmosphere which they clearly experience in cultural terms as liberal[7]. The probabilities that since these women (participants' mothers) were raised in different places, the fear of their assimilation into non-Muslim culture perhaps made the parents stick them to cultural roots of head-covering.

Further, in their native places, the grandparents of some of these women possess religious capital[8], and performed *Hajj* (annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). It is an unspoken rule,

[6] Before the participant took hijab, they had knowledge of *'jaga bujia matat kapor deo aa'* (context appropriate head-covering). Therefore, when they visit any funeral house, or when any older person or persons who holds religious knowledge arrives at their house they slightly cover their head with *unna.*

[7] These few women spent their childhood and adulthood outside of Barak valley. The places they used to stay, nearby, they recollected, had very less Muslim population.

[8] A form of cultural capital through which individuals seek status within the field of religion (Almila, 2015, p. 7).

but society expects female folk from the *Hajji* and *Moulobhi*[9] family to cover their head[10]. Those who defy the unspoken rule are being deeply held as not valuing the doing pilgrimage to *Kaaba* (the centre of the holiest sanctuary in Mecca).

Given this setting, there are certain people, particularly elders, the participants' mother was being told to whom 'respect' must be shown by covering the head. Few studies on purdah also reflect that head-covering is symbolic of paying respect to older people (Jeffery, 1979; Mandelbaum, 1988). In her study of purdah among the women of Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya shrine, Patricia Jeffery states:

> …There are certain people, particularly elders, to whom 'respect' must be shown by covering the head…The requirement to cover the head is more strictly observed with respect to men, particularly older kinsmen… (1979, p. 101).

The foregoing context embodies social information regarding the social significance of head-covering. The experience of puberty marks women's status as adults and it gradually gets enacted through *continuous [emphasis researcher's]* head-covering. And, by the time the participants' mother were taught to read the *Quran Sharif* and to pray, they are being taught by the religious clerics that head-covering is a commandment from Allah and the prophets' wives too have donned it.

[9] A person who has completed full studies in a madrasa or Darul Uloom (Islamic educational institution for advanced level).

[10] Performing hajj more than once requires good financial standing which only a few middle-class Muslim families could afford. The preparation for the annual pilgrimage is special not only for the families but also extends to the community. After making the pilgrimage, the status of the family alters forever as they come to be recognized as belonging to *Hajjiforibar* (Haji family). Therefore, performing hajj significantly contributes to the construction of family's middle class respectable with women being feel more obligated to perform gender identity function through dress. The one who performs the pilgrimage to Mecca is attributed the honorific title 'hajji'.

Image 3.5: Participant's family going on Hajj

3.3.2 *Salwar Kameez* and *unna* - Subtle and nuanced mode of bodily embodiment

A common modesty demanding practice through and through in their mother's upbringing was to observe head and body covering by wearing *salwar kameez* and *unna* as there was no hijab back then. It needs to be mentioned here that the participants' mothers wore *burkha* after their marriage, unlike their daughters who started wearing *burkha* or abaya before their marriage.

The participants' mother described that from an early childhood they have observed the instant actions of women, the flustered redraping of the *unna* when a man unexpectedly enters a woman gathering, the brief halt in working as woman delicately pulls her *unna* over her head because of the call to prayer. The flexible nature of manoeuvring *unna* according to changes in definition of social situation - pull down to uncover and pull up to cover has been demonstrated in numerous studies[11].

By the time a girl is a grown-up adult, she skilfully learns to deal with her *unna* and it becomes a part of 'learned bodily techniques in different spaces' (Johnson, 2017). The concealment which the *unna* affords (especially at home) is considered vital by all the women. Without the presence of *unna* in their body, women expressed to feel 'empty', and

[11] This reference is also seen in Papanek (1973), Sharma (1978), Makhlouf (2017).

'naked'. For these women *unna* carries cultural significance imbued with social meanings as it provides identity, symbolizes socio-economic position, signifies power and notions of privacy (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992, p. 1).

The *shormila beti* (shy women) keeps her body hidden in the presence of other unknown persons, unlike the low-class women who do not cover their body 'appropriately'. The everyday wear – *salwar kameez* of these women conforms to this requirement and thus represent the basic minimum bodily concealment and modesty. The *unna*, by contrast, is a coloured cloth draped around their neck with which the women strategically modify and adjust, and it is here that the more strategic and situational nuances of body language come to the fore as discussed earlier. Thus, by being a 'grown-up woman' there is a 'performance of gendered identification' (Johnson, 2017) of dress around age.

Examining these tacit rules around dress *'boro oi geso purdah korio amrar izzat oor kotha ase'* (you have grown up, do purdah. It's a question of reputation) more closely, reveals the symbolic way of restraint and distancing between men and women, which is achieved not only through material concealment, but also through immaterial form - avoidance of eye contact *(chokor purdah)* and conversational distance (*mator purdah)*. In other words, what links the experience of these participants' mother with their mother (participants' grandmother) is the purdah of seclusion (Vreede-de Stuers, 1968, p. 62) – a complex idiom of body, space, and the larger issues for the family, to be recognized as respectable.

3.3.3 *Chokor and mator purdah* – changes and continuation

The transition from girlhood to womanhood is determined in symbolic way [as noted earlier] as well as through spatial divisions within the homes. Home, though considered as the internal sphere of women, nevertheless Muslim homes are not exclusively female sphere but rather it gets transformed into private-public domain or all private domain depending on the circumstances. Thus, Muslim homes are bounded by 'negotiation and redefinition' (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001, p. 303) and it gets articulated in relation to different audiences that they engage with in as they move in across different home spaces.

In symbolic manner, apart from dress code, there are behavioural norms which is expressed in the construction of 'proper' modes of speech, and comportment for young girls. The mothers reflect to their time when considerable attention was paid to their voice; to speak

softly so that the voice does not cross the four walls of the house[12], not to approach or welcome any male relative unless being told to do so and should speak only when asked to do. Thus, by 'effacing the self' to cite Abraham's phrase that is, not being seen or heard in some contexts is best understood as controlling the behaviour of women (2018, p. 248).

More so it is interesting to observe that the use of *chokor* and *mator* purdah (avoiding eye contact and 'reserve 'conversational tone) particularly in the form described during their mothers' time have lessened in the participants' generation[13]. This is manifest in the fact that when certain social and religious occasion takes place at home, the presence of *begana betain* (stranger men/na-mahrem)[14] transforms the home space into more public and less private; in those times, such self-imposed behavioural norms are sought necessary from both the genders[15]. The crucial point here is within this highly charged environment, spatial arrangements is less tied with the nature of space and more to who they interact with in those spaces which enforces them socially to reproduce norms of purdah of seclusion (ibid.).

The following encounter illustrates the negotiation of spatial area by conforming to some levels of gender distance instead of totally avoiding eye contact as prevalent during their mother's time and by cloaking oneself with their elaborate *unna*.

[12] The participants' mother told the researcher that they were being told that woman's voice has the power to seduce. This perspective corresponds with the following verse in the Quran: '. . . let not your speech be over-soft, lest he in whose heart is a disease should desire you, but utter customary speech (Roald, 2001, p. 256). However, this verse specifically deals with the wives of the Prophet but is often referred to in the debate on veiling (ibid.). The younger participants believe that the verse was politically manipulated by the opportunistic patriarchal power to control the opinion of the women. A common agreement among both the older and the new generation is that women must not speak in a flirtatious and caring tone with the opposite gender. The point here is that the mothers believe that some women have a 'natural' caring tone. Which creates uncertainty in men's mind. As some situations become ambiguous, for example taking men as the starting point - did she talked with me in a caring manner? Thus, for the elderly participants, it is the women's responsibility not to draw attention from men and regulate her speech to protect her virtue.

[13] Several reasons, the participants' mother informed the researcher contributed to this phenomenon. The most obvious is that the mother think is that now as their daughters are going out for purpose of education, the colleges have male professors, so avoiding eye contact and not expressing their opinion in the outside world would make the situation strange. What their mother suggests to daughter is to keep their gaze reserve, and the tone of conversation 'strict' when they interact with any male persons.

[14] Mahrem (kindred) and non-mahrem (non-kindred)

[15] The participants' mother informed the researcher that in huge family gathering, the premise of architectural accommodation depends heavily on rules of gender segregation. Albeit gender segregated, the domestic space turns into public with the entry of male kin and non-kin. For example, in certain occasions when the need for additional hands is greatest, na-mahram had to perform a wide variety of tasks which ordinarily might be provided by the domestic help. This is one of many circumstances which allows the flow of kin and non-kin and in many respects increases the risk intimate associations.

One day the researcher herself witnessed a situation when she was in one of her participants' houses. The men who entered the participant's house blow the horn of the bike. Her participant peeped through the window curtain and told me to retreat the living room and go to her room. I stood behind the door of the living room and observed her interaction with her male guest. She ensured that her head and body is well-covered. As the two men entered the threshold of the living room, her whole persona changed dramatically. She offered the Islamic greetings and told them to sit and went to call her father. After a while when she came to meet with the researcher, the researcher asked whether the two persons are known to her. She then said, "I know one man [whose age is equivalent to her father's age]. The other young men [accompanying the elderly man] I saw him for the first time. So, I opened the front door. Then I asked, suppose, you saw the two men for the first time, in that case how would you approach them? She replied, at first, they would alert us through the doorbell [bell symbol button] which is there outside the grill gate. If no male figure or domestic maid is present at that moment, then we [me or my mother] would hurriedly take up our *unna* and would communicate with them from behind the grill gate.

Thus, it may be noted that with the intention of maximizing their social distance from the male guest, their dress and bodily comportment provided them a portable means of visual privacy without violating the Islamic etiquette of gaze modesty. In this case the symbolic meaning of purdah that was prevalent in their mother's generation still holds the same significance albeit they follow a different spatial logic in the participants' generation.

Very occasionally if the male (kin and non-kin) ought to enter the house in general and women's sphere in particular, it is the responsibility of men to alert women to their approach [as we saw in the preceding section – making sound of bike horn]. The means of 'early warning system' (Makhlouf, 2017, p. 28) is with "clearing the throat, speaking loudly if there are two persons and if alone then calling out any member of the family and calling out the name of Allah" are the many ways to alert the women of their [male] presence[16]. While men are expected to adhere to these spatial rules of purdah, it is exclusively the responsibility of the women to ensure her bodily coverage.

[16] It is to be noted from the narratives that there 'traditional' and 'modern' ways of alerting the women, which again is related with the relationship of 'closeness' and 'distance' of the person with the family. Traditional

3.3.3.1 Key take aways

Considering the ways the mother spoke about their lives - the time purdah practices starts and from the kinship from which it needs to be observed; are indications of the way in which bodies and spaces are gendered and sexualised. These spatial rules as noted above are strongly embedded in the control of female sexuality and are often expressed in terms of shame *(shorom)* and honour *(somman)*[17].

Unlike other religious scriptures, the Quran and the Hadiths talks about sexuality as part of God's creation that is possessed both by men and women. Thus, for both the genders it talks about lowering the gaze and guard their chastity (Bullock, 2003). However, it states that sexual desire is to be enjoyed within the institution of marriage. Outside marriage, as Guindi notes "behaviour between men and women must be desexualised. Both body and interactive space need to be regulated and controlled and both men and women are required to abide by this temporary desexualization to make public interaction between them possible" (1999, p. 136). Despite of such clear instructions in the Holy book, Muslim cultures tend to put more emphasis on the daughters to behave in ways that would not ruin the honour of the family.

Discussions on the cultural practices of honour and shame, is critically tied to the conduct of the women and fundamentally to the male honour of the family. Hence a common attitude towards women among all cultures is that they are often defined "in terms of kinship ties to men" (Mandelbaum, 1988, p. 100). The transition from the role of daughter to wife thus, involves a whole a new pattern of attire. The most obvious form of this is *burkha*. Wearing of *burkha* in Karimganj markedly distinguishes a married woman from an unmarried one[18].

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ways have been mentioned in the narratives and is mostly used by close relatives. Modern ways are honking the vehicle, ringing the doorbell, and is mostly used by strangers.

[17] The concepts of honour, shame are very broad concepts that includes qualities of general and sexual conduct. Nevertheless, the ideological notions of shame and honour is essentially related to female behaviour which are common throughout Middle Eastern, Mediterranean societies and even in Indian cultures. Hence, it's presence is not unique to Karimganj although their meanings and significance varies across cultures.

[18] It is not exactly known how this pervasive perception came about but the phrase "[she] took the veil" is used in the hadith to mean that a woman became a wife of Muhammed (Ahmed, p. 55) suggests that by publicly covering the man sends message that she is the wife of someone and thus, confers her status of respectability and exclusivity (Guindi, 1999).

By and large the participants' mother reported that as they got married their head-covering shifted from wearing *unna* to *burkha* when venturing outside home. Because *burkha* is an outer clothing specifically worn in public places, hence it is a dress which is time and space-specific (Entwistle, 2001). In marriages, apart from sending special gifts, *burkha* is given as a gift by groom's family, which the bride wears it upon leaving her natal home on the wedding day[19]. By gifting the *burkha*, the groom's family sends message that she is recognized as a part of their family and hence she contributes to their family's status position. Interestingly, this kind of gift giving are also found in Alvi's study of Punjabis in Pakistan but there it is the bride's brother who, upon her marriage, gifts her the 'protective garment' when she leaves the natal place.

In view of women and marriage, a woman's honour is not only directly connected to natal family, but it also extends to the honour of her marital family – and therefore, family honour is also controlled by women of the family through their actions of veiling (Webster, 1984). As for the mothers, what began as a change of dress upon their marriage eventually become a part of what the mothers reflect 'social class statuses'. As Jain views purdah goes much beyond the full veiling to encompass notions of respectability and virtue, class and caste, protection, and exposure" (Jain, 2008, p. 232). What is very clear conversing with these women is that although their encounter with *burkha* started off after their marriage yet it's donning depend on specificities of space (outside home) and interactions (*na-mahram* kin and non-kin) and on the normative clothing rules as laid down in families[20].

[19] On the wedding day if the bride fails to wear burkha due to her emotional breakdown, she is heavily shrouded with a thick unna or chaddor. Such a unique custom has not been without interpretations. Although common and obvious reasons have been discussed in the main section. However, the other reason is not to catch *nozar* (evil eye) from seen and unseen dimensions.

[20] Gradually women can relax their wearing of burkha. However, this relaxation happens not at the cost of bodily modesty.

3.4 Respectable dressing *(bodro kapor)* is intertwined with the notions of *shorom* (shame) and *izzat* (honour)[21] - spoken often in moral acumen

Saba Mahmood asserts that it is the empirical character of bodily practices which is the terrain upon which the 'topography of the subject comes to be mapped'. Her analysis differs from the usual understanding that the internal or unconscious is manifested in somatic or outward forms such as mannerisms or dress. According to her, it is how the practices are carried out or repeated 'bodily practices' which transform the subject who practices them (2005, p. 121). Therefore, for the participants' mothers, a person's *'haya-shorom'* gets reflected in their manner of dressing which can further magnify or diminish a family's honour. Thus, repeated actions, verbal and non-verbal carried out every single day, have the effect of causing them to internalize new modes of being. While maintaining the rules of the social space of respectable dressing which they wear both at home and outside, modest and covered dress, hence, remains an essential aspect in the family.

Discussions on dress among the participants' mother often centred on changing dressing styles among young adult Muslim women. Muslim women of Karimganj have long adorned *burga* and *unna* as mode of concealment. The chapter has already demonstrated that the form and type of concealment marks the transitional phase in the lifecycle of the women, space, and their position in the kinship system. However, what the participants' mother identified the nature of dressing as 'appropriate' carries the notion of 'good' girl from well to do Muslim families. Thus, class contributes to what is and is not condoned.

Through the observations of how younger women dresses up in Karimganj simultaneously combining the commentary and discussion that this often aroused in FGD, the researcher gradually developed a picture of what constitutes respectable attire and for whom it constitutes as such in contemporary Karimganj. Married women wear sari in special

[21] The concept of honour is not constant. It has various overlapping meanings and determination of someone's honour rests on different parameter (detailed discussion also done by Mandelbaum, 1988). Theoretically speaking, codes of honour and shame is for both men and women, but public perception of shame is that it is caused mostly by women (Tett, 1995). As honour is seen in relation to a man's standing in the community is as much sought as shame is diligently avoided, argues Mandelbaum (1988). Shorom or shame has both positive and negative connotations. To have shorom is a good quality which prevents a person from doing undesirable things. A woman's 'misbehaviour' does not always point to sexual act, her sexuality is often informed from her day-to-day behaviour - her style of walking, her way of dressing, whether she left her hair open or tied it, as well as how she behaves with her family, neighbours, etc. Honour and shame can be understood as 'rhetorical device' (Werbner, 2007, p. 168) for keeping matured unmarried women in line.

occasion such as, wedding or in family functions such as feast, and *salwar kameez* for their daily activities. On top of it, they wear *burkha* and niqaab or hijab. However, if one does not wear additional garments then they must main 'respectability' in dress. School going young girls generally wear Indo-western style dresses along with a scarf. This is again monitored according to the body shape of the wearer. It is marriageable girl for whom appropriate dress is crafted to incorporate new bodily practices.

In an ascending order of respectability, most preferred female dress includes traditional wear such as, *salwar kameez* (which presently comes in different shapes, designs and under different names) with a long, wide *unna.* The tunic should be loose and not body hugging. *Unna* should cover the head and upper body and should not be left on the shoulder. If the kameez is see-through or it is elbow length, then a T-shirt or similar kind material is deemed necessary to wear underneath the main dress. One thing about *unna* is it is worn in three different ways in Karimganj:

It covers the head and chest, rests on the shoulders like V-shape and falling over the chest with hijab or draping around the neck and bring the two ends to cover the front (without hijab). When worn as a head-cover the *unna* does not obscure the face and the strands of hair can remain visible. This is considered as cultural appropriate ways of head-covering and is acceptable.

Another respectable and partial acceptable form of dressing is baggy jeans and a loose kurta till knee length or long maxi dress but must be accompanied either with a hijab or scarf.

At the safer end of the scale of respectability is wearing shapeless outer garment such as, abaya, *burkha*, hijab and niqab on top of the above stated respectable dressing categories. Not necessarily the colour of the outer garment should be black. Added to this, there are differences in design, colour and material which are a further indicators of class distinction. Fancy *burkha* and abayas are reserved for special occasions where middle class and respectable families gather. 'Ordinary' 'synthetic' 'black' *burkhas* are stereotyped as village women. Whereas the same black *burkha* in a flowy gown design with subtle touch of embroidered work is considered as 'aesthetically elegant'. What can be inferred from this is that the participants' mothers identify the significance of consumption in creating distinctions between people belonging to different class positions. The conscious

classificatory practices involve in conspicuous consumption not only suggests their social distance from those in lower stratum, but it also enhances their symbolic values within the middle-class circle (Sabur, 2022).

Unacceptable and less respectable ways of dressing include all those forms of dresses and adornment that expose the body parts as well as reveal the body shape such as, body-hugging dresses [it can be traditional or western wear or a combination of both]. Leaving the head uncovered falls somewhere between partially and less respectable category.

The 'respectable and acceptable' women's dress in Karimganj is made more complicated by variations in the ways in which the various dresses described above can and should be worn – for instance, married women when they wear sari which is considered as respectable in Indian culture must be worn with a long-sleeved, loose, long and fully lined blouse, so that the body shape is not revealed" (Osella & Osella, 2007, p. 237). However, in Karimganj it is mostly the women above 50 years who wear full coverage blouse design, the classification of which is laid down by Osella and Osella in the case of Kerala. The women who are below the age of 50 wears elbow length blouse. It is important to note here that a change in the social space may raise the partially acceptable dress to the preferable form of dressing as the accounts below reveals.

One participant's mother who is a teacher in Government school expressed:

> "In my family I allow my daughter to wear Indian and western wear. But I make sure it should appear decent to the one who is wearing it as well as to one who sees the wearer[22]. In the name of 'everyone is wearing this'; I do not allow them to wear tight fitting jeans or short tops or tops that exposes the belly. We cannot be like them. We spend so much time thinking about what others will think of us. I have seen in town girls from lower class Muslim families wearing dress like this. Even their makeup is loud and gaudy. For them, decency does not matter, and comfort gets replaced with what everyone else is wearing, let me wear it too".

Upon hearing the sentence, 'everyone is wearing this' other woman added,

> "Yes! Yes! We also feel the same. That day I was at the cloth store doing Eid shopping. So, the salesman not finding what I have wanted called another salesman to bring the dress

[22] The wearer must be sensitive to public opinion.

> from the other counter. When I turned around, I saw a girl [college going] was bending to see the cloths displayed before her. What struck my notice was that as she bends forward, her back got exposed. So, she was continually struggling to pull it down. She also understood that it is causing her uncomfortable [the shop is crowded, and she seems oddly out of place]. *Taire ela dekia amar nijor o shorom lagi gese* (translated: seeing her like this I felt ashamed). Even you have worn it, wear a top which covers your hips. Whatever they see in mobile, they try to copy it without even understanding the concept of *jaisa desh vaisa bhesh* (When in the Romans do as the Romans do). They can be like this. Neither they have concern for their family, nor do they fear Allah".

Another woman, a widow vehemently interrupted, *"amrar manushe o ola tight fitting kapor pinditra, aar kita koitam oinno rar kotha"* (translated: even among us [middle class] women are wearing body hugging dress. What to talk about others). In a curious manner, other women asked who they are, the women who made the opening quote replied that, "daughter of so and so went to Noida and seeing the *chok chok bairer duniya dekia tair hosh uri gese, honor porinte ola kapor pindoin* (translated: seeing the glitzy outside world she lost her conscious, girls of those places wear dress like this), she forgot her own dress code that she followed over the years. My daughter showed me her photograph spreading both hands around and captioning it as I am free".

In response to her mother, the participant suggested that "perhaps she wore it for one day or her workplace demanded such dress. Just looking at the photo you cannot judge her". To which, the mother gave a look, the researcher will not forget. The discussion ended with the elderly women saying that *"sorir dakar maaje o sondorota ase"* (translated: covering body has its own beauty).

It is fairly understood from the discussion above that standards of decent dress are clearly marked among these middle-class Muslim families. In the opinion of these women, the lower-class Muslim families knowingly or unknowingly avoid these standards, as they are least concerned with the opinion of others. They try to emulate what they see on media without considering the knowledge of context appropriate dress. Further, the mother's understanding points to the fact that social class has an important effect on the reception of Islamic messages. The mother's understanding of 'decency in dresses' is interchangeably used with the word 'comfort' which is nothing short of class habitus and moral concerns. It is not the dress that causes loss of respectability per se, but rather the

lack of self-taught strategies of minding the dress and body in public place. The necessity to employ dress strategies while considering the movement of the body when in motion - walking, sitting, bending over (Almila, 2019), arises partly to fulfil religious obligations of bodily modesty also known as *haya-shorom*.

Despite the shared understanding of the maintenance of class habitus for analysing what kind of clothes are appropriate for which social space. Space specific rules that demand negotiation of dress and alter of self is considered only by the young adult woman, as the previous discussions among the elderly women interestingly identified with. Thus, the young women of the same class who imitates the dress styles of metropolitan cities are viewed disrespectfully. The young participant clearly understood the uneasy situation that the potential view created, and she carefully balances her approval of certain female dress styles with caveats and exceptions, which in part appear to be attempts to avoid seeing her as overly conservative in front of the interviewer.

The uniqueness of these middle-class mother's understanding of the nature of women's way of dressing it seems too often work to define the moral and social boundaries of middle-class femininity. In implicating that certain type of dresses is read through wearer's bodies 'as having value or no value' in the dominant social discourses (Skeggs, 2004, p. 169, cited in Hussain, 2019, p.101), these mothers illustrate some of the ways in which society speaks of the women's body. What is of paramount importance is that these issues cannot be addressed in an isolated manner but should be read through gendered and marked spaces.

Image 3.6: Researcher with the mother and the participants doing FGD sessions

3.4.1 Women in public space and potency of gossip

The everyday bodily practices adopted by the young college going women – demeanour, and dress is one way to uphold the normative ideals of respectability, and, on the other hand, this is the condition that allow their movement outside home with reference to noble tasks such as, pursuing education and helping the family in running errands. It would be wrong to say that participants view the cultural and religious prescriptions on their bodily behaviour as performatively challenging, but the responses of the mother and the code of conduct followed by daughter indicate that the body is indeed conceived as 'a set of boundaries' (Butler, 1990, p. 46). As one of the mothers narrates:

> "I have openly advised my daughter to wear frock-kurta and take a scarf while riding scooty. But instead of taking scarf she took hijab and mask and told me that it protects her from dust. So, I am happy that no one would get a chance to 'label' her. However, it took some time for the researcher, to learn that many women wear kurta with elastic leggings. Kurta has cut in both sides which when walking or while riding 'scooty' makes the hem of the kurta move[23] and leggings, a skin-tight bottom hence it sticks very closely to the skin exposes the entire figure of the legs[24]. Thus ogling, jeering by male onlookers happen. In this way transgressing the boundaries of appropriate feminine comportment happens every now and then. To counter it, mothers make sure that the dress their daughter is wearing is in place and no skin is showing. Thus, attempt is made to deflect the male gaze. Their mother expressed that there are all sorts of people outside home-known, unknown, good, and bad so we need to make sure they are cover up in a manner that people hardly find anything sexual".

To illustrate the point, another mother interjected:

"Sometimes my daughter tells the auto driver to drop her before the house. But if there are other passengers, they drop her off in the main road. So, she ought to walk a few hundred meters to reach the house. I told her do not walk leisurely - looking here and there to every passing thing. Instead look ahead, walk steadily, and keep your mobile phones inside your

[23] To confirm my thought, the mothers even complained that some kurtas have long/wide slits that if one raises their hand/arm, then the side of the waist gets exposed, so constant adjustment and readjustment is needed.

[24] In many ways, the mother's concern appears to be akin to Gilbertson's (2014) middle class participants who at one point regarded leggings indecent but afterwards it was very common among middle class young women.

bag. The mother stated that these ideals exist because the family is well known in the area. If she does anything 'wrong'[25] in the eyes of society, the honour of her entire family is affected". Sharing her concern another mother adds:

> "Our *izzat* is everything. *"Betain tor lakan amra andaazi jebaide mono oy obaide saite partam na"* (translated: Unlike the men, we cannot look here and there unnecessarily) nor go out at any time of the day the way they aimlessly roam about. Our movement is bounded by *"dorkare baire jaa ooa* (going out when necessity arise)".

In practice then, women can access public space legitimately when it is marked by purpose, time, and distance (Mandelbaum, 1988; Ranade, 2007). To be seen as 'good', women belonging to a well-to-do family, her body is trained to be disciplined through a ritualised performance of demure body language when in public. In their daily negotiation of public space, the young women produce notions of respectability by wearing respectable dress that reflects the idea that the bodily exposure displays lack of *shorom*; and the presence of *shorom* in women is used as a cultural device to define what is socially desirable and undesirable actions, and in doing so, is related to the wearer's awareness of bodily self.

In contrast to men's movement, women's movement had to be extremely purposeful, so as not to give the impression of being in public *odorkhari/bekhama* (unnecessarily); so as not to be seen as inviting undesirable gossip. Young Muslim women who dress 'inappropriately' or whose movement outside the house is without an apparent purpose are looked suspiciously. What is noteworthy to understand is that the presence of women in public space is strongly marked and their conscious positioning in public space "sets into practice a whole set of connotative chains" (Ranade, 2007, p. 1523) of being seen and evaluated in a specific way.

The participants' mother are thus agents in developing norms of appropriateness and balancing respectability and not crossing the line that would affect familial honour is crucial for receiving good marriage proposal. Circulation of gossip among the social network affects the *izzat* of the family thus, increasing the likelihood that the family failed

[25] Examples of 'wrong' the mother pointed out are, looking at the phone screen and smiling, or endlessly talking over the phone, or unexpectedly you met with male person, and you interacted. Possibly you are seeing something entertaining in your mobile phone or the men whom you have talked may be your distant relative, but the men who sits in this bazaar area are not aware of all this. They need something to talk about and one unconscious action on the part of woman gives them the opportunity to spread rumor about you.

in bringing up moral and religious values in children. Patel noted that "families constantly monitor and judge other families' morality and propriety, particularly in the highly public marriage market" (2012, p. 29). This makes sense when young women reported that some of their cousins who delayed marriage due to different reasons were 'advised' by *dur ka ristedaar* (distant relatives) to change their appearance and demeanour. From the viewpoint of those 'distant relatives' they were being labelled as *nachri* (dancer), *noti* (slut) and 'colourful model', by men and women alike. In other words, such social labelling is given by name and repeating this through gossip is a performative act that can lead to loss of *izzat* of the family.

3.5 Then versus now phenomenon - Some reflections

On several occasions, the mother of all the participants expressed their surprise over their daughter's increasing Islamic knowledge. The mother shared

> "our daughters keep on telling us that they have watched a video in YouTube where the Muftis [sharing proper references from Quran and Hadiths] said that *(fisedi mata)* backbiting, *(bodnaam kora)* gossiping, and slandering goes against the principal of Islam. They also showed us the videos. It is not like that we don't know it. But sometimes it is just that we *(mata)* talk about it (candidly acknowledging that they substitute gossip with talk). Not everybody likes to constantly talk about practices of Islam every time when they meet. Even when we end our talk, we seek forgiveness and say *Allah amrar sobore etat thaki bachaita* (May Allah protect us from all).

The mother was taken aback by her daughters' scholarly argumentation. Perhaps she had expected her daughter not to stretch the issue further, yet here [the young participant was ready with her response]: "however it is important for you not to justify your behaviour in terms of maintaining sociable interaction and instead agree that what you engage in is Islamically wrong so that next time when you speak you remain careful".

This shows that engaging deeply with one's faith is more of a personal journey and less a matter of compulsion. What happened in the conversation is that the young participants expect their mothers to be the exemplars of a righteous and noble person who practices their religion perfectly. For they believe if one is religious[26] then one should refrain from

[26] Participants' understanding of religious is behaving according to Islamic values and following formal rules of ritual practices.

indulging in things which is considered ‘profane’ discussion. Contemplating to what Ammerman eloquently states: “religion simply exists alongside all other realities of everyday life” (2014, p. 195). Notably, mothers’ social gathering involve discussion of ordinary and sacred realities, and this is what make their conversation ‘portable and powerful’. What is significant here is that, “It is not just that people take religion into everyday life; they also take everyday life into religion” (ibid., p. 201). To this, Lindsay’s concept of the ‘end point fallacy’, which asserts that the social reality and its negotiations is an ongoing process in which new definitions produce new behaviour in a never-ending cycle (2005, p. 10) is an excellent way to explain what goes beyond the domestic space of women’s behaviour as they move between two worlds - mundane and religious.

Noting the researcher’s surprised look and listening to the conversations, other women who was present there expressed to the researcher:

> “On numerous occasions the present generation has better explanation of religion which our generation completely lacked. On their mobile gallery they collect Q&A posts of Islam and related posts. Often, they would cross check on the Internet to what we speak (laughingly making this statement). One participant’s mother who expressed that her grandchild sometimes asks easy questions such as, ‘who created us’ followed by more difficult one ‘who created Allah’ which the participant’s mother replies, ‘I don’t know’. The participant [who is aunt of this child] she says that “we need to end this cycle of ‘I don’t know’ because we have all the means [resources] to know”.

Hearing her daughter’s clarity in response, the mother says:

> “From this, you [pointing to researcher] can understand that our knowledge lacked the true essence of teachings of Islam. Frequently we were told by our mother to follow their footsteps and not to apply our own *dimaag* (brain) to understand the depth of what the Quran says. In a similar manner, we also told our children [now they are adult participants of the present study] to see ‘what we do and how we do’ and follow the religious practices accordingly. At other times, even if some of us had any question we were told to ask question to our father who would answer it for us. And that is the end of discussion. And interrogating the religious rules or any “why it is like this” related to Allah was considered as blasphemous, nuisance and are frowned upon by the older generation. In actual sense of the term, we were not even encouraged to ask question. Now, my daughter says, the religious scholars in online platform acknowledged that it is normal to have question

> relating to cosmos and mundane affairs. They encourage people to ask question on religious matters, clear the doubts. Even sometimes, I also watch those videos and understood that why our daughters appreciate what they lean about religion from mobile. It is because these scholars explain Islamic practices logically unlike our time when distorted and exaggerated practices were taught in the name of religion. Things have changed now."

The participants' mother expressed a negative connotation with received religious knowledge. Just like their mother's generation, participants too were taught the sacred text in an incomprehensible manner thus, the significance of divine meaning is not emphasized and hence the outcome is 'ignorance on the part of learner'. The religious leaders are looked upon with reverence and considered knowledgeable in the communities. Understanding religion, it seems, is only their prerogatives. Any query on religion which the family fails to provide answer is in turn passed to them to respond to it. The participants' mother asserts that culture of this region discourages people from asking questions regarding religion, which implicitly suggest the presence of patriarchal tool of control and supremacy. To which participants see 'half learned' religious scholar as the primary reason for an inconsistent religious understanding among ordinary people.

Social media, particularly Instagram have paved the way for these participants for religious engagement with the new religious intellectuals. Specifically, such online engagements with the religious information have helped these participants to develop a 'reflexive approach' by re-evaluating the traditional practices and values, rather than blindly and unquestionably accepting them. This phenomenon of reinterpreting faith with the help of new media has been described by Eickelman and Piscatori as 'objectification of Islam' (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009, p. 53). The participants' mother realized that unlike their 'consistent message to children on religion' (Bader & Desmond, 2006) – do like this, don't do like that; a passé parenting style of passing religious knowledge to their daughter, their daughters are 'working hard' to make sure that their children don't have to unlearn what they are taught as a child and relearn Islam all over again. This highlights that transferring religious beliefs and practices on to the next generation involves what Danièle Hervieu-Légera termed as 'crisis of transmission' (1998, p. 214) because as we have seen in the discussions, that present generations are not once and for all copies of earlier generations, and they take stock of religious practices and interpretations that necessarily undergo reinterpretation. Particularly in the era of Internet where Muslims have realized the

diversity of [the voices within their religion] and multiple 'Islamic' ways of doing things. What matters is their 'reconstitution of moral subjects' which is moulded by the overarching moral principles of Quran and Hadiths that guides the young, educated participants' ethics and behaviour and ultimately formed the 'self'.

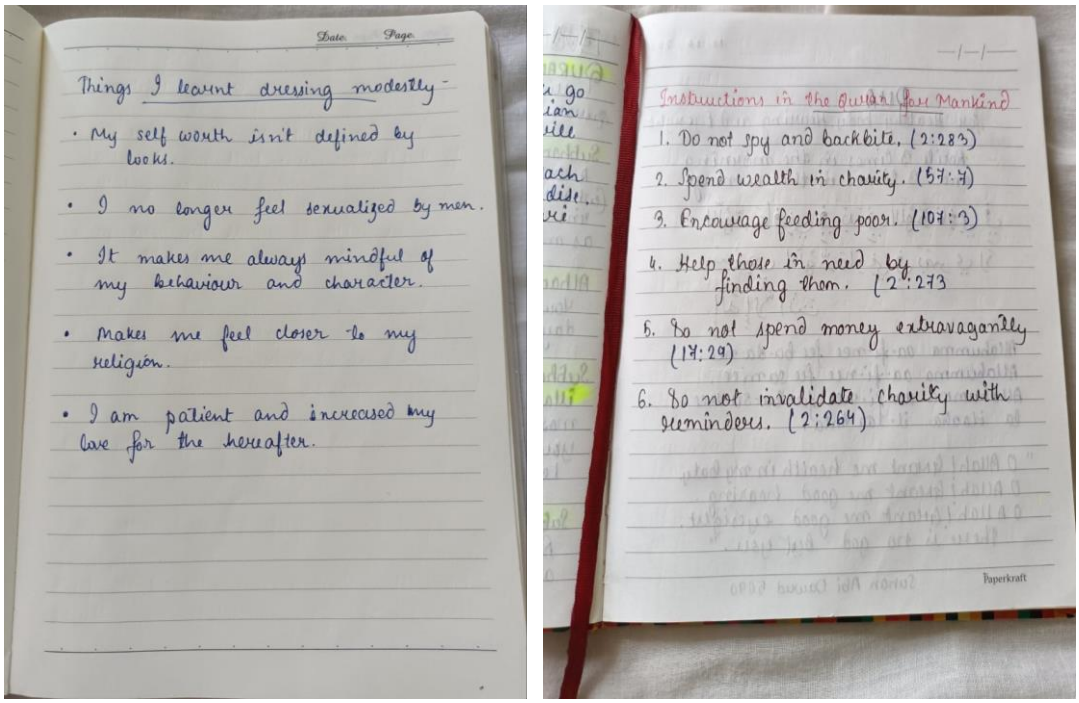

Image 3.7: Noting down religious information on the diary

3.6 Questioning, bargaining and complying culturally gendered norms - religion is part of the conversation of everyday life

Sociologist Nancy Ammerman aptly stated, "religion can be found in the conversational spaces - both in religious organizations and beyond - where sacred and mundane dimensions of life are produced and negotiated" (2014, p. 189). This suggestion aptly encapsulates this section that focusses on some of the daily conversation around pursuing higher education, work, virtuous women in Islamic history and men's hijab. While the talks are not necessarily related to religion, yet discussions about the correct practice of religious knowledge are brought centre stage as part of everyday discourse. As discussion turns to certain cultural practices in the family, the section demonstrates how certain cultural practices act as constraint for the young adult women. Rahiman in her article, "Gender, Religion and Higher Education: Strategies of Muslim Women Students in India" pointed out that scholars such as Engineer and Hasan, and Menon argues that more than

Islam, it is the patriarchy which is the real culprit for women's subordinate status and the most susceptible factor behind low representation of Muslim women in education and employment (2023, p. 465). However, it would be wrong to suggest that the participants are mere passive pawns who internalise these ideological factors. During the whole work of research, substantial conversation took place in certain key areas – behaviour which demonstrate resentment, opposition as well as awareness of women's subordination. Under what conditions, they [young adult participants] navigate the structural constraint is taken under this section.

3.6.1 Education and its importance

Almost every maternal figure the researcher spoke to in Karimganj insisted on the importance of educated daughters. Mother of some participants had access to education till their secondary and graduate level and only two participants' mother completed their graduation after getting married. The participants' mother mentioned that preferential treatment of educating sons located in their mothers and that of her grandmothers' lives.

Upon asking why it was important to educate girls, the responses point to three factors: female autonomy, parent's aspirations, and marriage factor.

Two participants' mothers (one is widow, and another is separated) told the researcher that since they had their requisite educational qualifications, they utilize their cultural capital that accrues from a good education to deal with their life challenges. When asked about natal kin support, they mentioned 'busy schedule' as the reason for declining familial support. As Sylvia Vatuk points out, identifying a need for 'self-support is itself a sign of changing times' (1972, p. 79). Thus, the mothers frequently emphasised on the potential for financial autonomy provided by education, that is, an educated woman who stands on her own feet would not have to depend on any one for financial support.

According to the participants' mothers, nowadays families want their daughters to complete at least graduation. Even certain families have no issues if their daughters want to pursue post-graduation courses or teacher education training programmes popularly known as B.Ed and D.El.Ed course. This is so because in today's time when people visit someone's home, they ask what the daughter in the family does and give more respect and encouragement to families in which the daughter is studying or pursuing a career. Further,

repeatedly they told the researcher that the first question, men ask when they come to meet with their prospective bride is whether she completed graduation or not. This is followed by question on her religious practice. As one participant narrated that when the groom's family came to see her, apart from asking her educational qualification, they also inquire on whether she wears hijab and fulfils all her religious duties[27].

If one attempts to read the narratives it seems that public perception is, as girls achieve higher education their religious observance decreases (Mandelbaum, 1988). Apparently young college going women wearing hijab and abaya in public male space is relevant in Karimganj. Contrary to the earlier generation, when in the name of purdah rules, Muslim women were prevented from attending educational institutions, now, the perception that hijab and abaya has the strategic effect of allowing women to move easily through public space without the need of a public chaperone helps them to attend educational institutions without breaking the 'purdah rules.' Further, completing graduation or teacher training courses has the added advantage of women to get a professional career in teaching which lacked during their mother's time. Thus, tangible achievements of women which involves education, employment, and the need to maintain a 'morally good and chaste women image' significantly enhances the overall respect of the family.

Many participants expressed their desire to work to which the parents extended their support to their decision. During the FGD, frequently, the parents highlight that their daughters are more 'sincere and obedient' than their sons in matters of studying. This shows that parents have high hopes and faith in the capability of their daughters as potential sources of making a good name for herself and for her family as well.

Indeed, daughter's desire to work and parental aspirations seem to work only if they are able to attain a good degree and choose a career perceived as 'safe' and 'respectable': one in which they could keep their modesty and dignity intact. The mostly preferred career is teaching career followed by self-employment, and administrative, legal jobs. These are considered as socially respectable job for middle class families in Karimganj. Naturally, the influences of family on daughter's career preferences strengthens the arguments that

[27] Wearing hijab not only implies that the wearer is pious, but it also adds to the piety of the wearer's families (Medina 2014, as cited in Rumaney & Sriram, 2023).

typically ‘appropriate’ career for girls are occupations that “do not demand long hours out of the home and locality, or prolonged contact with men” (Khan, 2007, p. 1530).

Although educational achievement is the primary basis which enhances the *izzat* of the family as it gets embodied in the form of paid employment, yet few families the researcher spoke to, nevertheless agrees that the prime responsibility of women are housework and childcare. Thus, the widely prevalent discourses of attaining education as necessary enroute for better livelihood and reproduction of social status for the family in general, is surpassed by discourses of educating girls to be good wives and mothers which is the stereotypical view of education within a patriarchal society (Rahiman, 2023, p. 467).

Narratives from the field solidifies the prioritisation of domesticity not only in relation to education and paid employment, but also in discussions of marriage. In arranging marriages, education is considered as worthy so long it is applied within the private sphere[28] which Raheja and Gold identifies as ‘domestication of female learning’ (1994, p. 189). One participant narrated that her father attempted to stop her from enrolling into bachelor’s programme. But later, agreed to allow her to continue education. She described how she managed to circumvent the difficult situation:

“Though my father teaches Arabic in madrassa, a man who is aware of what our Prophet told about education[29], yet his thoughts are dictated by the rules framed by society for women. According to him, no matter, how far women reach in her career, she has to return to home, and cook. Further, he says women with higher educational qualification faces rejection in the marriage market.

Upon listening to what my father said I burst emotionally and approached *boro chachu* (eldest uncle) and narrated my ordeal. I told him, “The first word that was revealed to our

[28] The patriarchal understanding is that home is the natural place for a woman and that fulfilling the role of a housewife and mother is a fundamental role for a woman. Thus, they see a woman who cares about her husband, children and imparts them the Islamic knowledge and worldly knowledge serves the community better than if she goes to work. It seems obvious that internalisation and perpetuation of gender roles are present in Muslim societies in Karimganj too. However, unlike her mother’s generation, she did not accept and agree with this human-made interpretation and later, before her future husband she explained her understanding of ‘role of complementarity of both the parents in looking after the family’.

[29] In terms of seeking education the Prophet, at no point made any reference to gender and said “seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim” [Al Tirmidhi, Hadith 74].

Prophet was *"Iqra"* (read) which means we should seek knowledge"[30]. My *boro chachu* looked at me astonishingly and smiled back and assured me he will talk. Eventually, he intervened and mentioned the cases of some families where the groom's families want their bride to complete graduation. Even her uncle told her father, 'You gave your eldest daughter in marriage immediately after her completion of higher secondary. Now the husband has secured for her a job in kindergarten school since most of the time she stays idle at home'. From this, you must understand the criteria of today's young men. He also assured him not to worry on decreasing good marriage proposal since we belong from a well-known *bongsho* (class)".

From the above narratives, it can be deciphered that although minimum education is necessary to attract a marriage proposal, yet no man desires to marry a woman of high qualification [31]. Further, parents identify that 'highly educated' daughter are least preferred in the marriage market. Gilbertson pointed out that several scholars of South Asia such as, Mankekar, and Still have described concerns around (over)educated girls. That they overstep the boundaries of their roles as daughters, wives and daughters-in-law (cited in Gilbertson, 2011, p. 132). Vatuk's Shimla informants constructed a stereotype of educated girls that they prove to be incompetent and reluctant housewives (1972, p. 78). The studied participants' mother informed that families in Karimganj do not prefer highly educated daughter-in-laws not because they would challenge the familial authority but because higher education generally involves delaying marriage. Once the standard age of marriage gets over, it becomes difficult to get suitable groom. Akin to Rahiman's study, the present research findings also argues that the "meaning of education among Muslim women is limited to 'marriageability'" (2023, p. 472). Thus, parents are constantly compelled to worry on the achieved educational qualification of their daughter and its impact to find a good and suitable husband.

However, it has come to notice that the dynamics of marriage market had also changed in Karimganj. Quite like Vatuk's findings that the demand of white-collar young men for an educated bride could be the reason because of which girls in her selected study area could

[30] Islam began with an order to read, to inform oneself (Mernissi, 1991; p. 28).

[31] Although in all probability there exists Muslim families which pose no challenge to women's higher education such as, masters or doctoral programme, but prevalence of such families is extraordinarily low in Karimganj. It is also significant to note that those who pursue 'higher education' their ordinal position, economic and educational status of the families must be considered.

complete high level of education (1972, p. 78). Similar finding is also reported from the research field as evident from the above narratives. However, just like Vatuk's informants, the participants' mother too emphasised that education of the women must be up to the point that there is no decline in acceptable marriage proposal (ibid., p.79).

3.6.2 Historical noble women of Islam and particularly their mode of comportment

The wives of the Prophet's family are considered as the noble one in the history of Islam. The wives of the prophet are the role model of the participants and their mothers and looking up to them in their everyday life as an ideal figure of patience, and devotion is reckoned necessary with a view to attain the highest piousness. In the Hadith literature, Prophets wives have been described as exemplary women. Stowasser writes:

> A large segment of the Hadith depicts the Mothers of the Believers as models of piety and righteousness whose every act exemplifies their commitment to establish God's order on earth by personal example…Indeed, the traditions on the women's personal comportment, dress, performance of ritual and worship, and the like… in that their intended meaning is normative, not descriptive. Each recorded detail represents s*unna*h-in-the-making…(1994, p. 115).

It is important to note that when the participants took to hijab and abaya, not all mothers accepted it in the beginning. According to some of the participants, their mothers told them, "What is this new drama all about"? Another says, "my mother was telling me you are ordering hijab one after another, will you even wear it?" Even some of their grandmother express confusion "you are all young, if you cover your face with mask and wear hijab, who will see you"[32]. To these concerns, the participants explained that in the beginning some *maat* (talk) was there in the family regarding their change in dress but over time, the family got adapted to their decisions. During the interview process, these mothers expressed that they are happy that their daughter wears hijab. When asked why so? More than half of the mothers openly acknowledge that they never told them to cover their head, since they are well aware that their daughters are aware of contextual head-covering and this is sufficient for them. But the technology and the hijab industry changed

[32] Who will see you is indirect way of saying who will give you marriage proposal as your face is hidden behind the mask, people will think that you are married.

the equations which their grandparents could not accomplish through their superstitious stories [details discussed in chapter 5].

One mother narrated how her daughter made her understand the value of hijab:

My daughter explained to me calmly that she read it in Instagram that even when a blind man was there in front of the prophet he asked his wives to observe hijab[33]. She made me understand the degree of obedience to God's command. After explaining the details of prophet's time, she asked me the question: "By not wearing hijab am 'I trying to prove that I'm better than these best and pious women of Islamic history".

> Another mother said, "at first, I was not happy with my daughter's decision to wear *neqaab* when she goes out with me. But later she too explained me that the degree of good and bad people existed in all ages. Even during the time of prophet, bad people loitered in the street, so to ease the movement of Muslim women in public sphere, Allah revealed the verse of covering to which Prophet adhered. I am also aware of that Allah instructed us to cover but what situation promulgated Allah's ordinance was unknown to me. Indeed, I would say most of the women are ignorant of this. So, I thought my daughter is reading and accepting what she thinks as correct. She is intellect enough to justify her action."

Contrary to the studies of Mernissi (1991), and Ahmed (1992) that argues that veiling is a privilege for Prophet's wives, and is not ordained for ordinary women, the young hijabi participants and their mothers acknowledge that covering extends to all Muslim women. Their argument is that in Islam *nabiji er bibi* (Prophets wives) have a special status. They are considered as the 'Mother of the Believers' hence the command instructed to them eventually extends to all Muslim women who believes in Prophet's message. Thus, in advocating hijab and other modes of covering the mother and daughter questions all such claims that associate hijab only with the prophet's wives based on their superior status in Islam. Apparently, they believe that in everyday practice, the ordinary Muslim women should exercise strict form of hijab as in their viewpoint the present society is more hypersexual compared to the Prophet's time when women were virtuous and manageable.

[33] Clarke explained that the stated hadith report has to do with space rather than clothing and with the attraction of women to men rather than vice-versa (2003, p. 225). Similar understanding was also found in participant after probing her, but she also came up with an additional understanding. For her, it is a cryptic message to avoid unnecessary gazing at na-mahrem. For her, hijab requires absolute seclusion through screening by which refers to neqaab.

As a part of the discussion on the ideal women of the early Islamic era, the participants' mother said that as part of religious education they were not taught in-depth about them, nor they were taught how Prophet Muhammed has treated the womenfolk of his households. When researcher asked the elderly mothers to name few female role models and their contribution in public life, they could only name Aisha, Khadijah, and Fatima but failed to mention their role in community life. Some of them made apologies and expressed their embarrassment for unable to answer such straightforward question. Basically, they were taught how good the wives of the prophet were in terms of religious devotion, how they showed exemplary patience in times of financial difficulties, and their role as a nurturing woman; On the contrary, the young participants had abundant knowledge on the role of the Khadiza's entrepreneurial and Aisha's intellectual skill. And the participant who convinced her father to allow her to study further also mentioned to the researcher that the world's first university was founded by a Muslim women named Fatima al-Fihri[34].

3.6.3 Men's hijab and its ambivalence

Another conversation was around men's hijab[35] which has received less attention and is hardly pondered upon. The sacred text describes men's hijab in terms of lowering his gaze, protect his chastity and not to look lustfully towards any women. Despite of its emphasis in Quran, the participants in [melancholy tone] express that in practice, the family's emphasis more on women's dress and comportment and exclude men from following the guidelines of bodily modesty. To this, participants' mother strongly assert that teachings of sexual modesty [*chokor purdah* for men] is taught to boys when they are being imparted Islamic teachings. To which participants concede that although teachings are given to [boys], but [when the participants ask the question on male hijab to their male classmate] they [boys] could not recall, or some even goes to the extent of surprise and questioning mode - like was it really said? Ignorance on this part explains that one-sided emphasis on women's dress and behavioural norms shows how gender preferences work over religious practices. In this regard, it is worth mentioning here a personal account of the researcher:

[34] https://risingkashmir.com/fatima-al-fihri-the-woman-who-founded-worlds-first-university/

[35] Men do have an Islamic dress code - it should be loose, opaque, cover the area of the navel to the knee and not designed in a way to attract attention (Bullock, 2003, p. 200).

> "After doing the fieldwork on the way to home, the researcher took an auto where already two men were sitting. The researcher took the side door seat to make herself comfortable. Surprisingly the men who was sitting next to the researcher instead of sitting with his legs extended (the way men sit usually) he sat with his legs closed. Moreover, he placed his plastic bag in between the researcher and himself so that his body do not touch the body of female researcher".

Real life experience like the one mentioned above suggests that the men in the auto "abided by his own self-imposed rules of ritualized cross sex encounters in public space" (Guindi, 1999, p. 118). Besides, the intangible modesty code also points out that he behaves respectfully towards the researcher without any knowledge of whether the researcher wore hijab or not and her religious affiliation. Quite clearly it points out that socialization and upbringing vary when applied across families[36].

In part conversations like these demonstrate that seeking knowledge by the young participants is seen by the mother as an indication of getting closer to one's religion. Besides this, the mother believes that 'mobile' [Internet] has helped the younger generation to obtain authentic religious understanding and has helped them to shape their faith. The presentation of religious principles and doctrines in social media sites such as, Instagram has played a transnational role in expanding religious knowledge beyond space. Furthermore, participants certain level of familiarity with what they have been taught and what they have been exposed to religious knowledge in social media helps us to understand how religious meanings are consumed, understood, and even practiced in everyday life.

Critical characteristics of increasing interest in faith include spending time and contemplating with Quran and Hadith study, prayer, and worship. It has been observed that the traditional setting of attending Tablighi Jamaat is no longer the norm as men are busy in their 'secular' profession. Individuals can revive their faith by watching a sermon or podcast on YouTube, viewing clips on Instagram, or watching or reading questions or comments.

[36] The men whom the researcher is talking about here in the narratives, after reaching his destination as he stepped out of the auto, the house in which he entered the researcher knows the family well. His *bongsho* (wider patrilineage) were in the profession of alim (learned in religious matter) and his father is a well-known headmaster in the area.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter have explored variegated nature of socialization that takes place within selected Muslim middle-class families in Karimganj. In conceptualizing the family as a 'socialising agent of practice' of "what is being said, with what is expressed or communicated about the formative period of *Mosidi pora* (primary religious education at mosque), with what is being shown or signaled through what is being said" (Butler, 2006, p. 529), the chapter have exhibited the practical ways in which elements of religious socialization are passed on to the children.

The mothers primarily believe in the principle of 'if and then' (emphasis made by the researcher). Their argument is 'if' the child is made to understand the importance of religious practices from an early age, 'then' it would have a significant effect on them to adopt their beliefs later as they grow up. Additionally, religious practice and sacred objects in house space are not merely 'objectified cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) but are also visual reminders of religion, which teaches, informs, and articulates a Muslim self (Qureshi, 1996). In internalising such hegemonic principles, families create a new religious habitus where imbibed religious knowledge is invoked into performances of religious self (Almila, 2019).

Regardless of the family type in which the participants were raised, all the participants experience religious teachings in a similar manner. The mother plays an active role as 'guardians of the faith' in setting up the conditions conducive to transmission of religious practices. Later to strengthen the foundation of religious education, children are either sent to mosque or the local religious figure tutors the child at home. Institutionalised spaces such as mosque or the local religious authority focuses on rote learning of different short chapters of Quran without explaining the word meaning.

With a focus on observation and participation in many different religious practices in the family, mothers intend to transmit religious knowledge and practices to children in much the same way as they were being taught. For the participants as a child, participating in and observing the daily rhythmic ritual pattern at home was an important learning process. In much the similar manner the mothers too, acquire religious education. However, mothers' attitude towards religious upbringing are affected by the kind of (patriarchal) religious teachings they received.

This leads to the obvious point that religious socialization within the family does not take place without the influence of culture. In shaping the argument, the chapter specifically focusses on the discussions of embodied Muslim women in a range of contexts primarily focusing on younger participants' adulthood. In addition, the chapter incorporates life history of participants' mother who termed their dressing practice as *'purdah kora'* (doing purdah). By examining the mother's experience of purdah in its numerous layers in relation to the socio-cultural and institutional paradigm, the chapter is a modest attempt to elucidate within inter-generational world, the processes of change and continuity – at times so infinitesimal that they are easily brushed off.

Experiences of the mother in the process of *matat unna deo aa* (headcovering), is mostly facilitated by the older members of the family and especially it took the form of imitation. This contrasts with other women who were *told to do* head-covering which was, one out of many ways to enhance the family honour and maintain class status in the community. It is worthwhile to point out that most of the participants' mother spent their childhood and adulthood in the villages, a close-knit setting where everyone knows everyone else; so, women of the family cannot afford to stake the reputation of the family is understandable. Furthermore, there is an expectation to maintain the *izzat* of the family at the collective level and to avoid *shorom* at the individual and this is made possible through the individual being aware of bodily concealment. Indeed, bodily concealment can be maintained by following dress codes which are long, loose, and not body hugging. Before their marriage the participants' mother wore *salwar kameez* (inside as well as outside home) with *unna,* which is considered more a cultural and respectable way of the social presentation of the body.

Participants' mother also spoke of how 'appropriate and respectable' behaviour determines cross-sex interactions. In the lives of the Muslims, the spatial dimensions of public-private is largely misunderstood. What constitutes the world of private and public in the lives of the Muslim is based on the presence of *mahram*[37] and *na-mahram*. For these women, sharing of space with *na-mahram* was what they taught to be a risky affair. It must be noted that since these women lived in extended households, the general notion that Muslim women are allowed to marry their cousins, either parallel or cross, further necessities the

[37] Mahram refers to men who are unmarriageable kin, with whom marriage or sexual intercourse is considered haram (forbidden), or people from whom purdah is not considered obligatory.

rules of social concealment through obvious ‘body language’ such as maintaining reserve and distance in their interactions with men.

Further, the division of home as exclusively women’s space transforms into public upon arrival of male person, kin, or non-kin. [Unmarried] women can navigate the ‘temporary semi-public’ space of home depending on the nature of their work; and, to cut short all forms of interactions, both the genders are expected to maintain *chokor and mator purdah*. This suggests that the home space itself is gendered and at times both men and women’s access to certain spaces although limited yet built around certain verbal pronouncements (cases where men had to enter female spaces) and in case of female entering male space they negotiate the spaces under certain conditions such as, dressing appropriately and maintaining the social comportment.

While in theoretical level, the modesty codes of restraining the eyesight and restricted speech are associated with controlling the impulses for both the sexes, in practice, with an exception, it is the women who is expected to maintain higher modesty. It is likely that if the modesty code is broken in relation to behaviour and dress it would cause, embarrassment and ruined the honour of the family. As can be understood, the intangible aspect of observing purdah rules has implications in maintaining *izzat* of the family, as a way in which unmarried women conduct themselves and how they interact with men, which in ramifications increases the daughter’s chances of good marriage arrangements. In this sense, Papanek have provided a general parameter of arranging marriages which goes well with the participants understanding:

> The symbolic and real shelter provided to the unmarried girl by her parents through purdah observance is an important factor in the arranged marriage. The girls’ marriage chances are felt to be injured by contacts outside the home, not only because she might succumb very quickly to sexual temptations but also because she might develop a personal attachment which would interfere with a successful arranged marriage (1973, p. 321).

Unlike their adult daughters’ lived experiences (discussed in chapter 5) that inform their clothing choices, their mothers generation ended up demonstrating a high degree of performative dispositions reinforced in micro-interactions of spaces. So, the space of Muslim home in Karimganj is constructed out of movement of social relations.

As the participants' mother's identities shifted upon marriage, their bodies were made familiar with a new form of dress that is '*burkha*', a portable privacy which they wear when they venture beyond home. Nevertheless, as women progresses through various life stages, individual choice of relaxing the practice of wearing *burkha* is acceptable. As a mark of distinction of middle-class modesty in public spaces, kinds of *burkha* and its pattern express and reveal wearers' social status of class, wealth sophistication and pride [the place from where it is purchased].

What is interesting to note is the life history collected from these women about the purdah practices of their time reinforce in the daughter's generation albeit in different forms, degree, and functions (detail of which is there in chapter 4 & 5). The greater picture is that increasing desire for women's higher education and career has necessitated the movement of women from home to outside. Exposure to the outside world, where non-mahram male congregates, mothers make sure to implement their piety and respectable image on their daughter by making them wear modest dress and adopt a deferential demeanour. On many occasions' women owing to their age, reproduce dominant socio-moral boundaries deemed to be a 'good Muslim women' through informal means [in this case by participating in gossip]. Thus, they not only act as the custodian of perpetuation of faith but also act as the cultural flagbearer of the family. As Emma Tarlo notes, drawing on Bernard Cohn that often dress codes are at the centre of modesty, honour and respect, and that clash between different styles of clothing is often symbolic of a wider conflict which exists between different cultural and social values and norms (Tarlo, 1996, p. 13).

In a similar manner, participants' mother represents and ensure women's modesty by defining appropriate and inappropriate performance of dress, ideas and practices relating to women's movement which goes hand in hand with the notion of *izzat* and *shorom*. In fact participants' mother do not verbalise it directly to the participants, rather they 'discuss it' [a typical gossip scene] among other women. The 'collective shaming' discussion can be interpreted as a larger part to create tacit strategies of action which are eventually worked upon by the young participants who at various points of their student life decided to change their appearance to construct a boundary of familiarity and distance.

In other words, when participants overhear 'to what the mothers speak when they all meet' on opinions about appropriate dress, the eventual consequence is that they get the impression that there exist rules of female propriety which is bounded by space and sexes,

transgressing the rules are strongly ridiculed and gossiped upon. However, in terms of physical mobility, participants accept the behavioural code of conduct, yet the next chapter would demonstrate how sometimes they evade it without incurring any sanctions. The discussion on classification of dress as modest, respectable, and appropriate by the participants' mother legitimates the class from which they come from. Thus, conscious application of the social field of consumption helps them to mark their boundary, and (re)establish their habitus within their middle class.

The research finding shows that there appears to be a standard ideal schedule that persons belonging to Islam faith should learn, yet among different classes of families there are momentous differences in the interpretation of Islamic knowledge and hence its different practices. Among the younger participants, rather than completely different interpretation of Islam there are differences in action, for instance regarding practice versus theory. Such differences in understanding arose as a response to rise in the religious figures on online platform. Young adults' interactions with social media have expanded their knowledge of socialization and transform their childhood experiences of religious teachings that the younger participants largely believe were not the 'correct' version of Islam. For most of the participants, the religious education that they received or heard in different phases of life lacked depth, clarity and mostly enmeshed with culture. Like the religious artefacts of domestic space that reflect and strengthen the religious identity, participants of this study repost, take screenshot of the verses including its translation from the Koran, and hadith and store it in their phone gallery as social media capital.

This distinctive pattern, help to understand that parental influences of faith not necessarily create a homogenous religious subject. In this regard, as the participants enter different course of their life and exposed to different social settings (real and virtual world), one can see change in acquired religious discourse occurs among the young and educated women in Karimganj. Of critical importance is that as the daughter gets access to authentic religious knowledge, mother too go through different phases of transformation in religious knowledge. Rather than seeing the social change as inversion of knowledge from young adult to older parents and not vice versa, parents perceived the change as an inherent and potentially productive part of unlearning and relearning of the commandments of religion.

As noted earlier, the young participants internalised and accommodate the role expectations that emerged from their gender, religious and class identity vis-à-vis hijab

and overall changed appearance. However, in certain areas such as education, work, they question the culturally imposed gendered norm and those who uphold them while on the other hand, deploying legitimate religious discourse for their own 'interests and agendas' (Mahmood, 2005). The participants and their mothers' discussions on those key areas subtly unravels these performative nexuses of culture-religion.

Education, particularly completion of graduation and post-graduation is viewed by majority of parents as a new source of enhancing *izzat*. Also, this increase in demand for young women's education is taking place in a context marked by changing marriage market dynamics which has a direct bearing on educational decisions. In this 'new religiosity' world order, constructing a 'pious' presentation of self requires negotiating the expectations of respectability (defined in terms of class and female chastity) with Islamic ideals of modesty (Borker, 2023). Though, in most cases, the parents' and daughter's aspirations outdo community people's expectation and opinion; others still worry on the consequence of (over) educated daughter in finding suitable husband and for this reason, some parents even attempted to limit their study. Participants who faced such situations use their Islamic knowledge as a tactical strategy to overcome the social barrier to their higher education. Furthermore, in terms of seeking career, the participants accept the career which is deemed socially acceptable, and which would allow them to get ahead in life. This seemed to be participants' clever strategy to strike a balance between 'established ways of life' and 'new ways of being' by complying 'appropriate' norms of Muslim womanhood (Khan, 2015, p. 171) and not bargaining with the patriarchal norms and gendered roles that has placed constraint on their career choices. This can be read as mechanisms of 'bargaining with patriarchy' where women maximise their own power by showcasing their ability to conform to patriarchal demands and at the same time benefit from it (Kandiyoti, 2005).

Additionally, participants' awareness on the absence of detailed discussions on noble female figures of initial Islamic era is a living testimony of local religious teachers intentionally downplaying their importance. The systematic erasure of their contribution to public life and focussing only on their virtues, trials, and tribulations points to two established facts: One, if they were taught about the female role models of Islam and Prophets approach to women from an early age it would have create a sense of gender complementarity and women empowerment which the patriarchs do not want. As

enlightening aspect of religious knowledge would have destroyed and spoiled their work of oppressing women. Dialogic approach of such kind would work against their patriarchal interests. Now, the faith based content on social media especially Instagram and YouTube are making the young women to relearn on Muslim women of prophets' time in general and women of Islam in particular, their successful role in the community life, learning the translation of certain verses and relating it to their real-life, capitalizing on all this raises their self-confidence, and helping them to utilize these discourses to reclaim their space which has been lost under fabricated patriarchal interpretation of Islam.

In the field, mothers feel that their daughter's higher level of education, and their familiarity with the world of Internet attributes to constant self-research and practise of gender egalitarian ideals inherent in Islam. Positively, it seems that their children [the younger participants] and for the coming generation, questioning aspects of religions would be appreciated, valued, and answered. As already noted, that in mother's generation, stress on questioning faith is considered a cumbersome affair and following the unreflective traditional practice was based more on social conformity. So, the older generation believe that their daughters' higher education and their desire to seek out more knowledge about faith and practice 'authentic' Islam proves that faith can no longer be forced upon in the coming generations.

To conclude, experiences and related accounts of the participants and the specificities across generations indicate that some sense of emerging selves is up-playing where element of practicing authentic Islam and remaining truth to oneself is considered intrinsic to empower oneself from within a place of patriarchal control. Therefore, within the patriarchal structure the agency of the young hijabi women *even if it is limited* yet in a selective manner, it still operates within the boundaries of the established structure in a selective manner.

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