Emerging Muslim Identity in India’s Globalized and Mediated Society:

An Ethnographic Investigation of the Halting Modernities

of the Muslim Youth of Jamia Enclave, New Delhi

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This dissertation titled
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of the Muslim Youth of Jamia Enclave, New Delhi

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ABSTRACT

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Emerging Muslim Identity in India’s Globalized and Mediated Society: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Halting Modernities of the Muslim Youth of Jamia Enclave, New Delhi (276 pp.)

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This is an ethnographic study exploring media consumption patterns of youth belonging to a distinct Muslim community in New Delhi. This study looked at how global and Indian media, which have emerged as a powerful force of social change in India since 1991, redefined the isolation of Muslims in the segregated Jamia Enclave. After 1991 India liberalized its economy, and Indian audiences were then able to receive multiple Indian language and global satellite channels in addition to the single state broadcaster available previously.

The Muslim researcher approached the field from the perspective of an insider and employed participant observation and immersion in daily activities of the community to understand how media have been integrated into the lives of Muslim youth. The aim was to understand the way mediated interactions influenced the construction of the identity of Muslim youth born and raised in the age of globalized media and liberalized Indian economy. The study explored their self-perceptions as members of their Islamic community, as Indians, and as gendered individuals.

The findings challenge essentialist constructs of identity that define Muslims as isolationists and resistant to processes of modernization. However, the youth of Jamia youth did not share the same ideological attachment to their community that was
expressed by members of the older generations. The youth also gave greater credence to their national identity, as opposed to their Islamic religious and cultural identity. Unlike their mothers, young Muslim women followed examples presented in the media promoting new ambitions and careers outside their community. Among these young women, it was consumerism rather than feminist motives that acted as inspiration for careers outside Jamia. Yet their desires created anxieties among Muslim men. The ambition expressed by Muslim youth to move out of their seclusion and be part of the wider Indian society was propelled by a rising consumerism in Indian society. Muslim youth had internalized media’s emphasis on materialism and it shaped their emergent identity. Even so, while these youths sought new identities they did not really leave their community behind. These experiences call for a fresh perspective on postcolonial identities in globalized mediated societies.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Drew McDaniel

Professor of Media Arts and Studies
I dedicate this work to my parents and to aspiring scholars, Sana and Samreen.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Liberalization and Social Change in India</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution of Indian Media and Transformation of Indian Society</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Boom</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Skies and Liberalized Economy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of Media Content</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Research in India: Addressing Gaps in Scholarship</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Compulsions to Address Gaps in Scholarship</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Socio-Economic Determinants of Indian Muslim Identity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Identity in Mediated Societies: The Question of Islamic Identity in Indian society</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernity, Media, and Identity</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project of Islamic Identity</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity of Indian Muslims</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity, Media studies, Indian Media, and Media Research</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations of Muslim Identity in Indian Media</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender, Media, Globalization and Minorities</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Chak De India** and the Achievements of “Team India” ............................................. 116

**Chak De India: A Personal Reading** ................................................................. 119

**Chak De India** and the Muslim Youth of Jamia ............................................... 121

Mediated Discourses of Materialism and the Muslim Youth of Jamia .................. 128

Perceptions of a Level Playing Field and Dreams of Assimilation .................... 135

Media Representation of Indian Muslim ........................................................... 142

Materialistic Markers of Identity and the Indian Muslim Consumer ................. 146

**Muslim High Culture: An Elite Consumption Pattern** ................................. 151

Summary .............................................................................................................. 153

**Chapter 6: Liberalization, Liberal Media and Aspirations of Muslim Women of Jamia Enclave** ................................................................. 157

Post Liberalization India, Indian media and the New Indian Woman ............... 161

Segregated Enclave and the Lives of Young Muslim Women ........................... 165

Deportment of Muslim Women: The Tendency for Internal Surveillance ........ 167

**Muslim Women and Public Spaces** ............................................................... 169

Media, Celebrity Role Models and the Ambitions of Young Muslim Women ...... 171

Young Muslim Women’s Dreams of Self-Reliance and Independence ............. 175

Religion, Patriarchy and Aspirations of Young Muslim Women ....................... 181

Media, Fashion, Freedom, and the Anxieties of Muslim Men .......................... 185

Young Muslim Women and the Liberal Indian Society and Economy ............. 191

Summary .............................................................................................................. 195

**Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussion** ........................................................... 198

**Voices from the Field: Key Observations** ....................................................... 198
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic study of a distinct Muslim community inhabiting a well-defined space in New Delhi, the capital city of India. The research focuses on media consumption patterns of youth of the secluded Muslim neighborhood of Jamia Enclave when globalizing forces were transforming Indian economy and society. Following economic liberalization in 1991, transnational flows of finance, technology and media played an important part in the rapid evolution of Indian social and economic conditions. This study sought to understand how media from across the world became integrated into the daily lives of youth belonging to a Muslim community and how media caused them to construct and/or redefine their self-perceptions as Muslims, as individuals and as citizens of a nation.

Jamia Enclave, the exclusive Muslim community, is situated in south Delhi. This is one of the more expensive residential areas in the first city of the world’s largest democracy. Here a narrow road divides two exclusive domains of Hindu citizens and Muslim citizens. One side is orderly, sanitized, with broad streets, lined with trees and filled with residents’ showy limousines. The other side is chaotic and congested with street upon street criss-crossing in a labyrinth of narrow passageways. Here, cycle-rickshaws mostly compete with pedestrians as few motor vehicles can venture into the impossible jam of narrow lanes. The area, however, is not a slum, though it comes close to being one. This is Zakir Nagar, one of the neighborhoods of Jamia area, where middle-class Muslims reside. The other side is the Friends’ Colony, the home of the area’s Hindu citizens.
The short distance from the mansions in Friends Colony to Zakir Nagar provides a sharp transition that is not totally accounted for by differences in economic status. One cannot fail to register that the sights, sounds and smells are distinctly different. The fragrances emanating from slow cooking meat overwhelm the senses. The pride and pleasure that Muslims take in their cuisine is announced by the aroma of *kabab, biryani, korma* and *naan*\(^1\) rising from the small eateries that line Zakir Nagar’s streets. The small restaurants are packed with patrons who sit cheek by jowl with the cook, unmindful of the cramped conditions. The festive air that surrounds food evokes in the minds of other communities the stereotype of the “sensuous Musallman.” It also reminds one that the largely vegetarian population living across the road has very different food habits.

The neighborhoods of Jamia area are also distinguished by the call for prayers in Arabic that resonate from numerous mosques five times a day. The mosques, with open courtyards and blue tiled domes, reflecting Persian and Central Asian influences, are well-defined spaces for worship. Here faithful Muslim men stand together, shoulder to shoulder, in the egalitarian and communal spirit of Islam and offer their prayers at appointed times. The Hindu residents of Friends Colony worship individually or in small groups at the grand temple, the *Mata Ka Mandir*, before a female deity, which rests in a closed sacred space. The unique architectural styles and practices of worship in a mosque and a temple embody the different approaches to life of the two religions. But, the separate and disparate physical spaces where Hindu and Muslim citizens reside, reflect the everyday realities and the politics of coexistence for the majority Hindu and the minority Muslim population. The Muslim population in India is concentrated in urban
areas where it is squeezed into congested, segregated neighborhoods or ghettos like Zakir Nagar (Sachar Committee, 2006).

The genesis of segregated neighborhoods like Zakir Nagar lies in the sidelining of Muslims, after the sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan at the end of the British colonial rule in 1947. A portion of the Muslim population moved to Pakistan, but the majority of them stayed behind. Those who remained in what became the Indian republic were ignored and doubts were raised about their loyalty to the Indian nation (Hasan, 1997, 2002 & 2004; Varshney, 2002). Muslims withdrew into themselves and chose to live among their co-religionists. Sayid Hamid, an eminent Muslim citizen and scholar, said that Muslims did not realize that their withdrawal from the mainstream of Indian life was tantamount to their suicide, as they became further disconnected from progress and growth in India (see “Education only way out,” 2006). Indian Muslims who live in urban ghettos are often condemned as being close-minded, fanatical, and retrograde. Their loyalty to India is considered suspect, and their attachment to their cultural and religious heritage is seen as a rejection of their Indian heritage and a subscription to a pan-Islamic identity (Hasan, 1997; Hasan & Roy, 2005). This is especially problematic, as India and its neighboring Islamic state of Pakistan have fought three wars (Brass, 2003). Muslims remain isolated in their over-crowded enclaves, unable to move out because prejudiced attitudes make it difficult for Muslims to find housing in mixed and non-segregated neighborhoods (Sachar Committee, 2006).

Muslim alienation is defined by a lack of connection to and communication with the larger world outside their communities. However, sweeping changes in media technologies and Indian media industry since 1991, are redefining the isolation of
Muslims in their well-demarcated enclaves. In 1991 India liberalized its economy from state control, transforming it into a market-driven one. The year 1991 was also a watershed year for media as India opened up to receive global satellite television (Ninan, 1998). Overnight, satellite dishes sprang up across the country. Today Indians have access to over 300 satellite television channels as compared to only a single state broadcaster prior to 1991 and more channels are being added everyday (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). Although Muslims continue to live among their co-religionists surrounded by sights, sounds, and symbols that reiterate their identity, the ubiquitous presence of media (especially satellite television, but also Internet, radio, print and billboards) in their homes, increases their contact with the world and acquaints them with life-styles and ideologies that are often opposed to Islamic religious and cultural norms.

This research focused on the youth of Jamia who have come of age interacting with global media within their distinctively Muslim enclave. The aim was to understand 1) how media are integrated into the patterns of everyday life of Muslim youth, 2) how Muslim youth balance the competing experiences of media and those of their Muslim community, and 3) how these dynamics influence the construction of their identity as Muslims, as Indians and as men and women.

I sought to investigate these questions at a point of time when Indian society was undergoing a complex and profound transformation, as it has since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991. This economic liberalization and globalization coincided with far reaching changes in media outlets and media content in India; and there is a close
interplay between expansion of the economy and growth of the media industry (Ninan, 1998; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006).

Economic Liberalization and Social Change in India

The Indian economy has been transformed from a socialist command economy to one driven by market forces after liberalization occurred in the early 1990s when India shed its commitment to Nehruvian socialism (Das, 2001; Varma, 1998; Walden, 2003; Zakaria, 2006). Varma says that in a country where an overwhelming number of citizens are poor, prior to liberalization the Indian State professed a bias towards austerity and containment of material pursuits. But the effect of the economic policies of 1991 has been to liberate Indian middle class from “even the pretence of any notion of restrain or reticence in the unchecked pursuit of its consumerist aspirations” (p. 175). According to Walden, India is no longer the country of Gandhi, where caution and conservatism had once prevailed. Varma concedes that Indians have witnessed “an exuberant escape” from the self-denying idealism of Gandhi. Liberalization has provided them an opportunity to construct “a break from the attitudes and thinking of the past” and “to bring out into the open desires long held back” and to fulfill them without any sense of guilt (p. 175).

Today, acquisition and display of wealth are no longer seen as being contrary to Indian values. According to Zakaria, the Indian middle class now apes consumption patterns of the citizens of the developed West; while India has dramatically changed from a country that had strong sympathies to Communist-style planned development to one that courts global multinationals at international fora like Davos to help shape India’s economic growth.
The reform process was set underway under directions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the year 1991, when India’s foreign exchange reserves had reached a dangerously low level and the rising oil prices after the first Gulf War had worsened the situation. Das (2001) says that the changes that were set underway by then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and his chief advisor and economist, Manmohan Singh, were as momentous as India’s freedom from the British colonial rule. The import of the economic reforms was that it unshackled the private sector from the stranglehold of government controls and allowed new businesses to be set up and old business to be expanded without requiring a mandatory license from the Government of India. The reforms freed industries from miles of red tape, which the process of securing a license even to produce a pencil created. Das says that the freedom from the “License Raj [Regime]” unleashed the entrepreneurial energies of Indians on a scale not seen before and India entered the twenty-first century “on the brink of the biggest transformation in its history” (p. 346).

The almost two decades of the reform process have raised the status of India from a Third World nation to a “place to see and to be seen in,” as dignitaries, politicians and executives from across the world make their way here, drawn by the country’s enormous potential for growth (Timmons, 2007). India is the second fastest growing economy in the world; it has the world’s fastest growing telecommunications market; it has emerged as a global leader in computer software and the pharmaceutical industry; and nearly 50% of its billion-strong population is under 25 years of age, making it the youngest of all the major economies with a median age of 24 years. This compares to 37 years in United States, and 32 years in China (Larkin, 2006; Walden, 2003; Zakaria, 2006).) According to
the National Council of Applied Economic Research (as quoted in Sinha, 2004) India’s population in the consuming and very rich class will be 462 million people in the year 2006-2007, making India a huge market for goods and services.

As India’s economy has grown rapidly and the expansion of opportunities has strengthened the Indian middle class, critics have sounded a word of caution (A. Roy, 2008; Mishra, 2006; Varma, 1998). Social commentators are concerned that there is an increasing gap between the rich and poor Indians. Middle class Indians who have benefitted from the urban centered growth seem to have become insensitive to the needs of the rural, tribal and other poor Indians who have yet to be included in India’s growth in wealth. Arundhati Roy (1999) denounced the Narmada Dam project because it exemplified India’s tendency to develop based on needs of the middle classes, and to the detriment and (in the case of the dam project) the annihilation of the tribal, the poor and the marginalized populations of India. The decade of the unprecedented growth in India during the 1990s was also marked by the rise of Hindu nationalism and consolidation of the support base of the BJP, the right wing Hindu nationalist party, among urban middle class Hindus (Brass, 2003). The rise of the middle class and hegemonic Hindu identity has created a crisis for minority and non-Hindu populations. The decade of euphoric growth in India was marked at both ends by incidences of conflagrations between the Hindus and the Muslims. In 1993 Mumbai, the commercial heart of India was rocked by violence, and the minority Muslim residents were attacked. And in 2002 more than 2000 Muslims were murdered in Gujarat, one of the most prosperous states in India, and the BJP government failed to protect them. There have been real changes in the Indian economy, but the reform process has also sharpened inequalities. Critics like Mishra and
Roy decry the tendency in the media and in public debate to ignore the contentious issues and to focus on only positive aspects, which in their opinion have been grossly overstated.

However, the supporters of the economic reforms are wont to underline not only the increase in economic growth rate but also the fact that the reform process has “changed the mind-set of Indian people” (Das, 2001, p. 346). According to Das, Indians are creating a new political order emphasizing the importance of the market and a greater transparency in governance. He says that as global capital flows and media have increased the connections of Indian citizens to the world, Indians want India to perform like the developed economies of the West. Even if Das’ views reflect the opinion of a select well-informed section of the society, there is no denying that media have played a part in the transformation of Indian society.

Evolution of Indian Media and Transformation of Indian Society

The Indian media, like the Indian economy, were also dominated and controlled by the Indian state. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting through its departments Doordarshan and All India Radio managed television and radio broadcasting respectively in India. There were no privately owned radio or television stations in India, but India’s print media was privately owned. It was extremely vibrant and it often actively challenged the government. However, the government had retained its power to chastise publications by monopolizing availability of newsprint. The ostensible reason for Government of India’s investment in radio and television was to communicate to a pluralist Indian society the idea of a single nation (Ninan, 1995).
Television made its advent in India in 1960s but up till the mid 1970s, expansion of television broadcasting was extremely slow and there were only eight production and transmission centers in a few state capitals across the country (McDaniel, 1998). These centers were not connected to each other and there was no central command. According to McDaniel and Ninan (1995), the Government of India had come up with a plan, as early as the 1960s, to unite the entire country through development of a domestic satellite system. The plan materialized with the launch of satellite Insat-1A, and the beginning of satellite transmission on August 15, 1982. Henceforth, all the different Doordarshan production and transmission centers were linked for a few hours with a seamless telecast of a satellite feed originating in the Delhi studios of Doordarshan. According to Ninan, setting up of the domestic satellite television system meant that the government could expand television’s reach by installing new transmitters and without worrying about creating different production centers. The content created in Delhi Studios could be retransmitted from the other centers across the country (p. 29).

The development of the national network with the introduction of satellite broadcasting in the country immensely suited the purposes of the Indian state “to use television to promote the idea of one country,” especially as the separatists movements in Indian states of Punjab and Kashmir in the 1980s had substantially increased the state’s anxieties (Ninan, 1995p. 3). Hence, the 1980s were a period of intensive expansion of television broadcasting by the state; Doordarshan commissioned about one transmitter a day between July 1984 and October 1984 (p. 30). By the late 1980s, Doordarshan terrestrial network had expanded to cover almost the entire nation. But this aggressive investment in hardware and technology was not matched by an expansion or innovation
in television content. According to McDaniel (1998), the introduction of commercial and sponsored programming had helped create some quality programming to satisfy the audiences and mention can be made of *Hum Log* and the Indian epics *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan*, but Doordarshan’s programming still left much to be desired. The few hours of commercial programming could neither fill the many hours of transmission nor fulfill the enormous hunger for entertainment among Doordarshan’s steadily increasing audiences. Indian audiences, as McDaniel and Ninan point out, were especially dissatisfied with Doordarshan’s news bulletins. According to Ninan, Doordarshan’s news bulletins were “an audio-visual gazette on the activities of ministers,” and it was controlled in the interest of the ruling party, which had no qualms about using the state machinery for political gain (p. 35).

*Video Boom*

According to McDaniel (1998), enterprising entrepreneurs stepped in to meet the Indian audiences demand for entertainment and news that Doordarshan was unable to satisfy. Informal cable television services, which connected small neighborhoods and apartment complexes using very rudimentary technologies, were set up as an alternative to Doordarshan. McDaniel says that these systems had, by early 1990s, an audience of about 10 million viewers (p. 245). But most urban neighborhood had their video parlors, which did brisk business. The video rental shops in Friends Colony in South Delhi, where I lived in early 1990s, would deliver the tapes to your home for viewing on personal VCRs. One video parlor in the Jamia area, owned by an acquaintance, even rented out television sets and videocassette players to the less affluent residents who did not own color televisions or videocassette players. The popular programs distributed on video
included Bollywood films, Pakistani mini-series, foreign films, and the news magazines *News Track* and *Eyewitness.*

According to McDaniel (1998), the news magazines, produced by prominent publications houses like *India Today* and *Hindustan Times,* were an extremely popular alternative to state run media, and they covered stories that received no attention on Doordarshan. Moreover, as the state broadcaster did not accommodate anyone but the ruling party, the news magazines were also used by the opposition to disseminate their viewpoints to wider audiences (p. 245).

*Open Skies and Liberalized Economy*

The challenges to Doordarshan’s functioning as the propaganda machinery of the ruling political party did not come from media activists who had been demanding autonomy for Doordarshan, and its structuring along the lines of the BBC. The threat to Doordarshan’s preeminence as a broadcaster came from the skies. The Gulf War in February 1991 created a demand for CNN among select urban Indian viewers, but once STAR TV started to beam a multi-channel package (comprising BBC World Television Service, MTV, and a channel featuring American soaps) from Hong Kong in May 1991, the expansion of satellite television in India began (Ninan, 1995, p. 38). In the small predominantly Muslim housing complex in Friends Colony in New Delhi (where I resided) satellite television reached every home following the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* on December 6, 1992. Up till then only a few homes were connected because the service was haphazard and the initial charges for connectivity were high. However, after viewing BBC’s coverage of the event (in the homes of their friends and neighbors who had cable connection), many people were convinced that cable television provided an
important service. Soon the entire neighborhood of 200 hundred homes was wired, especially since at about this time an independent cable operator with deep-pockets was able to offer better quality of transmission and a continuous service.

The credit for taking satellite television beyond metropolitan cities and into small towns and even semi-rural areas of India, and transforming the face of Indian television, along with posing a real threat to Doordarshan, does not lie with STAR TV (or its program offerings), but with Zee TV (Das, 2001). Zee TV was the brainchild of Subhash Chandra, a grain merchant who saw immense opportunity for Indian language television programming. According to Das, he aggressively pursued STAR TV’s executives in Hong Kong to secure a transponder to start transmitting Hindi language programming into India in 1992. In 1993, when Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation acquired STAR TV, Zee TV became an equal partner in a satellite television distribution company, SitiCable, and further expanded the reach of satellite television in India by investing in ground redistribution of satellite television signals (p. 257). Doordarshan was initially able to put up a successful defense of its advertising revenues by copying the programming of private satellite broadcasters. However, in the long run, the tardy and red-tape-ridden organization lost out. Today the viewership of the state broadcaster in urban areas is decimated (AC Nielson 2008).

On the other hand, the number of private broadcasters has continued to grow. According to the report released by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006), Indian media industry, since liberalization in 1991, has chalked out a growth path which is even more impressive than that of the Indian economy². There are over 300 satellite television channels beaming into the country today, and more seem to be added every day. And
nearly every major media company in the world (such as News Corporation, Sony, Time Warner, Viacom) has established its presence in India.

The increase in the number of television broadcasters has been matched by an expansion of infrastructure. According to Siddhart Jain, Vice President South Asia for Turner Broadcasting (personal communication, December 4, 2008), cable systems that mushroomed all over the country in the early 1990s to receive satellite signal and to redistribute them, were small, “mom and pop” operations. He said that satellite television companies like Zee TV and STAR TV were among the first to begin the process of consolidation by entering the cable distribution business as large MSOs (Multi-System Operators). The large MSOs like SitiCable invested in upgrading the delivery systems, which included the equipment for downloading and the cables for carrying satellite television signals into homes. According to Jain, the MSOs created the capacity for delivery of an increasing number of channels to subscribers. The upgraded systems are now ushering in broadband Internet and setting the stage for a whole new revolution in Internet connectivity (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006).

Moreover, the emergence of large system operators has also helped in creating a legal framework for operations in the largely unregulated market. The state has made several attempts to regularize the business, starting with the Cable TV Network Regulation Act of 1995. The act, however, became obsolete even before it was implemented because of technological advances (McDaniel, 1998). In 2005 the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting notified its new Downlinking Policy. The policy stipulates that only registered MSOs can be given permission to download and redistribute satellite signals. This Policy brings the unregulated industry under the
taxation network and also paves the way for establishing control over content received/downloaded by MSOs (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). Despite the passage of these policies, the Indian media industry lacks a regulatory framework, while debates continue with regard to the creation of a Communications Convergence Regime, and to the establishment of an autonomous regulatory authority like the FCC, which would oversee implementation and punish transgressions.

Yet, despite the lack of a legal framework, Indian media industry continues to grow at the annual rate of 24 percent. This is a much higher growth rate as compared to media companies in other Asian countries. The size of the Indian media industry is estimated to be about $6 billion. The total number of television home in the country is over 100 million and the number of Cable and Satellite homes has crossed the 60 million mark (Kohli-Khandekar, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, cable and satellite homes in the country are going to reach the 90 million mark by the year 2010, and households belonging to lower socio-economic strata will drive the growth. But the push for further improving services and moving towards digitization comes from the introduction of more expensive services like DTH (Direct-to-Home) satellite television and also through introduction of addressability by the way of CAS (Conditional Access System) in cable television. Although, both DTH and CAS have yet to capture a large market, PricewaterhouseCoopers’ report says that the advertising revenues for television industry are expected to double in the period 2004 to 2010 to reach $250 million. It is therefore not surprising that India is the major revenue earner for global media players like STAR TV, a News Corporation media enterprise
which operates in Asia but draws 70 per cent of its revenue and profits from India alone (Lakshman, 2007).

The current and future growth of television industry is impressive. But, the expansion of the cell phones market has outperformed even the rate of growth of satellite television, and it exemplifies the rapid speed at which new technologies are being adopted in India. Today there are 250 million Indians (and more) who are connected to cell phones; and the majority earn just $2 or $3 a day as innovative service plans continue to connect even daily wage earners via cell phones. Delhi, the capital of India and a city with a population of about 11 million, has crossed the 10 million cell-phones users mark in just a decade (see Anand, 2006; Friedman, 2007).

**Characteristics of Media Content**

India’s media industry, since the advent of satellite television, has become ratings driven. It functions to create profits for television companies, advertisers, and manufacturers. According to Ninan (1995), even the state broadcaster (which after Parliament’s decision in 1996 transformed it into a broadcasting authority in BBC’s image, but without BBC’s autonomy and integrity) is not geared to serving the development needs of the state or the educational needs of its citizens. Thus, in this country where according to Varma (1998) more than half the population hovers close to starvation and destitution, media narratives make no references to poor and lower middle class Indians who have all but been erased from public consciousness (A. Roy, 2008; Mishra, 2006; Nandy, 1998; D. Sharma, 2005; K. Sharma, 2005; Varma, 2004). Media narratives feature the rich and up-coming middle classes or the wealthy among Indian diaspora populations. The obsession with the rich and the famous is referred to as the
Page 3 phenomenon (K. Sharma, 2005). But the disturbing aspect is that even Indian news, both print and broadcast, is veering towards increasing tabloidization (Peer, 2007; Thussu, 2007). The news avoids all reference to harsh realities of urban and rural India, such as languishing agricultural growth across the country, and increasing pollution and lack of civic amenities in towns and cities, to give greater coverage to crime, celebrities, films and fashion (D. Sharma, 2005; K. Sharma, 2005).

The lack of relevance to the real India, and a constant reiteration of India’s potential in media, has sparked a resurgence of nationalism. There is a new confidence among Indians in their country and they feel that India is a country to be reckoned with in the global arena (Das, 2001; Zakaria, 2006). Media has created catch phrases like Team India that refer to an all-encompassing and singular Indian identity. But what is the meaning of rising nationalism in media and society for India’s minority populations? This question underlines this research and it is explored in depth in Chapter 5, which analyzes how Muslim youth internalized the nationalistic rhetoric of the popular film *Chak De India*. According to Bhaskar (2005), “while the post-liberalization India seems to shine for a few in a euphemistic mood of political consolidation and economic stability, the minorities and the marginalized . . . face the risk of getting further displaced from public space and scrutiny” (p. 237).

The demise of the Urdu press (patronized by Muslims), even as there is an unprecedented media boom in India, illustrates Bhaskar’s contention. The Urdu press could not stand up to competition from global media, especially in the face of a systematic marginalization of the Urdu language by the Indian State (see Sachar Committee, 2006) that has ensured that the younger generation of Muslims is unable to
read and write in the language. The total number of Urdu newspapers has declined to 113 today from a count of 500 to 600 a decade ago (Lakdawala, 2005, p. 199). The state of the Urdu press is perhaps reflective of the state of the Muslim minority population in India. These far-reaching changes in Indian media and society have come under scholarly scrutiny, but the question is what is the direction and focus of the large body of media research in India.

Media Research in India: Addressing Gaps in Scholarship

Media research in India has analyzed the relationship between media and society from several perspectives. A large body of research focuses on the role of media in mobilization of majority Hindu identity (Brosius, 2005; Mankekar, 1999; McGuire & Reeves, 2003; Rajagopal, 2001); and an emerging body of research analyzes how globalization is constructing new consumer subjects (Butcher, 2003; Juluri, 2003; Mazzarella, 2003; Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2006). But this research does not take into account the experiences of India’s minority or non-Hindu populations. The lack of focus on India’s Muslims in media studies coincides with the general paucity of research on Indian Muslims. For example, Barbara Metcalf (1995) says that when she announced her intention to focus on Indian Muslims to her senior professor, he responded with a surprised splutter and said that Muslims were only 5 per cent of the population and they simply did not matter. Today Indian Muslims comprise 13 per cent of the total Indian population (about 138 million people, according to 2001 census as reported in Sachar Committee, 2006), but, according to Hasan (2002), serious scholarship continues to ignore the experiences of Indian Muslims; while at the same time Muslims are “genetically and culturally cast in the role of a religious crusader,” and their immense
diversity and the secular terms in which they relate to their environment is ignored (p. 10).

**Personal Compulsions to Address Gaps in Scholarship**

I got drawn into this research project because in the absence of research, Muslims are referred to as retrograde, isolationist and anti-modernization (Ahmed, 1983). The need of the hour is to draw attention to

The multiple levels at which a Muslim relates to the temporal and spiritual world in day to day living, and the currents of change, reform, and innovation that have influenced the course and direction of quite a few Muslim societies the world over. (Hasan & Asaduddin, 2000, p. 5)

The aim, in words of Hasan and Asaduddin, is to question “scholarly exertions to 'essentialize' civilizations” (p. 5). Muslims are cast as static when the rest of the world is changing and hybridity has become the defining order of the world (Khair, 2001). The result is that ordinary Muslims are very self-conscious about their identity (Sachar Committee, 2006). There have been instances when I have been evasive about my Muslim identity because I did not wish to be associated with the stereotypes that describe Muslims. Therefore, given my personal experiences, including the fact that I was a Muslim, I spoke Urdu fluently, and I had lived in close proximity to the community for many years, I believed that I could approach the field as a native ethnographer. I felt I could present the most accurate account of my informants’ realities. However, the research experiences have revealed that the position of the native ethnographer must be qualified with reference to privileges of class and education.
I also believe that a free and unhindered discussion of the experiences of Muslims in India will end the politics of silence that surrounds them. But the task of creating awareness of the challenges that Muslims face, in balancing their distinct religious/cultural identity within the Indian framework, is a daunting one; as the rise of Hindu nationalism has put the pluralist and secular nature of Indian society under great strain (Hasan, 2004). Attempts to acknowledge the distinct Muslim identity will be condemned by Hindu nationalist right wing supporters as raising the specter of the Partition. The next section explores the researcher’s apprehensions by looking at the politics that surrounded the construction of an important survey of India’s Muslim population and the release of this report.

*The Socio-Economic Determinants of Indian Muslim Identity*

The Prime Minister’s Office of the Government of India, in March 2005, constituted a high level committee, headed by Justice Sachar (and hitherto referred as Sachar Committee) to look into the state of affairs of the Indian Muslims and to report on their social-economic and educational status. The Government of India was confronted by the same problem that confounds scholars who are studying Muslims of India. According to Omar Khalidi (2006), anyone who is interested in investigating or writing about Indian Muslims “complains about the paucity of reliable data or empirical studies on the economic condition of Muslims” (p. 3). There is little documented data about the 138 million Muslims who comprise 13.4 per cent of Indian population (Sachar Committee, 2006). The Sachar Committee was expected to fill this lacunae by seeking information, often classified, from all Ministries and other agencies of Government of India and reporting on indices such as: Muslim demographics, their educational status,
employment status (for example what percentage of Muslims are employed with organized sectors, in Government, at high decision making levels, etc.), their access to bank credit, health, and other factors. The general impression in India is that Muslims have been left out of the mainstream of economic and social life, but there was little hard evidence to support this claim. The intentions of the Government of India may have been to investigate on-the-ground reality and initiate ameliorative measures that would uplift Muslims from their depressed economic and social conditions and end their segregation and isolation (see “PM trying to fool,” 2006).

The findings of the Sachar Committee, released in November 2006, presented a state of affairs that was even more dismal than the general perceptions. According to the report of Sachar Committee (2006), the status of Muslim in independent India had fallen on indices of educational status and level of employment to a level even below the historically disadvantaged lower castes in Indian society (labeled as Scheduled Castes in Government of India’s statutes). The low level of education among Muslims was attributed to their abject poverty and to discriminatory treatment within institutions, leading to a high dropout rate (p. 15). Almost 25 per cent of Muslim children in the age group 6 to 14 have never attended school or have dropped out. This is higher than any other socio-religious community considered in the analysis (p. 58). There are, as a result, few Muslims at higher levels of public employment, including the public institutions of state governance, police, and judiciary. According to the report, “discriminatory practices, especially at the time of the interviews,” were even responsible for “poor Muslim representation even at the Class IV level or in Grade D employment where high educational qualifications are not required” (p. 20). The Muslims who were among the
ruling classes in India a century and a half ago have been reduced to the lowest strata of the highly hierarchical Indian society.

The Sachar Committee Report was a significant intervention as it provided hard evidence to expose the systematic marginalization of Muslim population in India since independene. But, what is even more significant are the debates that surrounded the formation of the Committees and the release of its findings. These debates exposed the prejudices that mark Indian social and political life and keep Muslims in their depressed state. The BJP, the leading Hindu nationalist party, was stridently opposed to the formation of the committee. The BJP leadership accused the Government of fanning separatist tendencies by treating Muslims as a distinct religious community within India. Arun Jaitley, spokesperson for the BJP, said that the Sachar Committee was on the path of national destruction (see “BJP expresses concern,” 2006), while the leader of the party L. K Advani called for the scrapping of the committee itself, as no government in the past had ever tried to verify the status of Muslims in Indian society by seeking information from the police, judiciary, or the army (see “BJP expresses concern,” 2006; “Opposition Stalls,” 2006; “VHP to oppose,” 2006). The BJP took a belligerent stand and even ordered the State governments that were ruled by the BJP not to cooperate with the Committee and not to provide it with the information that its members were seeking in order to draw an accurate profile of the Muslim situation (see “BJP to launch stir,” 2006). The BJP sought to silence and shutter, rather than to create a public debate, about the political forces that keep Muslims backward (see “Victims of bias,” 2006; “Separate and unequal,” 2006). They created a furor when the Committee members sought to find out the percentage of Muslims who were employed by the Indian army (Bhargava, 2006).
The Indian army refused to release figures in the interest of the security of the nation (see “Defense Minister’s statement,” 2006). However, it is well known that Muslims are grossly under-represented in the army because doubts exist about their loyalty to India. The Sachar Committee’s report brought the tendency to view Muslims with suspicion into the open (p. 14). One of the dire outcomes of the trend to mistrust Muslims, especially in the current political climate of the general antagonism towards Islam, has been that the prison is the only place where Muslim population is over represented (see “Prison is the only place,” 2006; Sachar Committee, 2006).

The findings of the Sachar Committee Report point to the socio-economic factors that are responsible for the impoverished status of the Muslim population. However, the public debate, which surrounded the report, highlights the prejudices that fix Muslims in their backward state. The stereotypes that exist about Muslims directed a research approach that would help undo these impressions.

Summary

This research investigated the identity of a minority population as fundamental realignments of economy, polity, culture and governance take place in India. The focus was on mediated experiences of Indian Muslim youth population, which were vastly different from those of their parents. The youth have come of age as Indian society was inundated with media content, both global and in various Indian languages, while their parents had access only to the sole state broadcaster. The question is that though the youth continued to live within the segregated enclave as did their parents, how did the youth’s interactions with media affect their perceptions about themselves as Muslims, Indians and individuals? The research attempted to address the lack of focus on Indian
Muslims and explored the ignored realities of their everyday lives. The research highlighted the need to include the experiences of minority populations in media research and in globalization studies as their experiences will enable a better understanding of the complex process of social change.
Footnotes

1. These are specialties of Muslims cuisine, which is a mixture of Central Asian, Persian and Indian cuisine. *Biryani* is a rice and meat dish, *korma* is a meat specialty, *kababs* are patties made with mince meat and *naan* is yeast leavened bread made in clay ovens.

2. The report on Indian media and entertainment industry by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006) elaborates that the access to television in the upper middle-class and middle-class population, identified as Social Economic Classes A1, A2 and B1, B2, is over 96% while access to satellite (or pay television) is over 85% of the population. The lower middle class populations specified as categories C, D and E have satellite television penetration below 50% of the population even though in absolute terms their numbers are larger. It is this section that will drive media growth in India, and India will continue to be the profitable market for media industry in Asia.

3. According to Sachar Committee (2006), the state of affairs of Indian Muslims whose population would cross the 150 million mark by year 2006, is worse of than even the dalits. The dalits are historically the most deprived section of India society, while the Muslims were the ruling class up till 1857, when the British took over the reign of control from the ruling Muslim Mughal emperor.
CHAPTER 2: IDENTITY IN MEDIATED SOCIETIES: THE QUESTION OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN INDIAN SOCIETY

This research investigated the identity of minority Muslim youth as India liberalized its economic policies, opened up its skies to receive global satellite television, and integrated into the global economy. The research focused on Muslim youth from the exclusive and segregated Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar in New Delhi and explored how media narratives, which introduced them to alternative and often conflicting ways of life, were woven into their sense of self and identity. The research sought to understand how media redefined the youth’s relationship with their distinct community, with their nation, and with members of the opposite sex. This chapter reviews scholarship on identity in mediated societies and examines how the question of Islamic identity has been explored, and especially in the Indian context.

Modernity, Media, and Identity

Identity has become a contentious issue in modern times because the defining characteristic of modernity is uncertainty of all knowledge, which destabilizes the core of individual selves (Giddens, 1991). Media and modern institutions heighten the dynamic nature of modern society as they “propel social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts or practices” and establish relationships across wide spans of time and space (Giddens, 1991, p. 20). According to Benedict Anderson (1983/1991), nation states and national identities were created thanks to print-capitalism that enabled people who shared linguistic affiliations, but may never have been face to face, to imagine themselves as a community and a nation. Appadurai (1996) says, that in the case of “electronic capitalism,” the “community of sentiment” shaped by “conditions of collective reading,
criticism, and pleasure,” can extend well beyond the national boundary (p. 8). Hence the examination of identities and consciousness in modern mediated societies is within situations “which have disturbed the relatively settled character of many populations and cultures” (Hall, 1996c, p. 4). According to Hall (1996b), in “contemporary societies identities are more fluid, less predictable . . . more dependent on performance and less dependent on . . . inherited tradition” (p. 129).

In scholarly circles, especially cultural studies, construction of identity is being explored within contexts of cross-cultural contacts, that involve migration, and movement, in terms of colonization, trade and globalization, which are shaping vibrant new cultures (see Alexander, 1996; Ang, 1982/1985 & 2001; Appadurai, 1996; Canclini, 2001/2005; Hall, 1996b; Kraidy, 2005). Postcolonial scholars, who study evolving conditions in postcolonial worlds including India, have been deeply influenced by cultural studies’ focus on rootless, fluid, flexible and performative (or constantly under-construction) identities and they have paid inordinate amount of attention to identity of diaspora populations (see Alexander, 1996; Ang, 1982/1985 & 2001; Chopra, 2006; Das, 2003; Durham, 2004; Faizal, 2006; Hall, 1996a; Hirji, 2006; Kaur, 2002; Khurana, 2004; Mankekar, 1999a & 2002a; Punathambekar, 2005; Rajagopal, 2003). The aim and politics of cultural studies and postcolonial scholarship is to counter divisive ideologies that frame identities as stable, fixed, pure, or mutually exclusive. Hence, in scholarly debates hybridity and hybrid identities have emerged as important concepts, which challenge and undermine structural controls (see Bhabha, 1994; Garcia Canclini, 2005; Rosaldo, 2005; Kraidy, 2005); and research has focused on construction of hybrid sensibilities at the juncture of globalization and circulation of global media narratives
These concepts have become an important way to think about identity in popular culture, which celebrates interconnections between vastly different groups of people and their ways of life resulting from increased trade, travel and media. Hybrid identities are seen as empowered identities and the term hybrid corresponds with Bhabha’s creative third space and Turner’s (1974) conception of “liminality.” According to Turner, the liminal space offers opportunities to stand aside from all social positions including one’s own, in order to formulate unlimited “alternative social arrangements” that undermine “prestigious programs” of authority and tradition.

However, in a contemporary networked world, which is converging, collapsing and celebrating hybridity, Islamic identity is presented in dialectic tension or in sheer opposition to the project of modernity. The next section looks at debate about Islamic identity within the global context and within the framework of Indian society.

The Project of Islamic Identity

Huntington (1993) proposes that there are basic, fundamental and essential differences between Western civilization, given its democratic values, liberalism, equality, liberty, and free markets, and the Islamic world. According to Huntington, Islamic civilization and Western civilization are not only mutually exclusive but also acutely hostile to the extent that implementation of Western democracy in the Arab world can only give rise to anti-Western sentiments. However, according to Benjamin Barber
(2004) the world may appear to be divided into opposing poles of *Jihad* versus *McWorld*, but the relationship between them is not necessarily oppositional, it is dialectical. *Jihad* and *McWorld*, which stand for forces of fundamentalism and modernization/capitalism respectively, both undermine democratic institutions and wage war on sovereign nation-states.

Castells (1997) presents a more nuanced argument. He claims, “the construction of contemporary Islamic identity proceeds as a reaction against unreachable modernization (be it capitalist or socialist), the evil consequences of globalization, and the collapse of the post-colonial nationalist project” (p. 19). He sees Islamic identity as a defensive identity and a reaction against an unpredictable, hostile and unstable world. Castells claims that in a networked society there is a lack of connection at the level of “power-making in the global networks and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures,” which leads to the disintegration of civil society and “the search for meaning takes place . . . in the reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles” (p. 11). The underlying hope of defensive identities is that “God, nation, family, and community will provide unbreakable, eternal codes, around which a counter-offensive will be mounted against the culture of virtuality” (p. 66).

Castells’ (1997) arguments account for how experiences of social deprivation and alienation are involved in the construction of defensive identities. Castells adds that though Giddens’ arguments about reflexivity (or deep uncertainty) of modern life are valid, “reflexive life-planning becomes impossible except for the elite inhabiting the timeless space of flows of global networks and their ancillary locales” (p. 11). Castells implies that while the rich and the knowledgeable successfully negotiate the complex life
choices presented in a networked global world-order, the poor and the marginalized organize around communal principles because they hope to overcome social exclusion, deprivation and disaffection in “the new godly, communal world” (p. 20). Nevertheless, despite these insightful observations, the import of Castells arguments is not very different from that of Huntington’s (1993). Castells is also guilty of attempting to fit into a single mold the diverse realities and complexities of Islamic society, spread across many nations, cultures, languages, and history. Castells claims,

An Islamic fundamentalist project has emerged in all Muslim societies, and among Muslim minorities in non-Muslim nations. A new identity is being constructed, not by returning to tradition, but by working on traditional materials in the formation of a new godly, communal world, where deprived masses and disaffected intellectuals may reconstruct meaning in a global alternative to the exclusionary global order. (p. 20)

According to Hasan (2002), the problem with such overarching arguments that see fundamental faultlines between cultures is that “they predispose the reader to view the relationship of Islam to the West in terms of rage, violence, hatred and irrationality” (p. 12). This distorted perspective about Muslims among audiences or readers the world over infects the way Muslims are seen and represented in the Indian public sphere.

Identity of Indian Muslims

Metcalf (1995) says that divisive and essentialist theoretical frameworks that determine representation of Indian Muslims are a legacy of colonialism in India. She adds that in the nineteenth century, the colonialist and later the nationalist scholars were inclined to write a history that highlighted the differences and the antagonism between
two the communities—Hindus and Muslims. According to Metcalf, the British historians were keen to project Muslims as outsiders and conquerors of India and to focus on instances of Muslim persecution of Hindus, in order to present the British rule as a comparative blessing. However, what is worrying, according to Metcalf, is the recent resurrection in Indian public life (coinciding with the rise of Hindu nationalist party in the 1980s) of divisive historical narratives that “define the nature of India’s people and draw the boundaries of citizenship” (p. 952). These narratives present Muslims as foreign invaders. Metcalf says that the destruction of Babri Masjid (a mosque constructed by Mughal ruler, Babur, in the 16th century) in 1992 and the violence perpetrated on Muslims, was part of a program for public action, which was sanctioned by revival of narratives defining Muslims are outsiders and conquerors. Muslims were being given the choice to either assimilate or leave (p. 952).

The tendency to see relationship of Islam in confrontation with the rest is further perpetuated by research that focuses on conflagrations that have marred the Hindu-Muslim relationship in independent India. There is extensive research devoted to investigation of riots and violence between Hindus and Muslims since the partition of the country (see Basu, 1997; Engineer, 1988 & 1995; Kakar, 1996; Mehta, 1992; Pandey 1990, 1997, 2001 & 2006; Saberwal, 1986 & 1996; Sen, 2006; Shiva, 2005; Tambiah, 1990; Varshney, 2002). According to Basu, scholars are interested in conflagrations because they are committed to explaining the nature and cause of conflict with the ultimate aim of resolving the tensions. Hence, in addition to dissecting the contexts and conditions of violence, scholarship brings an intense scrutiny to bear on political conditions and shortfalls in the Indian democratic system. For example, there is an
intense debate that the interpretation of secularism in India could be the cause of the riots. Scholars argue that the meaning of secularism in the Indian settings does not signify the state’s withdrawal from all religious affiliations. In fact the Indian state is ambiguous in its stance towards religion leading to misgivings, grievances, and the politicization of religion (see Hasan, 2004; Chatterjee, 2006; Asad, 2006). However, as these studies focus on antagonism between communities, they do not, despite their good intentions, counter the stereotypes that confound Indian Muslims.

One of the most pervasive stereotypes defining the identity of Indian Muslims is that they are inordinately influenced by their religion (Hasan, 2002). India is a religious country; however, Muslims are considered to be excessively religious in comparison to other Indians. According to Hasan, despite the existence of a wide and rich range of literature that point to the contrary,

Time and again one is reminded of the pervasive influence of Islam on its adherents. . . . Time and again one is also led to believe that the major preoccupation of a Muslim is praying, going on pilgrimage, and observing other religious rituals. Time and again we are also told that Muslims, more than any other religious entity, attach importance and value to their religio-cultural habits and institutions, and therefore are more prone to paying heed to Islamist ideas and movement. (p. 8-9)

Hence, Muslims in India are most often hailed with reference to their co-religionists and are seen as fundamentalist. According to Hasan, the result of this skewed perception is that we do not know anything about Muslims in their everyday life. There is no research on Muslims within the settings of their professional life, class affiliations and as they go
about fulfilling their socio-economic needs. Hasan continues that it is unjust that scholarship should harp on the role of religion in the lives of Muslims, while not undertaking research that illuminates their day-to-day existence within more secular contexts. Ahmed (1983) supports Hasan’s view when he says that the image of Muslims, as being inherently opposed to change and modernization, is the result of paucity of research on Muslims. Ahmed adds that false perceptions persist because sociologists and anthropologists investigating modernization and social change in India “have all accepted commonly held stereotypes and clichés about Muslims in India and tried to simply validate them through empirical research” (p. xxi).

The distortions of Muslim reality and the inability of Indian Muslims to present their point of view can be attributed to the fact that the Muslim population is impoverished and isolated. It is unable to question the structures that relegate them to the status of second-class citizens. According to Metcalf (1995), scholarship that would attempt to expose the Muslim reality would question these structures. She says,

The history that identifies Indian Muslims as aliens, destroyers, and crypto-Pakistanis, with its profound moral and political implications for citizenship and entitlement. . . . cannot be successfully challenged until, as has happened only partially and very recently in the United States in relation to African-American, the social and political interests that sustain belief in fundamental difference are changed. (p. 963)

However, Muslims are not in a position to implement fundamental changes to improve their image in Indian society. According to the report of the Sachar Committee, which was commissioned by the Office of the Prime Minister of India in 2005, Indian Muslims
are plagued by both economic and social marginalization. The stereotypes that represent the Muslim identity in the public sphere must be seen within their socio-economic realities and against the backdrop of political interests that perpetuate the Muslim population’s backwardness because these factors influence the representation of Muslims in media. The next section looks at research on Indian media and the representation of minority and Muslim populations in Indian media.

Identity, Media studies, Indian Media, and Media Research

The relationship between media and identities is intensely debated in media studies. Scholarship has investigated how media texts construct identities and represent identities along categories such as race (see Coover, 2001; Dubrofsky, 2006; Durham, 1999; Littlefield, 2008; McCarthy, 1998; Roja, 2004; Yin, 2005), ethnicity (see Abbas, 2001; Ardizzoni, 2005; Carstens, 2003; Durham, 1999 & 2004; Rajgopal, 2003; Samad, 1998; Van Nieuwkerk, 2004), gender (see Anngard, 2005; Banet-Weiser, 2004; Berland & Wechter, 1992; Meyer, 2003; Rojas, 2004; Stern, 2004; Werner, 2006) and other factors such as skin color (Leong, 2006), and sexual orientation (Ragusa, 2005; Raley & Lucas, 2006). The relationship between media and identity in Indian society has also come under intense academic scrutiny especially as the media in India underwent an absolute transformation.

In the 1980s, Indian media scene was dominated by the sole state owned and operated broadcaster, Doordarshan. Doordarshan functioned in Indian society in a manner comparable to McDaniel’s (2002) description of media—television, print and radio in Southeast Asian countries. Doordarshan, like the media in Southeast Asia was the collaborator and partner of the political elite and especially the ruling party. However,
as in Southeast Asia, Doordarshan’s role was also undermined “by changes in the technology of information and entertainment media” (p. 3). According to McDaniel, the media set-up in Southeast Asia and India changed with the advent of satellite television introduced by STAR TV, a company broadcasting from Hong Kong. STAR TV challenged the dominance of all terrestrial broadcasters and created fears of cultural invasion from the West in many Asian countries (p. 70-73). McDaniel has mapped the subtle but significant shifts in political climate that occurred in Southeast Asia as direct consequences of the transformation in media technologies. Although there is no study that has mapped the relationship between the declining fortunes of Doordarshan and the paradigm shifts in Indian politics, nonetheless in the changed media environment Indian audiences were introduced to global media and to new experiences of a plurality of life, other than those constructed by the Indian State.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an overwhelming expansion of satellite television and media in India. The media—satellite television, film, radio, Internet and print, have grown at a rate comparable to and even higher than the rate of growth of Indian economy, which itself has been expanding at a very impressive rate (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). Considering that the transformation of Indian media was so comprehensive, scholarship from different streams—political science, anthropology, sociology and media studies have focused on the relationship between the growth of Indian media and Indian society. However, there has been excessive concentration on one particular phenomenon—the telecast of Indian epics, the Mahabharat and the Ramayan on Doordarshan, in the late 1980s. The conditions of Indian media have changed since the broadcast of the Indian epics, however researchers
are still investigating the relationship between the broadcast of Indian epics on the State broadcaster and the rise of the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party.

Sociologist Rajagopal (1992 & 2001) has studied how the BJP used the visual repertoire of the epics for political mobilization of the Hindu constituency. Historian Miller (1991) and political scientists McGuire and Reeves (2003) have charted a path of association between BJP’s political fortunes and the telecast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* on Doordarshan. Purnima Mankekar’s (1999b) ethnographic study focuses on “the role of . . . state-run television, Doordarshan—in the ideological construction of nation, womanhood, identity and citizenship” (p. 4) with a focus on media texts *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana*. Ananda Mitra (1993), a communication scholar, has also studied the State broadcaster’s role in the construction of Indian popular culture by textually analyzing the broadcast version of the epic *Mahabharat*. In addition, a number of doctoral theses/dissertations have textually analyzed the epics, *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* telecast on Doordarshan, with the aim of exploring the state broadcaster’s role in constructing a hegemonic national identity (see Asthana, 2003; Dilawari, 1996; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992; Mitra, 1992; Rajagopal, 1992; Singh, 1998). Zacharias’ (2000) ethnographic study is the sole exception that considers the reception of media text *Ramayana* by lower-class Hindus and analyzes the protest launched by them against the upper-caste Hindu interpretation of the epic.

Scholarship’s overwhelming involvement with the media texts *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* can perhaps be explained by the fact that the epics are deeply imbedded in the Indian psyche. According to Pollock (1993), the symbolism of *Ramayana* offers “special imaginative ‘resources’” (p. 281). Miller (1991) and McGuire & Reeves (2003) believe
that is not surprising that the rise of “militant Hinduism” in 1980s should coincide with
the state broadcaster’s decision to telecast the epics. The symbolism of *Ramayan*
provided the much-desired rhetoric needed by the BJP to secure “ideological cohesion”
among its Hindu constituency (Pollock, 1993, p. 262) and to mobilize political support
for its nationalist agenda (McGuire & Reeves, 2003; Rajagopal, 2001). These studies
provide an important insight into the role of media in political and cultural mobilization
of the dominant Hindu identity. However, the fact that scholars (like Brosius, 2005;
Deshpande, 2000; Mankekar, 1999b, 2002b & 2002c; McGuire & Reeves, 2003;
Rajagopal 2001) should still be investigating the political and social fallouts of the
telecast of Indian epics a decade and half after their original telecast in 1980s places an
inordinate amount of focus on the construction and mobilization of the dominant Hindu
identity and culture. Moreover, several media studies that focus on the relationship
between media narratives and construction of Indian ‘national’ identity have exhibited a
tendency to tend to conflate ‘national’ with the Hindu culture (see Asthana, 2003; Das,
1998; Ghosh, 1992; Kumar, 2006; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992). This leads to reiteration
of the hegemonic Hindu identity, especially as there are no studies that explore
alternative visions of nationhood proposed by minorities and non-Hindu populations
(Mufti, 2000); and there is no focus on how minority and non-Hindu populations
interacted with the epics telecast on Doordarshan. Moreover, among all doctoral theses
written at American universities, there is no media study of any kind on the Muslims of
India.

Research that focuses on construction and mobilization of the dominant Hindu
identity at a point of time when Doordarshan was the sole state broadcaster with a captive
audience does not illuminate the current situation. The state broadcaster had established a “unified visual field” and created an “immense convergence of attention” (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 51). Today, the concepts of captive audiences or unified viewing fields are unsustainable as over 300 satellite television channels battle for audiences’ attention (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). In the contemporary complex and varied media environment, it would be difficult to establish a relationship between media narratives and social and political developments, as the scholarship has successfully demonstrated in the case of broadcast of Hindu epics on Doordarshan and the rise of the BJP.

There are a few studies, which explore qualitative changes in media industry following liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy and analyze how these changes are influencing media’s construction and representation of Indian identity (for example see Butcher, 2003; Juluri, 2003; Oza, 2006). Many of the studies focus on media role in creating a culture of consumerism (Grewal, 1999; Mazzarella, 2003), and how this affects construction of gendered identities (Mankekar, 2004; Oza, 2006; Parameswaran, 2004a & 2004b) and also reshaping the identity of Indian diaspora audiences (Datta, 2000; Grewal, 1999; Kaur, 2002; Mankekar, 1999a; Rajagopal, 2003; Sharpe, 2005). According to Grewal and Kaur, media texts that cater to Indian middle class consumerist sensibilities in the expanding and liberalized Indian economy are redefining the relationship between the Indian diaspora and the Indian nation. Kaur says that the Indian diaspora audiences are expressing a renewed interest in glossy representations of the rich in India as these media texts help them renegotiate their immigrant status in host countries. While according to Grewal, media texts which emphasize global consumption patterns and depict the lifestyle of South Asian immigrants to United States prompt
Indian audiences to copy the more evolved “market consumer lifestyle” of Indian diaspora populations (p. 801).

Most of these studies have either textually or thematically analyzed media texts and there are only a few studies that undertake an ethnographic investigation of construction of identity in the age of globalization and expansion of media in India (for example see, Banaji, 2006, Butcher, 2003; Mankekar, 2004; Mazzarella, 2003). However, there is a near absence of media studies that investigate the relationship between media narratives and the sense of selfhood of minority populations. The next section examines media studies that focus on representation of Muslim identity in media outlets.

Representations of Muslim Identity in Indian Media

There are a few studies that focus on representations of Muslims in media, although there is still a near absence of media reception studies and research that investigate the construction of minority or Muslim identity. Shahid Amin (2004 & 2005) and Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali (2002) have analyzed how media frames Muslims in the contemporary globalized mediated Indian society.

Amin (2004) analyzes a poster commissioned by the Government of India to promote national integration. The poster depicts the diverse regional, religious and linguistic identities that are part of the pan-Indian identity. The Indian Muslim in the poster is identified by his Turkish cap. According to Amin, the task of procuring a Turkish cap in a Muslim household would be as difficult as arranging for a Shakespearean costume (p. 94); but stereotypes referring to Muslims as outsiders continue to persist, regardless of material reality, because they support the claims of Hindu nationalists that Muslims do not belong to India.
Fazila-Yacoobali (2002) argues that media texts attempt to define Muslims within the “territorialized” and “territorially circumscribed” “national order of things” (p. 195). She refers to the popular Bollywood film, *Sarfarosh*, released during the brief but tense Kargil war with Pakistan in 1999, for an exceptional and “unabashed examination of Muslim identity in a post-Partition South Asia” (p. 183). However, she points out that though the contentious issue of Muslim identity was raised in defiance of the dominant trend in Bollywood to maintain a silence on such issues, the real intent of the film’s narrative was to indicate to Muslim audiences that they must give precedence to their Indian identity over any other affiliations (p. 195). According to Fazila-Yacoobali, Muslims who did not migrate to Pakistan but stayed behind in India after the Partition of the country have posed a problem to the proponents of the two-nation theory. They find it difficult to answer the question—where do the Indian Muslims belong and where do their loyalties lie? Fazila-Yacoobali says that the narrative of the film *Sarfarosh* has answered these questions in unambiguous terms. The loyalties of the Muslims must lie with the country (or *mulk*) and not with the de-territorialized collective Muslim community (or *quam*). If Muslims prevaricate on this issue, they have the choice: to either return to Pakistan or to go to the *kabiristan* (graveyard) as the slogans chanted during the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* clearly spelled out (p. 197). Muslims who claims loyalty to both *mulk* and to the *quam* are rejected. The two loyalties cannot combine because communal identity is pitted against the national identity. In fact, the person who claimed loyalty to both country and community was cast as a sinister character in *Sarfarosh*. The character that epitomizes the national identity is the middle-class Hindu hero of the film. According to Fazila-Yacoobali, Indian national identity
draws on the “spiritual dedication and fortitude” of a Hindu middle-class home and is conjoined to “the material power of a territorially distinct, efficient, benevolent, reasonable, forward-looking, military-vigilant nation state” (p. 196). While the Muslim *quam* is,

The anti-theses of this Indian modernity, and is imbued with wholly negative values; feudal and decadent, unable to put the sufferings of the past in the past, unable to move forward, calcified, embittered, irrational, sentimental, somewhat deranged, criminal and, ultimately, dangerous. (p. 196)

Hence Muslims are not only retrograde and anti-modern, but Fazila-Yacoobali’s analysis implies that Muslims are also precluded from adopting a hybrid identity. They cannot move between their essential bonds of religion, religious community and nationhood. They are forced to choose between one and the other.

The textual analysis of media texts by Amin (2004) and Fazila-Yacoobali (2002) have elaborated the complex dynamics of representation of Muslims in media. However, there are no studies, which focus on how Muslims react to or receive media texts that present them as caricatures, deny their experiences and evoke the hegemony of the Hindu identity. This question is important because, according to Myron Weiner (1997), the minority status of a community is a reflection of its relationship to dominant narratives. Weiner says,

A people who do not share what they regard as the central symbols of the society invariably view themselves as a minority. It is not simply that a community lacks power, but rather that the symbols of authority, the values that are propagated
from the centre, and the culture that emanates from the centre are viewed as not theirs. (p. 462)

But, there are no studies that investigate the Muslim minority population’s complex relationship with the symbolism propagated in media texts.

However, as identities are not monolithic but are constructed at cross-cutting categories such as gender, the next section looks at how media research has analyzed the relationship between globalized media and gendered identities.

Gender, Media, Globalization and Minorities

Gender impacts the construction of individual identity. This research looked at how gendered experiences of Muslim women influenced their perceptions of who they are. According to postcolonial scholars, it is difficult to study society without taking gender into consideration. Sunder Rajan (1999/2001) says that some of the major changes in a developing societies, including religious fundamentalism, caste, and communal tensions, are contested “on the site of gender and on women’s bodies” (p. 3). In investigations of the Indian situation, the perspectives of the upper-caste Hindu community prevail and there is a limited attention to construction of gendered identities among lower-castes in Hindu society (see Rao, 1999/2001 & Tharu, 1999/2001). However, the experiences of Indian Muslim women, who are doubly marginalized because of the general neglect of Muslims in social sciences and the historical neglect of women in Indian society, have not been examined (Haniff, 1983). According to Shahida Latiff (1983), it is important to take note of the experiences of gender among minority communities in postcolonial nations because,
The tensions and strains, which development activity specific to modernization can produce in a minority community, is magnified for the women of the community, making them vulnerable to pressures from within and outside the community. (p. 182)

Postcolonial feminist and media scholarship has critically analyzed representation of gender and objectification of women in Bollywood cinema. According to Dasgupta (1996) and Datta (2000), Indian women in popular films are ill–treated, oppressed and portrayed as submissive, surrendering, controlled and chaste individuals, who are repository of Indian culture and tradition. They decry the hegemony of the male gaze and argue that only alternate cinema presents women characters with control over their lives and livelihood. Mankekar (1999a), Sharpe (2005), and Datta (2000) have analyzed the relationship between popular Bollywood films and reproduction of gender and sexuality among Indian Diaspora women and exposed the detrimental effects of the theme of patriarchy on women’s sexuality.

Postcolonial feminist and media studies have also insightfully investigated how gender is constructed in media texts that promote consumption of global lifestyles and products. Scholarship has examined how interactions between aspiring middle-class Indian consumers and global media narratives, has created a hybrid construct of Indian womanhood in media—a woman who is a perfect blend of the East and West (see Fernandes, 2000; Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2006; Parameswaran 2004a & 2004b). Parameswaran (2004a) says that mediated “representations of feminine agency . . . authorize the ideological interest of India’s consuming class” (p. 346). The hybrid femininity of the “new Indian woman” balances authentic Indian culture with
consumption of Western products and lifestyle options and her construction exemplifies the marking on individual bodies the marketing strategies of big business (Munshi, 1998; Sunder Rajan, 1993). Hence, the new hybrid Indian womanhood serves the interests of advertisers and manufacturers and also satisfies the desires of the Indian middle-classes who aspire to imitate global consumption patterns (Grewal, 1999; Munshi, 1998; Parameswaran, 2004a). However, Munshi argues that “new Indian women,” who combine functions of caregiving and homemaking with consumption of modern appliances and services, subverts progressive feminist politics in favor of fulfillment of consumerist desires.

The postcolonial feminist and media scholarship in India is confined to analysis of media texts. The research does not present the perspectives of the audiences or analyze how media texts are being received and what are the complex ways that media texts are being incorporated in the lives of individuals. There are only a few ethnographic studies (for example see Banaji, 2006; Mankekar, 1999b, 2002b & 2004) that investigate how construction of gender and sexuality is influenced by changing material conditions in an expanding economy, and by media’s circulation of images of global consumption and lifestyle patterns. Therefore, there is paucity of information on how media narratives influence the notions of gender and sexuality among Indian youth.

Moreover, feminist media scholarship does not take into account the changes in production, distribution, and exhibition of media texts in India or refer to major shifts in demographics. At this juncture of history, not only is India a very young country but also the incomes of the urban youth are steadily rising (see, Census Data of India, 2001; “Targeting Youth,” 2007). The lack of focus on material realities explains scholarship’s
inability to account for the new visual sensibility in Indian media narratives, including the emergence of a liberated and sexually assertive urban Indian woman. Although journalists and columnists (see, Ahmed, 2003; Daura, 2005; Ravindran, 2008) have noted that the genesis of the new Indian woman is linked to the emergence of urban women as powerful consumers, (due to increased employment opportunities in the expanding economy), media studies and research have yet to take note of this fact. An analysis of feminist media scholarship shows that there is a need for research that will build knowledge, from the perspective of the media consumers rather than media critics and scholars, and especially from the perspective of minority communities that have been largely ignored.

Conclusion and Rationale for Ethnographic Research

The review of literature indicates that research and scholarship, analyzing the relationship between media, society and identities have not focused on experiences of minority populations and the experiences of the Indian Muslim population have been largely overlooked. Scholars are inclined to construct theory from the perspective of dominant communities. For example, when Anderson (1983) theorized that the imagined communities of modern nation states were forged by the logic of print-capitalism, which imprinted on people who shared linguistic affiliation a sense of national identity, he made no reference to those who were too few in numbers to have a publication in their own language. However, the neglect of minority populations in postcolonial scholarship, which focuses on how unequal power relationships shape knowledge and experiences of cultural identity, is a matter of concern. Postcolonial scholarship has not taken into
account the experiences of Indian Muslims, a sizeable minority in an important nation. The lack of attention is particularly glaring in the field of media studies.

The experiences of Muslim minority population have escaped study perhaps because postcolonial scholarship, influenced by post-structuralists and postmodern arguments, has tended to foreground experiences of migrant and diaspora populations rather than illuminating conditions within postcolonial nations (Dirlik, 1999; Eagleton, 1999; Olson, 2005). Postcolonial scholarship has been accused of being diffuse about its politics and not taking into consideration the loci of creation of knowledge, despite all protestations to the contrary (Ahmed, 2006; Dirlik, 1999; Eagleton, 1999; Olson, 2005). Moreover, given the overwhelming influence of cultural studies, postcolonial studies is also not inclined to stress on material factors and realities (Ahmed, 2006; Khair, 2001; Sarkar, 2002). Meanwhile, the excessive attention to experiences of migrant and diaspora populations takes the focus away from development within postcolonial nations where media have created deep-rooted changes. The populations of postcolonial nations are traversing the globe while still being fixed in the social and economic contexts of the developing world.

This research investigates the construction of identity of minority Muslim youth, living in the segregated neighborhood of Jamia Nagar in New Delhi, the capital city of world’s largest democracy, India, and it aims to illuminate the complex realities of a segregated population, one that is connected to the global order through media and globalization of Indian economy. As Clifford Geertz (1973) says, anthropologists do not study the sites—village, tribe, town or neighborhood, but rather they study in these sites; and different sites are suitable locations to observe different phenomena (p. 22). The
study of the Muslim colony of Jamia Nagar and the identity of its youth population could illuminate 1) how media are deeply implicated in process of globalization; and 2) how identities are constructed at the confluence of opposing streams of communication—one emanating from religious and cultural ideology firmly entrenched in everyday life and the other coming from global media content.

I undertook this ethnographic study to investigate the interaction between media and Muslim youth of Jamia in a particular and contextually circumscribed field-study. The task is “to explain a single situation in idiosyncratic detail” (Babbie, 2004, p. 21). I wish to understand the experiences of the Muslim community in Jamia enclave. However, I make no claims that the experiences of this community or the forces that shape those experiences can any way be generalized to explain the conditions of Indian Muslims at large. This is an in-depth analysis of a particular situation, which hopes to build on theory by looking at materials at close quarters. The method, according to Geertz (1973), will make the theoretical precepts that engage social science not only actual and real but creative tools to think about social reality (p. 23). The study emphasizes that there is a need to see the world interconnected by trade and media from different perspectives.
CHAPTER 3: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH: NEGOTIATING AS INSIDER/OUTSIDER

The aim of this research was to understand how Muslim youth belonging to a distinct community and inhabiting a clearly demarcated physical space interact with media that are redefining their segregation. The Muslim neighborhood was created as a separate space, where North Indian Muslim culture and values could exist, unpolluted by influences of other societies. However, the unprecedented expansion of media in India accompanying economic liberalization, and involving technologies of satellite television, Internet, print and cellphones, has enabled disparate cultures values to co-exist with Islamic norms in the Muslim enclave. This research focused on the construction of identity and selfhood of Muslim youth at the intersection of competing ideologies—the norms of the Muslim community and those propagated by media of a globalized, market driven economy and society.

The key question driving this investigation was, how do media narratives cross, compete/contest, and superimpose on the daily life experiences of the Muslim youth of Jamia Enclave and influence their perception of who they are and what they would like to be? The definition of media for the purpose of this research includes the spectrum ranging from print, to satellite and cable television, to cinema, Internet, cell-phones, along with billboards and banners. This research was interested in understanding 1) how are the experiences of Muslim youth born in the age of the media blitz (during the late 1980s and early 1990s) different from those of the previous generation; 2) how do the youth’s interaction with media structure their identity as Muslims and as Indians; and 3) how are media narratives entwined in their conceptions as Muslim men and women.
Methodology: Rationale for Ethnographic Approach

This research sought to understand how do Muslim youth of Jamia interact, interpret, internalize and negotiate with media narratives in their daily lives. According to Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin (2002), an ethnographic approach would be the preferred methodology as ethnography is suited to examining “how media are embedded in people’s quotidian lives” and how consumers of media are embroiled in the larger political, economic, historic and social contexts (p. 2). An ethnographic approach focuses on individual experiences but places them within the wider social, cultural, political and economic fields. The vibrant field of media anthropology with its stress on ethnographic approach has creatively examined how people construct meaning out of mass-mediated images (Askew, 2002, p. 2).

Media reception studies, since Morley and Brunsdon’s (1978/1999) and Radway’s (1984/1991) pioneering projects, have acknowledged the value of ethnographic approach in understanding how media are situated in society. The early reception studies, including the study by Morley and by Lull (1988), highlighted ethnographic methodology’s relevance to investigating how television was integrated in family routines and how family routines were structured around television viewing. Their approach ignored other media—print, radio, cinema, which co-existed with television. This research focuses on the relationship of the Muslim youth of Jamia with different media technologies. In their everyday lives cell-phones are an equally important connection with the outside world as are other media—be it television, Internet, print or billboards. Nick Couldry (2002) proposes that multi-sited ethnography is the relevant methodology for studying television’s role in daily life. This research follows Couldry’s advice to consider
interactions with media in situations outside the home environment. Couldry’s recommendation is especially valid as the use of media technologies of cell-phones, Internet, and television is in settings both in and out of the home, while contact with cinema and billboards are never within the periphery of the home.

Ethnography and Identity Construction

In the field of media studies there is an increasing realization that ethnography is the most pertinent approach to analyzing “the impact of technologies on the production of individual and collective identities” (Ginsburg et al., 2002). Identities, according to symbolic interactionists following Cooley’s (1902/1964) pioneering work believe that identities are shaped in the thick of social life (for overview see Prus, 1996). Sociologist Goffman (1959) has elaborated and substantiated the construction of individual self in the context of everyday life in his seminal work—The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Media theorists and other scholars interested in investigating media’s role in construction of identity (for example Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1997; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c) are in concurrence with the view that identities are social constructs shaped in the throes of everyday life activities. Hence, the relationships between media and conceptions of self-hood or identity are best investigated within their unique social settings. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), ethnography or qualitative field study, involving direct observation and participation as a witness in the lives of others within their natural settings, is the way to study many aspects of social life because they “can be seen, felt, and analytically articulated only in this manner” (p. 3). In other words, intricacies of social life are best understood only by being fully immersed in the subject’s lives as a participant observer. Media studies scholars and anthropologists have adopted
the qualitative field study or the ethnographic approach to study the complex construct of identities. The areas of focus have ranged from role of media in the shaping of modern consciousness (Abu-Lughod, 2002), and a global sensibility (Juluri, 2003) to media’s involvement in the construction and mobilization of national identities (Mankekar, 1999b), religious identities (Mankekar, 2002c), ethnic identities (Kraidy, 2005), racial identities, and gendered identities (Mankekar, 2004; Werner, 2006). The investigation of the construction of identity of Muslim youth from the segregated enclave of Jamia Nagar within the context of a mediated and globally interconnected society would follow the precedence established by these works.

An ethnographic methodology would also be the way to explore the perspective of a community defined by stereotypes because according to (Geertz, 1973), anthropology is not only most suited to the study of cultures but “the aim of anthropology is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse” (p. 14). Ethnographic methodology is interested in exploring the experiences of the lesser known. The approach foregrounds the subjects and allows them to speak for themselves. Moreover, as culture is defined by Geertz as a “system of construable signs” and a “context” within which “social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes” can be “intelligibly” and “thickly described,” the deconstruction of the life of a people and “setting them in the frame of their own banalities” demystifies cultures and makes different cultural experiences less opaque and more accessible (p. 14). According to Geertz, “understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity” (p. 14). However, the ethnographic approach, despite its egalitarian and humanist spirit, is not without its shortcomings.
Pitfalls of ethnographic approach

The task of examining the subjective experiences and inner worlds of the Muslim youth is fraught with many difficulties. Firstly, media experiences (including watching television, using cell phones or Internet and viewing outdoor advertising) are essentially a private and hard to observe activity (Couldry, 2002). It is also not possible, as a participant observer, to have access to many areas of their everyday life. Ethnographers try to overcome these problems through dialogue and conversations. However, Geertz cautions that anthropologist’s description of events is not “social reality but scholarly artifice;” in other words they are scholarly interpretations of subject population/actors’ actions and motives (p. 16). But, according to Murphy (1999), “problems related to self-reflexivity, the constitution of the audience, and the politics and poetics of representation” have deterred ethnographic study of media audiences in favor of more abstract theorizing (p. 206). Lofland and Lofland (1995) support Murphy’s call for reinvestment in media ethnography and say that despite the shortcomings of the ethnographic method, there is no better way to study individuals in their social context. It is only through “direct experience can one accurately know much about social life” (p. 3). An ethnographic approach was most appropriate for exploring Muslim youth’s relationship with media within the context of changes in Indian society and economy.

Approaching the Site and Recruiting Informants

I approached the task gaining entry into the field, recruiting my informants and establishing a routine for participation, interaction and observation of the life of my informants from the perspective of an insider. My parents live at walking distance from Jamia University. Entering the field was like going back home for me in many ways.
have spent nearly six years at Jamia University and I enjoy a certain privileges of access to the Muslim population that lives around the university in several neighborhoods of the Jamia area. I was a student of the AJ Kidwai Mass Communication Research Center at Jamia University. After graduation, I found employment as Producer Educational Television at the same institute. I became acquainted with a cross-section of Muslim population during the six years that I spent at Jamia University. My acquaintances are professors, lecturers, finance-officers, administrative staff, clerks and canteen workers. I sought the help of my acquaintances, as Agar (1980) and Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest, to facilitate the entry into the field and to recruit 15 Muslim young men and women (aged 19 to 29) from different sections of Muslim community of Jamia (see Appendix A for details about informants).

On entering the field I first approached the professors and academic personnel from my varied network of contacts, as I expected them to be sympathetic to the project. Moreover, as they represented authority and credibility, my association with them positively affected my image and vouched for the project’s integrity. The question of trust was very important in gaining access to my informants. Dr. Narayani Gupta, a historian, who is very well respected in the university, but who is not a Muslim, was the first person I pressed into service. Though she has retired from Jamia University, she was able to introduce me to a number of her former students and colleagues; and they allowed me to attend their lectures. I also reached out to other professors through personal and family connections and sought their help in recruiting my key informants. The aim was to reach as broad a cross-section of population as possible; and to bring into the research’s perspective particularities structured by gender, economics and education. I recruited my
informants mainly in the classrooms of Jamia University. However, as not all the students at the university are Muslims (Jamia University has about 40% non-Muslim population) I had to attend several sessions before I could find my key informants. My informants included Jamia alumni. I met them through interactions with my acquaintances and my key informants.

My key informants, young men and women of Jamia, either lived in Jamia with their families, or occupied rented accommodations, which they sometimes shared with other students. A few of my informants lived in the dormitories of the university, situated within the university campus. The length of their association with the Jamia residential enclave varied. Some of my informants had been born in Jamia, but many had migrated here, either with their families or as students when they enrolled in Jamia University. They had come to Delhi from north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The common factor was that all of my informants had all been living in the Jamia area for more than three years. The educational background and professions of their parents varied—from minimum level required for owners of small business and skilled craftsmen to professional qualifications needed to serve as bank-officers, lawyers and advocates. Their status ranged from middle class to lower middle class Muslims. In this research when I refer to the Muslim youth of Jamia, I am specifically talking about those youth who were enrolled in Jamia University. Youth who did not enjoy access to similar avenues of personal development and growth have not been included. Even my acquaintances who belonged to the older generation were associated with the educational institute in various capacities. Hence, the community that I refer to and investigate constituted the more privileged section of the population of Jamia. This population also
had more diverse media experiences as they subscribed to cable television, Internet and possessed cellphones. Education and class were important schisms dividing the residents of Jamia Enclave and this research did not reach out to the poorer and less privileged members of the community.

In addition, eight of my acquaintances and their colleagues, who had facilitated my entry into the field, also served as my informants. They belonged to the age group of 35 and above, with the oldest person being in the late 60s (see Appendix A for details). They represented the population that came of age before the major change of economic liberalization and exponential media growth. They were also closer to the generation that laid the foundation of this discrete neighborhood. My acquaintances represented the respectable and upper middle class section of Muslim society—two of them were professors, three of them were lecturers and the others had been university administrators at a senior level. Although, the youth were the focus of the study, the older generation was incorporated into the research design as they represented one end of the spectrum while the youth aged 19 to 27 the other end. The older generation became the reference point to juxtapose responses of youth. I also spoke to six other people who were not Muslims but were associated with the university as faculty or students (see Appendix A).

The fieldwork in Jamia area was conducted over a period of one year, beginning in December 2006 and ending in March 2008. In this period, I spent nearly 5 and half months in the field. However, in the period when I was away from Jamia, I was in contact with my informants through media technologies of e-mail, Internet chat and text messaging via cell phones. Occasionally, I also made long-distance telephone calls to my informants from United States.
Negotiating Fieldwork Constraints and Establishing Ethnographer’s Routine

Jamia University was the most convenient place to meet my informants, as they were students and regularly attended the university. I established a routine of visiting the campus about three times a week. I would call and fix a meeting with any one of my informants depending upon their class schedule. I would arrive a little earlier and wait for them, sometimes in the Common Room at Jamia Polytechnic, which the faculty at the Polytechnic had given me permission to use. The other place where I would wait for them were the spacious verandas of the History, Economics and English departments. The faculty was acquainted with me, and they did not object if I met with students on the chairs and benches in the courtyard and verandas; especially as I had taken the trouble and sought permission from the Office of the Vice Chancellor to visit the campus for the purpose of my research. The waiting period provided me with an opportunity to observe life in the university.

However, I was concerned that most of my meetings were held within the more formal settings of classrooms and common rooms of the university. I had tried to meet my informants in the informal setting of the university cafeteria. The cafeteria was the ideal location to meet and talk freely. In fact, the first few meetings at the cafeteria with the young men among my informants were very productive. Many other young men dropped in and joined the conversation, thereby familiarizing me with the perspective of those who were not residents of Jamia and who were not Muslims. These discussions gave me an insight into the dynamics of youth culture in India. They also helped in the construction of probes comparing the experiences of Muslim youth of Jamia with reference to other Indian youth. But, I could not continue using the cafeteria because in
Muslim society, men and women do not mingle freely. Ethnographers studying Muslim society have found gender to be consistent constraint on their fieldwork (see Altorki & El-Solh, 1988). Interactions between men and women are formal and kept to the minimum. Hence, the unsupervised meetings with a group of young men in the cafeteria reflected poorly on me. They also made the young men feel uneasy because the interactions attracted undue attention from other Muslim students. I had to think of other locations to meet my informants.

The coffee houses in the nearby Friends Colony market became the alternative space where I would meet with my informants. Friends Colony market is just across the road from Jamia, but it is outside the Muslim enclave. My informants, both male and female, met me individually or in small groups in this more secular environment where they were out of sight of the Muslim community. However, the norms of Muslim society governing the relationship between men and women also affected my access to the homes of my informants. For example, I could request the young women among my key informants to invite me to their homes, but I could not make a similar request to the young men. It is considered inappropriate for young Muslim men and women to have friends among members of the opposite sex. Hence, I did not visit the homes of any one of the young men, except for Zain who happens to be a distant relative.

The other major constraint that affected my fieldwork was the general wariness of the Muslim community. Muslim citizens of Jamia are conscious of an increased surveillance of their community by police and security forces. The residents of this area have been suspected and detained on charges of being involved in terrorist activities in the country (see, Press Trust of India, 2005; Sultana, 2006). Hence, they were guarded
with outsiders. I tried to overcome their circumspection, as I have mentioned earlier, by invoking my relationship with their professors, teachers and other people who were well known to them. However, the pervasive mood of distrust was such that it was difficult to visit the homes of even the young women. I also sought to counter the skepticism of my informants by opening up my home to them. I began by inviting several of my informants to visit my home, on *Eid* (the festival when Muslims commemorate Abraham and his sacrifice). It is customary on *Eid* to visit friends and relatives. I had hoped that if my informants had access to my home, it would create a more open and equitable relationship. My informants would know about me just as I was attempting to know and understand them. Several of the young women visited my home on *Eid* and on other different occasions, and they spent time talking to me and to my parents. However, only two of the young men from among my informants visited my home and one of them was again a distant relative.

The question of trust was further compounded by matters of class and gender; especially in my attempts to reach out to lower middle class sections of Muslim society through my acquaintances employed as clerks, canteen workers and office boys. The employees in the support sector are primarily male and they ascribed to very conservative views about women. I had taken extreme care not to offend them (by not being bold and by not dressing in Westernized clothes) when I was a student at Jamia. However, after a long gap it was difficult to re-establish the bonds, especially as it was not possible to meet them socially. They would not sit down and have a cup of tea with me or invite me to their homes because of our class differences and also because I was a woman.
But, one constraint that became the most problematic concern in this research was my status as an insider. My association with the community had initially facilitated my entry into the field. I had studied at the university; many of my relatives lived in the Jamia area; and they were well known in the community. But the very fact that I was well known and familiar limited my scope as a researcher. Altorki and El-Solh (1988) say that the native ethnographer’s ability to work in the field is dependent upon the role that the researcher adopts to reach out to the people that he or she is studying. The role that I was taking on was that of a person returning to the fold. At every point I would stress that though I may be studying in America, I was very much the same person who had studied here earlier. I dressed in conservative Indian clothes and spoke primarily in Urdu to prove that my values had not changed. However, the act of respecting and adhering to the rules of the community and not transgressing them in any way meant that I did not have access to many avenues of information that could be crucial to my research. For example, I wanted to walk freely through the streets of the Jamia residential area and not be confined to moving inside the university campus. But I could not do this all by myself. I had to often ask my mother, or a relative to accompany me whenever I ventured into the neighborhoods. I interacted with storeowners, pavement vendors and especially the bookstore owner, but only when I was with someone and that too during the day. I never ventured into the Jamia residential area on my own during the evening or night.

The outcome of these constraints was that I was forced to deal with silences and evasions. Butalia (2000) has rendered an evocative account of the powerful social histories that often lie on “the other side of silence.” She has also argued that extreme sensitivity is required in dealing with silences of the informants. The silences can be
addressed solely at the discretion of the informants and the researcher at all times must respect the prerogative of the informants to refuse to address issues that they find painful. Given the nature of my research, the atmosphere of uncertainty that surrounded my informants and my emotional involvement in their lives, I tread with extreme care and did my best not to force them to address matters that they wanted to push out from their consciousness. I also respected their evasiveness when I believed that any attempt to draw them into a conversion could be considered culturally inappropriate. Hence, at many times during the research I was forced to draw inferences to deal with my informants’ strategy of not addressing certain issues.

Nature of Interactions and the Recording of Data

The fieldwork was divided into three phases. The first phase was undertaken in December 2006, the second phase lasted from June 25th until September 4th, 2007, and the final last phase stretched from November 29th, 2007, until January 14th, 2008. As noted earlier, the conversations continued even when I was not physically present on the field via email and Internet Chats (mostly Google Talk). My interactions with my informants were frequent and continuous. They were in the nature of an ongoing conversation, which were informed by an interview guide (see Appendix B). Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to such prolonged and sustained interactions with the informants as “participant observation” and “intensive interviewing” (p. 18). They are contrasted with “structured interviewing,” which is more suitable for surveys where subject population is only required to choose from a limited repertoire of options. Intensive interviewing, on the other hand, is open-ended and the informants have the freedom to frame their experience of a particular topic or situation in any manner that they choose. Intensive
interviewing complements experiences of immersion in the field. According to Agar (1980), such informal interviews combine well with participant observations. The ethnographer frames questions on the behavior/action as it takes place or subsequently. The ethnographer’s observations recorded in fieldnotes support the informants’ accounts and create as complete a picture of the events as possible. However, the use of on-line chatting allowed me to continue the process of interaction and immersion in the lives of my informants. This practice actually extends the experience of fieldwork. Informants’ facilities with new communication technologies ensured a continuous contact with them. The introduction of the virtual in the realm of ethnographic fieldwork suggests a need for redefinition of what constitutes a field experience.

The recording of field experiences, in the first and even the second phase of my research, was affected by Muslim community’s apprehensions and misgivings and their inability to easily trust people. The sight of my notebook would often freeze conversation, even though my informants had read the formal document detailing the research objectives and had given their verbal consent to participate in the research. Therefore, in the initial stages I kept my note taking to the minimum. I also tried to create an atmosphere of a social interaction—as if the young men and women were meeting a casual friend. I would write down short phrases, as memory aids that helped me to commit the interaction to fieldnotes, soon after returning from the field. I also allowed my informants to look into my notebook and to see what I was writing in order to reassure them about the nature of my research. Many of the young men, though not the young women, took up the offer and read through my field notebook. It was only in the later stages of my fieldwork that I could take down detailed notes without making my
informants uncomfortable. But, it was only in the third phase of the research that my informants gave me permission to tape record our conversations. Hence, the data consists of field notebooks, which were converted into detailed field notes after returning from the field. In later stages the data consisted of tape-recorded conversations (which were transcribed and then erased) and fieldnotes. I continued to take notes even while recording the conversations. Here I noted down the main points of the conversation (in case the recording was unsuccessful) and also other things that caught my attention such as the informant’s body language, the surrounding conditions and so on. I have also maintained a file consisting of printouts of the e-mails and Google Talk conversations with my informants. The names of my informants have been erased or blacked out in the printouts and the electronic data of emails and Google chat conversations erased to protect the identity of my informants. The question of protecting the identity of my informants was addressed by giving the informants pseudonyms. The transcripts of conversations are kept in a secure place accessible only to the principal investigator.

In addition, I also maintained a personal journal. The personal journal was very important because I was entering the field after a gap of ten years. My earlier experiences had created in my mind maps or what Agar (1986) refers to as “schema-guided expectations” about the subject population, their beliefs and practices (p. 21). A departure from expectations is of great interest to the investigator/researcher. Agar refers to the “lack of fit” between the schemas or pre-existing knowledge in the mind of the ethnographer and the event that the researcher encounters in the field as “breakdowns” (p. 20). The breakdown has to be resolved. For example, if the state of affairs in the community were not as I had expected them to be, I would need to resolve the issue by
coming up with an explanation or resolution to eliminate the inconsistency. The task would entail asking questions of how is the event different; what could be the reason for the irregularity; and the answers could lead in the direction of the connections that exist between the daily lives of the Muslim youth of Jamia and the larger social and economic forces.

Moreover, the personal journal was where I could freely record my intuitions and musings without fear of polluting any observational data. Agar (1980) acknowledges the importance of “intuition and pattern perception” as integral to the “inexplicable mystique” of ethnographic research (p.114). This study is born out of personal experiences and convictions. The recording of personal musings and feeling was important to ensure that they were distinguishable from field experiences. According to Pratt (as quoted in Abu-Lugod, 1991), an enduring criticism against anthropological research is the failure to acknowledge “the ethnographer’s own material relationship to the group under study” (p. 148). I am a Muslim and I share many experiences with my informants, even though class and educational differences separate me from my informants. For example, I know how it feels to be marked as an outsider because of one’s religion, language, and food habits. One of my primary motives in undertaking this research was to counter the entrenched misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices that exist about Muslims. Hence, my personal feelings, impressions, and expectations had to be explicitly stated and incorporated at the stage of gathering evidence in the personal journal. Moreover, they also needed to be acknowledged at the stage of analysis of findings, thereby ensuring that the ethnographer’s motivations did not impose a framework of analysis on the event under observation.
Lastly, I collected media coverage of issues that concerned my informants, primarily through newspaper articles. I also viewed television programs that my informants found interesting and made notes about their format, content, and the like though I did not record them electronically. I also made a detailed analysis of one media text, the film *Chak De India*, released in August 2007 because my informants made several references to this film.

**Analyzing the Data**

The fieldwork created a mass of information and the challenge was, in the words of Lofland and Lofland (1995), to provide a “generic proposition” that would provide order to the mass of information (p. 182). According to Lofland and Lofland, the interpretative frameworks that impose coherence on the data are related to the research questions that directed the research. The social science questions posed by researchers range from problems about frequencies, magnitude, structures, process, causes and consequences, and they investigate how human beings respond to different variables (p. 123). These different social science queries lead to “eight different formal kinds of propositions” or organizing principles (p. 182). However, in addition to these passivist frameworks, scientific inquiry also considers humans as agents, “through which social forces operate and out of which social forms and organizations are composed” (p. 182). The research questions that propelled this research were—how do Muslim youth interact and negotiate with media in their daily lives and how do these interactions shape their sensibilities and their identity. This research explores people’s strategies for creating meaning. Therefore, the framework that guided the analysis of the data is the “activist viewpoint,” as my subject population is active, probing, and capable of influencing its
surrounding (p. 145). In the coding of the data, the strategies of my informants, including their actual actions and their claims about actions that they would take in the future were highlighted from the mass of data. For example, I would pay special attention to my informants’ expressions of “I want,” “I dream,” “I plan,” “I will do,” and so on.

The other organizing principle that helped bring order to the data is described by Lofland and Lofland (1995) as a variation of “consequences” (p. 141). Consequences are measured in covariation with another factor within a time sequence and after controlling for spurious associations (p. 141). The concept of consequence was indicated in the research questions. For example, the question of how are interactions with media a factor in youth’s relationship with their exclusive neighborhood can be explored in a before and after manner. In other words, we can ask what was Jamia’s residents’ relationship with their community like before media became a constant presence in their lives; and what form has this relationship taken after media’s intervention? For the purpose of this research, I chose to compare and contrast the older generation’s commitment to their environment with the connections and sentiments expressed by youth of Jamia. The older generation’s socializing took place in the age before the explosion of media outlets in India. Hence, the strategies, impressions of the both the generations with regard to their community were highlighted, coded and analyzed to explain the consequences of media’s increasing presence.

I also approached the second question of how media are influencing the Muslim youth’s interactions with the outside world, and especially their identity as Indians, in a similar manner. In the data the plans, and actions of the youth were highlighted and they were juxtaposed with narratives of media texts that the youth consumed. The organizing
principle of comparing two variables was also useful in helping to code the
ethnographer’s expectations (the pre-existing mental maps), and juxtапosing them with
observations of conditions on the field. Finally, order was imposed on the mass of data by
comparing and contrasting the views of members of opposite sex, and between members
belonging to different generations. The question of how media narratives could be
embedded in conceptions of gendered identities was examined by comparing the
perceptions of gender roles between members of different generations and between
members of opposite sex. These perceptions were then referred to the way gender is
defined in television programs, films, music televisions and other media, that engaged my
informants.

The collected data in this ethnographic research project runs into many different
streams and tangents, because the approach was open-ended and the tendency was to
record all that was happening in the field and to allow the informants to take the
conversation in any direction that interested them. The organization of this large mass of
data benefited from reverting to the research questions. This data can also illuminate
many other issues, but as this study was contained by certain key questions, the other
matters can be taken up in a later study.

*Presentation of Findings*

In the writing of the research certain norms have been followed with regard to
quotations from the informants interviews. The conversations with my informants were
carried out in Urdu and English. There were a few conversations in Hindi, a language
similar to Urdu except for vocabulary and pronunciation. My informants tended to switch
between languages of English and Urdu, as is the way with most Indians. I have
transcribed the Urdu speech using the Latin alphabet. I learned this technique from my informants who would write Urdu in an email using Latin alphabets to approximate the sound of Urdu words. In presentation of the findings, Urdu phrases are written in Latin alphabets and have been italicized. The author’s translation in English that follows the phrases is inscribed within brackets [ ]. All short quotations and sentences are presented in this fashion. However, all longer quotes have been translated by the author and identified as author’s translations.

In addition, the emails and Google Talk conversations that are reported have been subject to grammatical corrections that are identified as author’s insertions by placing them within brackets []. At other places too, any word or explanation that has been inserted by the author is identified by being placed within brackets.

Reflections on Field Experiences

I had entered the field after a gap of ten years believing that I had the right to see myself as an insider because I spoke the language fluently; I belonged to the area; my family was known to my informants; and I had many connections to the subject population through my family and my association with Jamia University. However, this research has allowed me to reflect on the native ethnographer’s claims of authenticity and veracity, and reconsider the dichotomy of insider and outsider in anthropological research.

At many points during the fieldwork, I could not help but question, if it was correct to assume that I was an insider? Firstly, I have lived for many years away from the Jamia area. I have had very different experiences. I have confronted many different cultures and situations. My perspective would inevitably be vastly different from my
informants who had lived all their life within the neighborhood. My informants did not share many of my ideas and beliefs. But, I noticed that to bolster my claims of being an insider, I was practicing a subtle deception. I was highlighting my Muslim upbringing by speaking in Urdu, dressing in old-fashioned Indian clothes, behaving very modestly and taking great care that my behavior did not offend even the most conservative members. I was also placing excessive stress on conservative values, which pleased many people, and ensured my entry into the field. Altorki (1988) says that when she was working as a Saudi woman among members of her own community, she adopted a similar strategy of being more native than the native in order to guarantee continued access to the field. She reports that she adopted the most traditional mannerisms of Saudi society in order to convince her informants that though she had been absent from the field for many years, she had not forgotten her true ethos. I was also trying to make a similar case that though I might live abroad, I was still a person who respected all the rules of her community. However, does this strategy, which entails hiding aspects of one’s current life to facilitate entry into the field, deny the native ethnographer’s claims of authenticity? For example, I would not dwell upon the fact that I have to be really independent to live far away from home. I believe that these inevitable subterfuges could become problematic only if the native ethnographer fails to notice them. The failure to recognize these tricks can lead to other omissions and elisions in the story and test the native ethnographer’s claim of having a true insight into the study of their society.

According to Kirin Narayan (1993), native ethnographers highlight the weakest links to the community but distances created between them and their subject populations by education, class and/or emigration are underplayed. Narayan adds that claims of native
ethnographers to represent their communities must be verified against indices of class, education and the location of the ethnographer. Hence, could I really believe that I was a native considering that I came from a different class, had access to more facilities and I was a PhD student at an American university. All of the indices invoked by Narayan separated me from my community. Once again my experiences in the field have indicated that these differences can become true barriers to ethnographer’s facilities if they go unacknowledged and unaccounted for, as Narayan (1993) states is often the case with native ethnographers. I tried to overcome this problematic issue by maintaining a personal journal where I recorded, among other things, my individual perspectives and expectations. My impressions were bound to be different from my informants and the differences in our class and educational experiences could be one of the factors that could account for these contrasts. The realization of these discrepancies has helped to clarify that the insider status and claims of authenticity of a native ethnographer are not automatically conferred. The native ethnographer has to establish his or her authority as slowly and carefully as the ethnographer who would be considered an outsider. It is only after returning to the field year after year, with a commitment to understanding the informants point of view, while constantly reflecting on the points of divergence, can the native ethnographer lay a claim to authenticity and veracity.

However, what the native ethnographers do bring into the field is an emotional involvement and a personal commitment to the project. The aim of my research was to present a small slice of the reality of Muslim youth so that the world could see them as they are, stripped of stereotypes that define them. The exercise is termed as unmasking the “other” and “writing against culture,” according to Abu-Lughod (1991). Abu-Lughod
says that non-native anthropologists designated the communities that they were studying as the “other” in order to maintain their identity; and the division was maintained by focusing on “culture” (p. 139). Abu-Lughod claims that “halfies” or anthropologists who belong to two cultures are best “positioned” to challenge the established and entrenched disciplines that codify and establish the “otherness” of self and “other” because “halfies” can be both objective and yet engaged. I believe that a native ethnographer can be similarly positioned if they are conscious of their personal motives. The personal commitment allows for approaching the subject with affinity rather than distance. The passion, if acknowledged and rationalized within the framework of research, lends to the ethnographic account sincerity and authenticity and make the story that the ethnographer is telling that much more readable.

In the final analysis, the job of the native ethnographer is more gratifying and less frustrating, especially as the native does not have to struggle over complex language constructions, and nuances and connotations of cultural expression. However, if native-ethnography has also to qualify as good scientific research then it must pay credence to the boundaries between the “self” and the “other” that they so decried in non-native anthropologists (for example see Abu-Lughod, 1991). The differences of class and opportunities must be built into the claims of the authenticity; the manipulations of identity carefully acknowledged; and all manners of artifice needed to enter the field spelled out. If that is taken care of, then, native ethnographers can offer an insight, which would escape an outsider and especially so as native ethnographers bring into the project strong personal motives, their own personal story, and emotions.
CHAPTER 4: REDEFINING **APNA MAHOL**: HOW MEDIA NARRATIVES RECONSTRUCT COMMUNITY, IDEOLOGY AND DAILY LIFE OF MUSLIM YOUTH IN THEIR SEGREGATED ENCLAVE

The word *mahol* is not easy to translate. The literal translation of the term *mahol* is environment or surroundings according to Urdu-English dictionary (Haq, 1993). *Mahol* is the term my informants used to refer to their life within the boundaries of the discrete Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar. They would often say, alluding to their community, “*Aur phir yeh apna mahol hai,*” translated as, “This is after all our environment.” The phrase, *apna mahol* or our *mahol*, reflects their relationship to their distinct neighborhood; it indicates their sense of belonging and their acquiescence to the norms and values prescribed for inhabitants of this community. The *mahol/environment/community* was created in response to certain socio-economic and political conditions. It was also created to fulfill the express desire of Muslims to find a space where they could practice their way of life, including their religious obligations freely and assert their unique identity. Hence, the *mahol* of Jamia, its characteristic rhythm of life, patterns, and networks of interconnections shape the daily life of its inhabitants.

Today, media are redefining the experiences of segregation and questioning the overwhelming dominance of Muslim culture in the Jamia area. The 24-hour satellite television channels have brought the world into the living rooms and bedrooms of the residents of this Muslim enclave. Mobile phones, SMS messages and Internet chat rooms have created myriad options for connecting and interacting with the world. The physical demarcations that differentiate and distance the inhabitants of Jamia from the rest of
Delhi have remained intact. However, it is no longer possible for inhabitants of this area to keep the outside world at bay. The youth of this area live like their parents within the physical boundaries of this separated space, however, unlike their parents, they look out at the world through the window of media, open 24 hours a day. This chapter analyzes how the meaning of and the relationship with mahol/community has been reconstructed for the Muslim youth of Jamia as a result of their interactions with media; and it compares the experiences of the youth with those of the older generation (comprising their parents and teachers) in whose lives media was not ever-present.

Media have connected the youth of Jamia to the larger world and mediated experiences challenge the singularity of their Muslim identity along with the boundaries of their exclusive enclave. Taking into account the youth’s interaction with media, the questions are: How do the youth internalize the lived ideology of their segregated community? How does it inform their sense of who they are? And how are their views different from the generation that did not grow up in such a media glare? This chapter begins with an exploration of the relationship of the older generation with their community, including what the community means to them, and how the community defines them. It then compares the responses of the older generation with those of the youth who have been born and raised in the neighborhood but have always been at the mercy of forces far and well beyond its mahol.

Segregated Community of Jamia: The Genesis

The Jamia area in South Delhi is an exclusive Muslim enclave and its residents are North Indian Muslims. The area, situated in the southeast of the city of Delhi, defies the grid of Delhi’s Master Plan and fills the marshes of the drying Yamuna River. The
distinct living space of Muslims has distinguishing physical features such as the mosques, *madrasas* (Islamic schools), and the eateries. It also has a unique way of life organized according to tenets of Islam—or the way Islam is interpreted by Muslim in North India. Many times during the day *Azan*, or call for prayer in Arabic, can be heard over loudspeakers as one mosque after the other invokes the faithful to fulfill their duty to God. The call resonates in the lives of the residents. The rhythms of their life are attuned to obligations of faith. On numerous occasions, I had observed that during *namaz* (the Islamic ritual prayer) the streets would empty suddenly. A hush would fall over the hustle-bustle of the narrow streets where men, women, animals and vehicles were all jostling for space a moment ago. For a few minutes, there would be a veritable pause and then life resumed its pace until the next *namaz*. The enactment of such gestures is a distinctive feature of life within the exclusive enclave. The daily routines pronounce that life experiences are markedly different here as compared to experiences of living in mixed or integrated neighborhoods in the larger city of Delhi.

There are also other features that are particular to the exclusive Muslim enclave. The street is lined with many restaurants where meat is being slowly roasted on skewers; and there are numerous little bakeries, where hot fresh *naans* (yeast leavened bread) disappear as soon as they are out of the oven, only their aroma lingers calling attention to the distinct Muslim cuisine. There are also many butcher shops selling fresh meat and poultry, which is the staple fare of the meat eating Muslim population in a largely vegetarian country. The sights, sounds and aromas of the area are unique and different from the world that exists just across the street in Friends Colony, a predominantly Hindu community.
The Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar was created in response to and within the context of certain historical, political and economic conditions. I approached Baig Saab who was among first people to settle in Jamia Nagar and is a reliable raconteur of its history. Baig Saab has been a resident of Jamia area for almost five decades. He migrated to Delhi from the state of Uttar Pradesh in early 1950s, when he enrolled as a student at Jamia Millia Islamia, a fledgling Muslim educational society. Baig Saab was among the first few hundred people who had settled close to the educational society. He has played an important role in the settling of this community and had many stories to narrate about how the area became populated.

Baig Saab recalled that when he came to Delhi in 1950s, “yeh sab Okhla gaon tha” [all this was Okhla village] (personal communication, August 13, 2007). According to Baig Saab, the Jamia area was a stretch of fertile agricultural land that skirted the river. There were a few small villages inhabited by Gujjars (the Hindu caste of cowherds and grazers). But, the primary reason for the establishment of the Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar was the relocation in 1935 of the campus of Jamia Millia Islamia. Muslim intellectuals and scholars had founded this educational society as a protest against British colonial education. According to official website of the Jamia Millia Islamia University (www.jmi.nic.in), Jamia educational society was set up in the 1920s. It was tied to India’s independence movement and Mahatma Gandhi actively supported this endeavor of Muslim intellectuals. According to Baig Saab, most of the faculty had also migrated here from north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and they chose to settle in the villages surrounding Jamia Millia Islamia. Baig Saab too found accommodation in one of the villages, and lived alongside the village’s Hindu inhabitants. He was filled with
interesting anecdotes of those early post-independence days when Jamia Millia Islamia was struggling to keep its head above water.

Baig Saab’s accounts revealed that the journey was not easy for the Muslim educational society, as the ghosts of partition of India (in 1947) still loomed large. Nothing could be readily accessible to the struggling educational society nor was life easy for the residents of the Jamia area. According to Baig Saab, the early residents worked very hard and often creatively exploited loopholes in municipal laws to ensure that basic civic facilities such as water and sewage systems were extended to their settlements. But, despite the problems, Muslims continued to be drawn to the university and to settle here because, as Baig Saab said, “Woh samajte thei ke unko kahin aur admission nahin melega” [they thought they would not get admission anywhere else] (personal communication, August 13, 2007).

The lack of confidence among Muslims has its roots in British colonial politics (Metcalf, 1995). It was from the Muslim Mughal emperors that the British wrenched control of the Indian subcontinent. The consequent animosity between the British and the Muslims entailed that the Muslims did not take to modern education with the same enthusiasm as the Hindus (see Hasan, 1997 & 2002; Sachar Committee Report, 2006). Since its incipience, the university has accommodated Muslim students who were not confident enough to secure admission in mainstream Indian educational institutes. Hence from the very beginning the university’s status as a leading educational institute has been compromised. However, the university survived, said Baig Saab, because Jamia Millia Islamia had a strong friend in Nehru (the Prime Minister of India from 1947 till 1964). According to Baig Saab, “Hum unko kabhi bhi bula lete the” [the Prime Minister was
always willing to come to the university] (personal communication, August 13, 2007).

Nehru’s benevolence was expressed in many ways. In the year 1962, the University Grants Commission of India declared Jamia Millia Islamia a “deemed to be a University” (see www.jmi.nic.in). However, even though this act granted legitimacy to the Muslim educational society by recognizing it as a university, the act could not put a minority Muslim institution at par with Delhi University.

As a student of the university in early 1990s, I witnessed Jamia Millia Islamia’s struggle to establish its credentials among mainstream and secular educational institutes. In 1988, another act of Parliament declared Jamia Milia Islamia as a Central University (see www.jmi.nic.in). The Ministry of Education directly aids Central Universities, and universities that receive federal funding are considered to be premier institutes in the country. According Professor Shahid, a resident of Jamia Nagar since late 1980s when the marshlands near the Yamuna River had been transformed into a teeming community, many new departments were started in 1988 as Jamia University had received substantial funding from the state. In the summer of 2007, I heard from many faculty members that there was much activity on campus and as many as 23 new courses had been announced, because once again the Ministry of Education had given a large grant to the university. Soon Jamia Milia Islamia will also have a medical college.

The university, in order to be eligible for federal grants, must design its admission procedures and criteria as per the laws of other Central Universities. Hence, as the university expands and improves its profile among educational institutes, it becomes increasingly inaccessible to the Muslim population that it once accommodated. According to Prof. Shahid and Zain (a former student of the engineering department)
more than 75% of the students in premium courses like Engineering, Law, Architecture, and Mass Communication are non-Muslims. I studied at the A. J. Kidwai Mass Communication Research Center and my classmates were predominantly non-Muslims. The admissions to this media program (set up in 1985, in collaboration with York University in Canada to rival the only other major media school in the country, the Pune Film Institute) were through a national competition. As the best students in the country competed for just 20 seats, very few Muslims made it through the muster.

Today, people from all over Delhi are now venturing into the Jamia area lured by the promise of quality education at the Jamia Millia Islamia University. “Earlier,” said Raunaq, a non-Muslim student and resident of south Delhi, “no one in the rest of Delhi came here. It was where the Muslims lived” (personal communication, August 16, 2007). Prof. Shahid said more honestly, “No one came here. . . [because] people think they will see red meat hanging from all the shops” (personal communication, August 7, 2007).

Many of the non-Muslim students expressed that their families were very apprehensive when they joined Jamia University. Veenu, a former student of the elitist Lady Shri Ram College in south Delhi, said that when she came to meet the faculty at Jamia University to secure admission to Master’s program in Economics, her parents insisted that she dress in a sober and staid Indian dress (the salwar-kameez) and not jeans, which is her normal attire. They feared that her Western dress would offend the Muslim faculty at the College of Humanities and that they might reject her candidature for admission.

The university is becoming more secular as many more non-Muslim students are being enrolled, but the community that had come up around the university is still predominantly Muslim. The group of villages, the agricultural lands, the marshes and the
The entire area now resembles a ghetto and the river that once flowed leisurely behind the homes is nowhere to be seen. Its view has been blocked by closely built 3 or 4 story homes standing abreast narrow lanes that stretch far into the horizon and allow for only a narrow strip of sky to slip through. All the space, the lush greens, and the waters have been swallowed up by lane upon lane of closely built homes that Baig described as “pachasaun sadke hain” [hundreds of lanes], implying that the area was growing so rapidly that it was difficult to keep track (personal communication, August 13, 2007). There are no parks, no greens, and no open spaces to break the monotony of concrete constructions. There has been an unplanned and aggressive occupation of the marshlands, and the satellite maps of the area (downloaded from Google maps) show that there is construction right up to the river. It is unsafe to build on shifting sands of the riverbed, especially in a region marked by high seismic activity. Nonetheless, the Muslim population in the area has continued to grow undeterred by these risks.

The legal status of the area has always remained unclear, leading to inadequate civic facilities, improper planning, and over-crowding. But, despite the crammed living conditions, Muslims from different parts of north India continue to flock here. According to Baig Saab, the demand for housing does not match the supply. He explained that there are several reasons why Muslims are drawn to the region. He said that first settlers of the Jamia area had been witness to rioting and violence between Hindus and Muslims during the partition of the country in 1947 and in its aftermath. These Muslims had left their homes in the riot-affected areas and had tried to build a new life here because this area
was close to water. According to Baig Saab, the early settlers had a deep-rooted fear not only of riots but of that fact that during communal riots their access to water could be shut off. Living in the Jamia area and close to the river helped allay those fears.

In past two decades, there had been certain other events, which have made Muslims even more apprehensive about their safety, leading to an increase in population of the Jamia area. One of the events has been the rise of the BJP, the Hindu right wing nationalist party. BJP’s divisive politics and its rhetoric of hate, which referred to Muslims as outsiders and invaders created hostilities between Hindus and Muslims in the early 1990s. Communal riots were sparked off in December 1992 when a mob, with full support of the BJP, destroyed a historical structure, the *Babri Masjid*, a mosque built by Mughal emperor Babar in 16th century, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The repercussions of this event were felt far and wide in the country and their bitter taste still lingers today.

Prof. Shahid said that the communal carnage in wake of *Babri Masjid’s* destruction compelled many people living in the outskirts of Delhi to move into the Jamia area (personal communication, August 7, 2007). I met Najma, a journalist with BBC Radio, and she said that one night after the *Babri Masjid* incident a group of drunk and hostile men attacked their home in Punjabi Bagh (in north Delhi). They abused and insulted her family by calling them filthy *Musalmans*, and threatened to harm them. As Najma’s family was the only Muslim family in that neighborhood, they felt isolated and extremely afraid. She said that within two days they packed and left their home to settle in Zakir Nagar, and they have not moved back to a Hindu-dominated neighborhood since (personal communication, August 30, 2007).
However, Asim Khan, a longtime resident of Jamia and who teaches at the Jamia School, believed that people were migrating to Jamia from Bihar and UP, not out of fear of riots but in search of employment. He said, “woh business ke silsile me aaye hain” [they have come for their business] (personal communication, December 7, 2006). The population of Delhi\(^1\) has witnessed a sharp increase in the period 1991 to 2006 as the city offers increased employment opportunities. The population of the Jamia area has also grown sharply during the decade 1991 to 2001, and estimates put the population to be about 600,000 people\(^2\). It may be that people migrated to Delhi searching for employment, however the growth of population in the Jamia area has been mired in minority politics.

Prof. Shahid said, “if your name is Muslim it will not be easy for you to rent a house in Delhi” (personal communication, August 7, 2007). Therefore, Muslims who migrate to Delhi, in the hope finding better employment opportunities, have fewer options for housing. They perforce have to look for accommodations in segregated Muslim enclaves like Jamia. Rana Khan, who teaches English at Jamia Polytechnic but lives in south Delhi, could afford to be more forthright. She said that Muslims lived in Jamia because they could not afford housing in other parts of Delhi (personal communication, August 6, 2007).

The surprising reality was that there were many Muslims who were monetarily well-placed but they still sought to buy housing in the Muslim dominated Jamia enclave. According to Prof. Shahid, there were many returnees from the Gulf region (Muslims who were employed in Dubai, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia), including his own cousin, who wanted to purchase property in the Jamia area. My cousins Naseem and Suhail, who were
employed in Saudi Arabia, had also chosen to buy a house in the Jamia area. The fact that Muslims were still seeking to try and find a future among people who shared their religious and cultural affiliations becomes even more intriguing, because the rest of Delhi aspires to build a global, cosmopolitan, and consumer culture.

*Segregated Enclave and the Global City*

Since the early 1990s when India liberalized its economy, and global satellite channels introduced Indians to lifestyle options from the developed West, the landscape of Indian cities has been changing. In the cities across India, Western style high-energy consuming shopping malls have cropped up everywhere, along with cafés, lounges, bars and multiplex cinema halls. They have become the ‘hang-outs’ of the youth, where they can imitate the affluent, global life-style options promoted by media. Moreover, as the Indian economy is being driven by the “business process outsourcing” model (derisively defined by the term “Bangalored”), urban Indian landscape is being fixed within the global landscape (see Friedman, 2006).

Delhi epitomizes some of the major transformations in the Indian society, not only because it is the capital city of India, but also because in the decades since the liberalization of economy, Delhi has emerged as the richest city in India. Its per capita income is two and a half times the national average (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2006). Its suburbs in Noida and Gurgaon are expanding rapidly to provide exclusive housing to its increasingly wealthy population. The city has transformed from being the seat of Government and the bastion of staid bureaucrats to being a hub of multinational corporations and their young workforce. The city of Delhi is in the throes of another makeover as plans are afoot to unveil a world-class city for the Commonwealth Games.
in the year 2010 (Holt, 2006). As these developments progress, the secluded life of the Muslims in their segregated colony seemed even more at odds with the cosmopolitan credentials of the capital city.

_Segregated Enclave and Globalizing Media Narratives_

The narratives of globalization that are transforming the rest of the country are also circulating in the segregated Muslim enclave. Almost every home in the area is connected to cable television. In many homes broadband connectivity is also available (although no reliable figures are obtainable\(^3\)). The Muslim youth born in the late 1980s (who are 19 years and above) have grown up viewing over 200 television channels. These channels carry both Indian and global content. The youth, especially the young men, were experimenting with interactivity. The main road of Zakir Nagar has several Internet cafés and the cost of connectivity is as low as Rs.10 (33Cents) per hour. I stayed in touch with several of my informants via email. I was also invited by the young men and by a few of the young women to join their chat groups on Orkut and Google Talk. Thus, for the youth of Jamia, their perceptions of a community extended well beyond the segregated enclave.

There was a perceptible shift in boundaries that separated Jamia from the rest of Delhi and the world. The world inherited by the Muslim youth of Jamia was different from the one constructed by their parents and grandparents, when there was a single state-controlled television channel. The youth faced a steady stream of media narratives from across the world, which confronted the stability of their identity based on Islam, the Urdu language, and North Indian Muslim culture. The Muslim youth continued to live within the community filled with markers that asserted their distinct and particular
Muslim identity. However, in their mediated environment they encountered different cultures and several alternative options of selfhood or identity; and even as they lived within the congested arterial roads of Jamia area, they enjoyed the view of the wide world. The question is how do Muslim youths define themselves, and how is their relationship with their community different from that of the older generation to which their parents belong? The next section looks at the older generation’s articulation of its relationship with the community of Jamia. This is the generation that laid the foundation of the segregated enclave, at a point in time when its boundaries were not compromised. I begin with an exploration of their views about the creation of this exclusive neighborhood, what living here means to them, and how these experiences informs their sense of who they are.

The Voices of the Older Generation

My acquaintances, former colleagues and co-workers at Jamia University, belong to the generations that had shaped the enclave and today they are in their thirties, forties and fifties. They live within the Jamia area and most of them are employed by the university. They were instrumental in helping me secure an entry into the community and to recruit my informants. My association with them extends to the time when I was student at the media school in Jamia University. Yet it was not easy to talk about their life in the segregated neighborhood, as I sensed a reluctance on their part, and I also feared that talking about this issue would draw attention to the differences that existed between us. It could undo my efforts to build on the common bonds of religion, community and friendship.
I must concede I do not live in the Jamia area, even if I live very close by. My parents’ home in Zakir Bagh is less than half a mile away. The housing society of Zakir Bagh has a predominantly Muslim population, but this neighborhood is situated within the grid and legal limits of Delhi’s Master Plan. Baig Saab, the founder of the housing society, fought long and hard to develop this housing society, not only because he had been disappointed with the unseemly development of neighborhoods in the Jamia area but also because he wanted to assert the right of middle class Muslims to decent housing and civic amenities (personal conversation, August 13, 2007). Zakir Bagh is free of the stereotypes associated with Muslim neighborhood as described by Prof. Shahid and Raunaq above. It is also a desirable living area because of its central location, design and planning. But it is most sought after by middle class Muslims, because in Zakir Bagh they find respectability of a legalized housing society and the opportunity to live among fellow Muslims.

The fact that I lived in Zakir Bagh had always eased my interactions with former colleagues at Jamia University. It also helped the young Muslims whom I was meeting in the summer of 2007 to situate me and gauge me. I was not such a stranger but someone who fitted somewhere in their mahol. I would like to believe that I shared the worldview of my former colleagues and other co-workers in Jamia University, but it would be at the expense of certain fundamental differences in our social, educational and economic status. Hence, I took care to frame my questions. It was easier to bring up the issue of segregated living with people who could opt out and live elsewhere as they had the monetary, educational and cultural wherewithal to find a life outside the Jamia area.
For example, Prof. Shahid’s response to my question on why he chose to live in Jamia was very pragmatic. He said, “My father was at the university, I lived and studied in different parts of India and then we came to settle here after this appointment” (personal conversation, August 7, 2007). Prof. Shahid’s father was the Vice Chancellor of Jamia University. They had a very comfortable bungalow on the campus. Once Prof. Shahid joined the Economic department at the university, living in Jamia area meant that he would not have to commute long distances. For many of my informants and acquaintances the decision to live in the Jamia area was largely pragmatic and related to livelihood, access to education and a result of their connection to the university. The father of one of my informants, Fawzia, a student at Jamia Polytechnic, told me that he worked hard to secure a transfer from his job in Muradabad (a small town in the state of Uttar Pradesh or UP) to Delhi (personal communication, August 19, 2007). They sold their home in Muradabad and bought a small flat in Batla House (one of the many neighborhoods in Jamia area) because he felt that his children would be able to find better educational opportunities at Jamia University. Almost all of my informants claimed that proximity to Jamia University was the main reason why their families moved here. Faisal, who was a Diploma student of travel and tourism said that although he belonged to Gulati in UP, his father built their house in Delhi instead of their native place because his father believed that if his children lived close to Jamia University, they would at least get some basic education. My uncle, a retired professor of Jamia University, verified that Muslims settled here as they were drawn by educational opportunities.

The association with the university spanned many generations for some of my informants. Talking to Nadeem, a broadcast engineer working at A. J. Kidwai Mass
Communication Research Center and a former colleague, I got a glimpse into how deeply many lives were connected to this Muslim educational institute. I had known Nadeem since I was a student at the media school. I referred to him as Nadeem bhai [brother]. It was common practice in Jamia University to add the suffix bhai meaning brother to the names of male colleagues. This eased the interaction between members of the opposite sex by fixing the relationship in a non-romantic context. When I asked Nadeem bhai how long had he lived in the area, he said poignantly, pointing to the lush gardens of the media school, “mein yaahan pehle kehla tha, ab main yahaan kam karta hoon” [I used to play here before, and now I work here] (personal communication, July 24, 2007). He told me that he was born in the Jamia area, his father was employed with the university, as was his grandfather. He had attended Jamia School, then studied engineering at Jamia University and later found employment within the university’s precincts. Like his father, following the lead of his grandfather, he too had built a house in the area, married and settled here with his children. He was unable to comprehend life anywhere else. Nadeem’s life exemplified those people who were drawn to the Jamia area seeking stability and continuity in the Muslim culture of the area.

The stability of cultural continuance is what the Jamia University also offers to Muslim students. At the university, they not only have access to modern education but they can continue to be immersed in Muslim culture/community/mahol. Fawzia’s father highlighted this fact when he narrated the story of the family’s move to Batla House from Moradabad. He had earlier said that access to quality education was the main reason why the family moved to the Jamia area. Then he added, referring to his children, “aur apne mahol mein bhi raheen ge” [they would also stay safe within the boundaries of their own
Fawzia’s father believed that as Fawzia and her brothers were at an impressionable age, living in Zakir Nagar and going to Jamia University would ensure that they did not go too far from the safe precincts of *apna mahol* (the Muslim environment and culture), and that they also learnt to follow its rules and etiquette. Moreover, residing in the Jamia area would ensure that his daughter (and perhaps he more than her) would not have to deal with practices, ways of life, and modes of thinking that were contrary to Islamic values. Fawzia’s father was implying that while girls in Delhi were experimenting with the Western style of dressing, hanging out at expensive cafés, shopping malls and multiplex cinema halls, Muslim girls dressed modestly, they did not visit these places or go out alone at unscheduled hours. Many Muslims, who were returning from the Gulf, were also drawn to the Jamia area for these very reasons. My cousins who worked in the Gulf wanted for their daughters to be educated within the precincts of the Muslim *mahol*. Hence, the main attraction of this area for its inhabitants was that it not only afforded them access to modern education but also allowed them to exist within the stable and firm foundations of their faith, keeping at bay the instabilities of the world. However the situation is not as comfortable as it appears.

Educational institutes in India are highly competitive. Muslims who had settled in Jamia area believed that since Jamia University was a Muslim institution, they would at least be able to secure admission here. However, Jamia University is not a Muslim institute but a Central University. The fact that it carries an Arabic nomenclature gives many Muslims reason to hope that it will accommodate them (as Baig Saab had said earlier). The search for *apna mahol* perhaps stemmed from a desire to overcome a sense
of inadequacy, and this could also be the reason why it was so difficult to discuss the implications of *apna mahol* with my informants. According to the Sachar Committee Report (2006), Muslims have been left behind in the race for education. Their impoverished status compromised their ability to succeed in the highly competitive educational environment.

The other reason my informants found it very difficult to articulate the term *mahol* is that they expected me to intuitively understand what they meant, for after all did I not belong to their community? The connotations of the word *mahol* are the common culture codes that bridge disparate experiences. I noticed that in my interactions with women I was expected to comprehend these norms and codes with greater alacrity.

Consider my interaction with Farhat, a PhD student and faculty member in the department of history at Jamia University. Farhat and I were going to meet Narayani Gupta, a friend and guide to both of us, for lunch. I had gone to fetch Farhat so that we could travel together to the venue, which were a few miles away from the university. As I waited for Farhat to wrap up I could not help but notice that everyone in the department was interested in her lunch plans. Furthermore, Farhat had to clarify several times that she was going to have lunch with Professor Gupta, who was a woman and not a man. From my experience at the university, I was not surprised because even among professional colleagues interactions between members of opposite sexes are carefully managed. However, I felt a little uncomfortable that Farhat had to explain herself to so many people. I, even, had to step in and say that as Dr. Gupta has retired from the university, she had especially invited us and was really looking forward to meeting us after a long gap. Eventually, we started out to lunch.
On the way to the venue, Farhat, told me why her family decided to move to Jamia. She said that all her life she had lived among non-Muslims, as her father was an employee of the Government of India and the Government’s accommodation for its staff were in mixed neighborhoods. However, after her father expired the family moved to Jamia area in mid 1990s. It was also the time when Farhat joined the Master’s program in Jamia University. Farhat did not mention anything about the insecurities that had plagued Muslims in the mid 1990s but instead said that her family moved here because of their widowed mother who felt lost in the Punjabi colony (Hindus from the north Indian province of Punjab). She said that her mother is now able to visit neighbors and is not so lonely when everyone leaves for work. Farhat ended her sentence, “Aur phir yeh apna mahoal hai” [This is after all our mahol/ culture/way of life] giving me a conspiratorial nod and assuming that as a Muslim I could construct what was left unsaid (personal communication, August 9, 2007). I left the discussion at that and picked it up again later.

Ruhi: Why did you shift here? Are you more comfortable here? Did you come here because this was your own environment/cultural context? How will you describe apna mahol?

Farhat: Our context, in the sense that…[trails of]. In ninety-nine, we shifted here. It was because of our security. We are more secure here as compared to other colonies. (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, January 5, 2008)

Farhat finally conceded that after her father’s untimely death, the members of her family did not have the courage to stay in a non-Muslim area in the politically tense period of 1990s. But, Farhat still did not mention that the decision to move was dictated by
considerations of Farhat’s safety (as I infer from Najma’s very similar experiences). I believe that Farhat expected me to understand this implicitly. Muslim women live a very sheltered life and their whereabouts and safety are always everybody’s concern. Farhat did not think that she needed to elaborate this fact. She just assumed that I would understand just as I had understood that it was perfectly normal to tell everyone at office where one was going for lunch.

Finally it was Abrar Cha, a distant relative, who clearly explained why Muslims preferred to live separately and what is the essence of mahol. He used the phrase “psychologically depressed” to describe the state of Muslims who lived in mixed neighborhoods and he elaborated,

You can say that there is too much emphasis of other cultures. For example take the case of celebration of Eid when we have to sacrifice a goat, we can freely do that here. But suppose I was living in some colony like Mayapuri or Punjabi Bagh, can I do that there? And suppose I am thick skinned enough to perform the ritual sacrifice? Then won’t all the blood flow out of the house? My neighbors will come and ask why is the blood flowing out of your home. They will say, where will all this mess go? They don’t understand the importance of this sacrifice in our culture. (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 4, 2007)

Abrar Cha had said that if Muslims were unable to assert the core characteristics of their culture they would not be happy. He felt that it was important to hear the azan (call for prayer) five times a day and to celebrate Islamic festivals freely without offending anyone. For example, the festival of Eid Ul Adha (the festival marking the end of Hajj
when a lamb is sacrificed to commemorate Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail) would hurt the sensibilities of vegetarian Hindu neighbors. The salient implications of the phrase *apna mahol* for the older generation are—this is the place where I seek and find signs of my own culture; this is where I see the values that I hold dear reflected around me in dress, food, practices and behavior; and this is the place where I feel comfortable and safe. Hence, *mahol* affirms one’s identity but it also marks boundaries between “us” and “them”.

**Media and Apna Mahol**

The distinct cultural practices of the Muslim community buttress and maintain the contours of *apna mahol*. However, patterns of media use especially television, Internet and mobile phones could redefine its essence. As one walks down the street, it is hard not to notice the zigzag of criss-crossing wires, which hang dangerously close to one’s head. This mesh of cables signified that almost every home was wired to receive satellite television, telephone and Internet.

In Abrar’s Cha’s home there was a single television that was kept in a large common area from where the kitchen, the master bedroom, the living room could be reached. There were three other rooms on the second floor but there was no other television in any of the other rooms. The entire family, including two sons and a daughter, had access to a single television in their home. The viewing pattern would be dictated by the placement of television and the tendency would be to watch what the others were watching. According to Abrar Cha, he watched news till about 9:30 PM, after which he slept, as he had to leave early for work. Then his wife and daughter tuned in to watch soap operas. He did not mention what his sons watched. One would assume that
since the television was placed in this common space there would be few opportunities to access media that could offend the sensibilities of the family. Media content was filtered by the family’s preferences and the family potentially exercised the right to censor content that it found offensive.

In Fawzia’s home, too, there was just one television, which was kept in the parents’ bedroom. There were two other rooms in the house, the living room (which also served as the bedroom for the boys) and the dining room, which had been converted into a study. The computer was kept in the living room. Sameena also had a single television in her home and it was also kept in the parents’ bedroom. On weekdays, both Fawzia and Sameena reported that they stopped watching television by 10 pm as their fathers had to go to work the next day. All my informants, the young men and women (including Faisal, Fahim, Sajida, Soha, Najma) reported a similar television-viewing pattern. They said that in their homes the television was kept in the general public space where the family eats, entertains people, and where some people of the family even sleep at night. Television viewing was a time spent with the family and it was not a solitary activity. My informants reported that they would watch what their siblings, parents and elders were watching, be it news, soap operas, or cartoons and there were few opportunities to exercise their choice.

However, my informants did try to find ways of getting around this problem. For example, Faisal said that when his family visited their native village during vacations, he would choose to stay back at home and not accompany them. He said that this was his only private time to watch whatever he wanted on television. Otherwise, the only time when he would get to watch television alone was when he returned from work at 7 PM.
till about 8 PM, when his mother and sister wanted to watch soap operas. He also got an opportunity to watch television without interference of other family members on weekends. He said that as he slept in the room where the television was kept, he often watched television beyond midnight on Saturday nights. Hence, for the youth of Jamia, not only is the real world kept at an arm’s length, but even their access to media, their window to the world, is also controlled or mitigated by family practices, including the cultural geography of the home.

Therefore, for the older generation, the essence of *apna mahol* was a way of life defined by religious and cultural traditions and they wished to perpetuate this way of life by prescribing certain norms of behavior and by proscribing the outside world to certain limits. The older generations sought cultural continuance and the stability of their Islamic identity by living among people who shared their beliefs and practices. However, their desire for cultural continuance persisted even when events within their own community were being affected by the community’s imaginations of the outsiders’ view of them. The ubiquitous media images and narratives impinged on their daily life. Their relationship with their environment/*mahol* has become more complicated than when the area was first established. I would like to illustrate this with reference to an incident that happened in September 2007, a few weeks after I had left the field. However, the fact that I was as involved in the event as if I were still in Delhi is a tribute to my informants’ access to Internet and mobile phones, the interactive media technologies.

*Apna Mahol* and its Reflection in the Media Discourses

It was the month of *Ramazan* when Muslims are enjoined to fast and to explicitly remember their faith in every waking moment. It is the time when Muslims are most
conscious of their religion and heritage. They join Muslims all over the world in observing the month of fasting, and in being immersed in prayer and recitation of the Quran. In the Jamia area the routine of life is altered as shops are open until late, restaurants serve their clients till wee hours and there is much activity until the pre-dawn hours when the fasting period begins with the muazzim’s call to fazar (early morning) prayer. In the evening, after breaking the fast, Muslim men fill the mosques and standing shoulder to shoulder behind the muazzim, they recite the Quran with the intention of finishing it in its entirety during this holy month. As people traverse across from their homes to mosques and back, there is much traffic on the roads; especially as the roads are further encroached upon by pavement vendors who are eager to take advantage of the increased hours of business. On the Saturday evening of September 22, one such roadside vendor was also selling the copies of the Quran. The constable, who had instructions to clear the traffic, was moving these carts aside. Perhaps he pushed it a bit too hard and a copy of the Quran fell on the roadside. This triggered a pandemonium that brought the Rapid Action Police Force to the doorsteps of Jamia.

I construct the following details of what occurred from newspaper reports and from emails that I received from my acquaintances and informants. The headlines of the newspaper reports were “Police posts set fire in mob fury” (The Times of India, September 23, 2007) and, “Jamia Nagar: Mob torches police post, 4 cops serious” (Indian Express, September 23, 2007). The Times of India reported that the Muslim population was incensed because a copy of the Quran was desecrated. It continued that a mob of about 600 to 700 people gathered and attacked the police station and torched it. In his email Faisal said that, “police waalo ne Quran ki be atbi kr di thi is wajah se bahot
“tension ho gayi thi jamia me. bahot zada fight ho gayi thi police aur public me” [the police had so disrespected the Quran and that is why there was so much tension and a fight had broken out between the people and the police] (personal communication, September 28, 2007). Faisal’s response indicates that he believed in the constable’s complicity and that he deliberately dishonored the Quran. From Najma’s email I got a better picture of what was happening. She said, “I was there and all I saw [was] the young boys creating complete situation of panic and confusion by unnecessarily running in groups from one lane to another and shouting slogans against the police, etc” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). Yousuf, her friend and my acquaintance, reported in his email, “the young boys on the streets in their religious zeal turned extremely violent” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). While Prof. Shahid’s email said, “overall there seems to less sensitivity on both sides, the community and the police authorities in this case. And I guess we tend to overreact because of our own insecurity” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). In his balanced appraisal of the situation, Prof. Shahid berated the reaction of the community even as he criticized the police. He had meant to say that the police should have been aware that as it was the month of Ramazan, and religious sentiments were bound to be high. Hence, according to Prof. Shahid the police should have exercised greater caution. However, what were the insecurities that Prof. Shahid mentions, and which brought out the “religious zeal” of the residents and turned them into intolerant fundamentalists?

In the recent decades there has been a resurgence of Hindu nationalism. Scholarship has thoroughly investigated the role of media narratives in resurrecting the hegemony of the Hindu identity and in creating an enabling environment for the rise of
the BJP, the Hindu right-wing party (see, Brosius, 2005; McGuire & Reeves, 2003; Rajagopal, 1992 & 2001). However, there is no research that illuminates how the circulation of media texts, which reinforces the dominance of the majority Hindu populations, increases the isolation of the minority non-Hindu populations. Media texts tend to ignore the existence of Muslims and when Muslims have been in the news, they have been portrayed as fundamentalists and terrorists.

I would argue that Indian Muslims are sensitive to media’s negative portrayal of them and the situation in Jamia got out of hand because the Muslim community of Jamia believed that the Quran was knocked down deliberately in order to mock them. To quote Prof. Shahid again, the Muslims overreacted because uncomplimentary commentaries about Muslims in the media have heightened their fears of being mistreated. The mob that arose in Jamia was unable to see that the event of the Quran falling to the ground could have been a hapless accident. The effects of media’s negative portrayals of Muslim on the Muslim community were accurately assessed by the Chief Minister of Delhi and by the head of the police force of Delhi. Both of these official issued a directive/request to television news channels not to broadcast any visuals of the violence in Jamia until the situation on the ground had been brought under control. They believed that media coverage of the event would lead to additional incidences of violence across different cities of India because most Indian Muslims were also likely to perceive the event as a deliberately provocative and insulting act (Pratyush, 2007).

The resentment, alienation and insecurity created by media’s representation of Muslims was expressed by Abrar Cha as,
There are four words that are consistently used to describe us — and the fifth word is terrorist. The other words are orthodox, then conservative, then Islamist, then extremist and the last word if they do not find anything else to say about us is that we are terrorists. This word has the top rank, for Muslims. Today this word is like the Victoria Cross, which used to be given earlier. (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 4, 2007)

The generation that created the segregated enclave, in the tense climate of post-Partition India, had believed that in their Muslim neighborhood they would not have to face discriminatory treatment. They had hoped to live in their neighborhood, cut-off from the rest, according to the tenets of their religion. They wanted a life among their co-regionalist who would accommodate them despite their inadequacies. However, the youth of this area cannot hide from the outside world. The daily life of the Muslim youth of Jamia may still be marked with reassuring signs and symbols of their religion and culture, but the outside world is equally persistent in its presence, thanks to media technologies. The question is how is the relationship of the youth to their community is being redefined in this complex situation. The next section explores this question.

Restructuring *Apna Mahol*: Voices of Muslim Youth

The one common experience that united the two generations was their heightened awareness of what the world thought of Muslims, as conveyed to them by media, a constant presence in their lives. The phraseology used by media to describe Muslims was on the tip of the tongue of my informants. And like the older generation, the youth of Jamia area also expressed a certain cynicism and distress at media’s portrayal of Muslims as backward and orthodox. But, considering my young informants’ response to the
conflagration in Jamia area on September 22, it is possible to say that the youth who were well-versed in interactive media technologies had the opportunity to intervene and influence media’s representation of Muslims. It was a chance that the older generation did not have.

The incident of Saturday evening, September 22, caused great consternation among my informants. As the next day was Sunday and a holiday, my informants must have paid greater attention to newspaper reports and television coverage of the incident in the Jamia area. I imagine that they would have read in the Sunday’s newspapers and perhaps seen on television all day long images that depicted Jamia as an area inhabited by religious fundamentalists and hoodlums. On Monday September 24th when many of them reached their offices, the first thing that some of them did was to send out a mass mail to all their colleagues condemning the incident. Najma, my informant, later forward these emails to me. I believe the intention of my informants was to undertake some form of damage control. Najma and her other Muslim friends wanted to defend the image of their residential area from the unseemly publicity that it had received. Najma’s email expressed her perplexity as to how could such a thing happen in Jamia where educated people lived. She said in her email,

I always used to think that Jamia has no history of riots and the entire area is “safe” for Muslims (that’s why so many of them, perhaps, migrated to this area from different parts of the city, including my own extended family). (personal communication, September 24, 2007)

Her friend Yousuf agreed with her, he said,
Having lived over 35 years in this area, I think this is the first time I heard this slogan [referring to the slogan of Naara e Tatbir or in defense of Islam] being shouted in Jamia Nagar. My father says he hasn't seen this sort of attitude of people in Jamia area in last 50 years that he's been here. (personal communication, September 24, 2007)

Najma urged action. She said, “but all I want to say is that there is an immediate need to do something. I also don't know what [to do]. I am confused and slightly taken a back by the whole thing” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). She and Yousuf planned to hold a meeting with all like-minded residents in order to ensure that such a situation would not arise again. It is hard to say how far their efforts would be successful but the fact that they had reached out quickly and formed an alternate opinion reflects on their ability to use media and to influence dialogue within the Muslim community and also outside the community.

My informants, the young men and women, Faisal, Fahim, Zain, Shahir, Fawzia, Sameena, Soha and Najma may have had only one television in their homes but they also had one computer. I was a little surprised that they all subscribed to broadband connectivity when they did not subscribe to pay television. They may not have been able to watch any one of the premium pay channels but they were willing to spend extra money on Internet connectivity mainly through their telephone service provider. The youth had access to multiple online publications both from India and abroad as well as to multiple news channels, Indian owned and global channels like CNN and BBC world. The fact that they were well connected to the outside world perhaps also explains their acute embarrassment at this incident. Najma and Yousuf’s responses show that they
wanted to disown the situation. They laid the blame for what happened that night on the irrationality of some undifferentiated youth who, according to Najma, “were all waiting [for] something untoward to happen and show how religious they are and can “sacrifice” their lives when there is a threat to their religion” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). While Yousuf said, “I took a risk by trying to persuade some youngsters to quit their violence and go back home. It was certainly futile. . . . Many of them told me I was being a buzdi [coward] and should go back home” (personal communication, September 24, 2007). Even Sajida and Fawzia were very angry with the young men who had gone on a rampage. Fawzia said, “I know the policeman did not intentionally drop the Quran, and then he had said sorry too. Also, what was the reason for those boys to go and burn the police station?” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Faisal did not even want to talk about what had happened, he was so upset. He would brush aside my email queries with a gruff response, “leave it mam. Tell me howz ur life goin??” (personal communication, September 28, 2007).

I believe that my informants who were better connected to Indian society because of their educational and economic status were more embarrassed and irritated. Najma and Yusuf who were journalists, and who were also financially more secure, were vehement in their condemnation. Zain, who also spent a lot of time with non-Muslims, had earlier expressed his discomfiture that such incidences of violence prevented his non-Muslim friends from coming near the community and the area (personal communication, August 15, 2007).
This incident reveals that there were differences of opinion within the community. Fault lines are bound to appear as the community expands, and the Jamia area has been expanding rapidly. However who were the young men that many of my informants were holding responsible for the riot? Could these young men belong to migrant population whom Prof. Shahid had mentioned are coming to the Jamia area from the small towns and villages of north India with the hope of getting admission in Jamia University? According to Prof. Shahid, most of them are unable to secure admission because of the rising educational standards of the university. But they do not return home; they choose to stay on and enroll in distance education programs or in other private institutes where criteria for admission are not so stringent. I did not have access to this population. The only ones that I knew from among the migrant population were those who were fortunate enough to secure admission to Jamia University—Shakeel, Nazneen, Nabila and her two brothers. I never saw where they lived because none of them would take me to their “rooms” (as they referred to their temporary place of residence in Jamia). Perhaps they were embarrassed about their living space. Living in small rented homes and juggling jobs and education, they tried to make ends meet. Monetary status, access to education, and professional qualifications are the divisions that separate this cohesive community. And, it appears that access to media, or the lack of it, may be a divisive factor too.

Shakeel, Nazneen, Nabila and her two brothers were the only ones from among my informants who reported that they did not have access to either television or Internet at their homes. They did not even access the Internet in the cyber-cafes that line the streets of Zakir Nagar because even paying Rs. 10 an hour (or 33 Cents) might be beyond their reach. The lack of access to media was the distinguishing feature of their relatively
disadvantaged status. Incidentally, inability to consume certain media was also one the factors that differentiated the youth of Jamia from the youth of affluent Delhi. My informants on very rare occasions only could avail themselves the opportunity to visit a multiplex cinema hall. Tickets were beyond their reach. The chances for young women to visit these halls were even more remote than those for the young men. Television was the most accessible medium and most of them reported that they spent time with television. However, it appeared to me that it was their cell phones that they spent maximum time with.

A cell phone was the coveted status symbol, especially among young men. Almost every one of them carried a cell phone, although not all the young women had access to one. Cell phone connectivity charges had fallen to as low as 3 dollars a month. Moreover, most service providers offered unlimited text messages for a nominal additional charge. Consequently, even those with limited means, were able to maintain cell phone connections. Moreover, as incoming calls were free, cell phones were used by parents to keep track of the whereabouts of their children. Zain received three calls from his parents in the one hour or more that he spent at my home. Sameena was adept at text messaging, and according to her friend Fawzia, no one could beat her speed. I believe that possessing a cell phone augmented their self-worth, especially for the young men. It could be that the ability to own what everyone in the city of Delhi did made them feel included as opposed to their more common experience of being excluded from the larger Indian society.

Many of my informants had access to Internet in their homes. Fawzia’s, Sameena’s, and Zain’s parents were actively involved in installing an Internet
connection, as they believed that it was an important educational tool. Faisal said that they had got the Internet connection in their home mainly for his brother who was studying engineering. The educational status of parents also influenced the Internet accessibility of my informants. Neither of Sajida’s parents had a college education, and she was the only one who did not have access to Internet, even though she was studying computer science. It appears that if even one of the parents had college education, they ensured that the learning environment of their children was enhanced through Internet. Sajida’s parents perhaps did not see the same urgency in getting an Internet connection as Fawzia’s, Sameena’s, Zain’s or Shahir’s father, all of whom were college-educated. The only exceptions were Faisal and Fahim. Neither of their parents were college-educated, but they still had Internet connectivity.

Internet connectivity presented many more avenues for self-expression to the youth of Jamia than was probably foreseen by their parents. Internet chat-rooms were especially popular with my informants, as they provided a space where they could create a new persona and experiment with identities in a way that was not possible in their real lives. In the real life, they were fixed in a category defined by their religion, their place of residence and their economic status. In everyday life, established stereotypes about Muslims pursued them and they found it very difficult to extricate themselves from the molds that fixed them. Moreover, certain norms and expectations of Muslim society also contained and hindered them. That is why when I met many of my informants online I could not help but be impressed with their creativity.

For example, when I met Zain online, it was hard to say that he came from a very conservative family. He was a brilliant student and among the select few Indians to be
admitted to the highly rigorous management studies program at Delhi University. However, his father, though extremely proud of his son’s achievement, was initially very apprehensive about sending Zain to live in the student accommodations at Delhi University. Considering his sequestered upbringing, I was always taken by surprise to meet online the outgoing and rather pert person who admired Ayn Rand, and referred to little known British grunge rock groups as his favored musicians. In many ways his chat conversations reminded me of the characters from the American Archie comics (which are very popular in India). Zain bore no resemblance to the respectful and shy Muslim boy that he is in face-to-face interaction, and especially in front of his parents. The personality of Sameena, who also frequented Internet chat rooms, was not as drastically different in the virtual sphere as Zain’s. Even so, Sameena appeared to be more extrovert and gregarious than she was in person. Moreover, in the virtual world my informants could meet and mingle with members of the opposite sex, something that they cannot do in their real life. (For example, I had explicit instructions from Zain not to tell his father that he chats with his girlfriends online).

In their every day life Muslim youth are expected to be full of *adab* (meaning courtesy/etiquette) and *lihaz* (translated as decorum), especially towards their elders. They must accept their parents’ wishes and always be careful not to offend their elders by such behavior as smoking in front of them, wearing clothes that are not modest or bringing friends home who are members of the opposite sex. The young women are expected to be doubly polite and modest at all times. For example, the gregariousness that Sameena adopted in her virtual conversations would be frowned upon by parents. These behavioral norms are not different from traditional Indian values, but they are a far cry
from the individualism, egalitarianism, and sexual freedom propagated by media narratives. Many of the images and narratives are patently offensive to Islamic sensibilities, especially the music videos, both Indian and foreign. Parents voiced concern over the titillating imagery, highly sensual and suggestive posturing, but the youth were not overtly concerned. Consider my conversation with Zain:

Ruhi: What do you watch at home?

Zain: At home, mostly music TV. 9 XM is on most of the time.

Ruhi: Do you watch 9 XM even in front of Chacha?

Zain: Yes it is pretty sanitized.

Ruhi: Those songs are OK?

Zain: Yes they are OK.

Ruhi: What is not OK?

Zain: [laughs] Late night movies on HBO.

Ruhi: Do you watch them?

Zain: Yes.

Ruhi: But the TV is kept right next to Chacha’s room downstairs? How do you do that?

Zain: I watch them when he is sleeping. It is all right. (personal communication, January 11, 2008)

What was more surprising was that even the young women in whose homes the television was kept in the parents’ bedrooms had been able to watch a film like Kabhi Alvida Na Kahna which is filled with sexual overtones. Almost all of the young women among my informants had watched this film when it played on Sony TV.
The relationship of my informants to media narratives must also be seen with reference to the physical space that they inhabit. This space is constricted both literally and physiologically. Their lived environment is crowded and congested, with few options for outdoor physical activities even for young men, let alone for women who hardly step out of their homes. Considering their constricted physical space, media is truly a window looking out into wider open spaces. Perhaps this explains why my informants had an enduring relationship with media that goes beyond fulfillment of mere entertainment needs. Media offered them that much appreciated opportunity to step out of their limited lives. For example, Faisal said that when he stayed back home while the rest of the family went away on vacation, he only wanted to watch Discovery channel. He said that he would spend the whole day watching travel and wildlife programs. Soha reported that she would run back home after class to watch *Noddy*, a cartoon show for children. It could be because in *Noddy’s* orderly toy town she saw an alternative to her chaotic surroundings. While Sajida said that she regularly watched *Page 3* (a show about models and celebrities), perhaps to escape the ordinariness of her life, and Zain was always online.

However, even as the youth had access to so many different media their connection to their own language and to Urdu media was declining. According to the local bookstore owner, there were very few people among the younger generation in the Jamia area who read in Urdu. He said that the sales of Urdu newspapers and magazines were falling. Lakhdawala (2005) has presented figures that support the bookstore owner’s observations. The bookstore owner attributed the decline of sales to the fact that people preferred to watch television; and those who did read choose to read in Hindi or in English.
With the decline of Urdu, the language of the Muslim community in India, the connections of the youth to their community become weaker because the Urdu language is the repository of the Muslim culture, ethos and ideology. Moreover, as the Urdu press was patronized by an older generation that had access to few other media outlets, the distance between the two generations could widen; and with the demise of unifying Urdu language it would be difficult to pass on the distinct North Indian Muslim culture to the youth and to future generations.

My experiences suggest that youth were not conscious of this loss because they were involved in reducing the distance between their world and the rest of Indian society. For example, Zain painted a picture of the situation in his home, which was very different from the way things actually were. Zain’s devout father expected him to pray five times a day. Both of Zain’s parents were very proud that their young daughter had started to wear the *hijab* and that she stayed close to home. I know that Zain’s parents were not aware that some of his friends were young women and they would definitely be displeased if Zain brought any one of the young women home. But Zain presented his parents as being very modern and the atmosphere in his home as being very liberal. I present an excerpt of our conversation:

Ruhi: Do you think our world is changing because of movies? I mean the world of us Muslims.

Zain: Yes to some extent.

Ruhi: Like what?

Zain: It has become more open.

Ruhi: Are you telling me all the Muslims are watching MTV at home?
Zain: Yes they are.

Ruhi: I cannot watch MTV in front of my parents.

Zain: There is a lot of difference between your parents and mine.

Ruhi: Do you call it generational gap? Do you discuss everything with your father?

Zain: Yes I discuss everything with my father, we have more freedom than you, we can go out, go out even to parties.

Ruhi: Does your sister go out?

Zain: No but that is because of her. I do not know why she does not go out.

(personal communication, January 11, 2008)

It is interesting that Zain should think that my parents (who have allowed me to travel so far for my education) gave me less freedom than his parents did. Zain also denied the reality of his sister’s life. In fact his sister was thinking of wearing the full veil and she had very little freedom to go anywhere. I do not infer from Zain’s response that he was being untruthful, but rather that Zain wanted to live in a different mahol and he was imaging that transformation before it has actually happened.

The responses of my informants show that as the youth had a greater facility to imagine a different world; their definition of a community was not limited by the physical or ideological tendencies of their segregated community. Their relationship with the Muslim community was less emotional and they were not concerned about the permanence of this community. For example, Faisal said “Sab log apna mahol khud banate hain” [everyone shapes their own community or context] and Fahim, while seconding him, said that they did not know their neighbors, so it was difficult for them to
talk about the cohesive Muslim community (personal communication, July 17, 2007). If Faisal’s and Fahim’s responses showed their growing disassociation with the Muslim community, Nabila, who was a migrant from Bihar, had an attitude of total detachment. She said, “Abi to hain, jab job mile gi to achi jaga rahein ge” [I am here as long as I need to be, when I get a job I will move to a better place] (personal communication, August 13, 2007). While Sajida completely rejected the notion of apna mahol. She said, “Yeh apna mahol nahin hai. Men pass comments at women” [This is not our culture and our community] (personal communication, August 3, 2007). Even Zain, who seemed most attached to the place where he was born, finally conceded that once he became a successful portfolio manager or investment banker he would buy a house in Greater Kailash (the expensive and trendy residential address in South Delhi). He needed to put that address on his visiting card, though he might come back to sleep in his home at Ghaffar Manzil.

Summary

Life in the segregated Muslim enclave has a different meaning for the youth than it does for the older generation. Although the youth and the older generation share some of the experiences that led to the creation of the segregated enclave, such as the communal riots, the youth lacked the commitment that their parents and grandparents had to this segregated Muslim colony. The older generation expressed an attachment to Jamia not only because they felt it was safe to live among their co-religionist, but also because this distinct space provided them the opportunity to live comfortably according to the tenets of their religion and culture. The Jamia enclave secured for them their life and their cultural ethos.
However, the youth lived in conditions in which it was normal to continuously look through media to see the wide world outside the community. Hence, the youth were not overtly concerned about the continuity of the Muslim culture and way of life. In fact, they were embarrassed by the strong religious sentiments expressed by some members of their community. The meaning of *apna mahol* had become less certain for youth and life within the community did not dominate their imagination. Even their loyalty to the community had become more tenuous. Although the community still provided them with a safe place to live, and accommodated them when the rest of the city treats them with suspicion, the youth did not express any strong sense of connection or belonging to the exclusive Muslim enclave. They had lost their core connection with their culture because few among the youth read or write in Urdu, leading to the demise of Urdu press.

Moreover, mainstream media’s constant presence has made the youth very self-conscious of their image as Muslims, especially because their portrayal in media tends to be negative and uncomplimentary. The youth wished to disassociate themselves from these images, and some of them were able to use interactive media technologies to undertake some interventionist measures. The continuous interaction with media was pulling my informants away from their community and instilling in them a desire to participate in the mainstream of Indian society to a greater extent than their parents. The parents wanted the youth to stay close to the community because of their greater sense of insecurity; the youth, however, showed less caution. They also comprehended the importance of stepping out of their isolation, and having an address outside the segregated enclave (even if it were just a mailing address, like a post office box). The
youth, in fact, were desirous of a different *mahol*, one that was not so different from the environment and lifestyle of other Indians.
Footnotes

1. During 1991 to 2006 Delhi added nearly 5 million people and the population stands at 14 million people (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2006).

2. The Census of India gives the population of the entire district. Data for just this area is not available. However the Office of Election Commission of India said that there were about a 100 election booths for the area and each booth serves around a 1000 people. This makes the adult population to be around 100,000. If there are 5 to 6 people in each household the rough estimate would be 600,000.

3. According to Piyush Chakravorty, Vice President for NGC Networks India, there is a constant tussle between local cable operators and large MSOs over number of subscribers. The local cable operators receive the satellite television signal from the larger MSOs and there is a tussle between the two over revenues. As it is the smaller operators who directly serve the customers and collect subscription revenue, they have access to the true numbers for each area. However, there has been a battle since the incipience of the industry over the number of subscribers. It is still difficult to know how many people are connected to cable systems. On the other hand MTNL, the telecommunication provider is a government enterprise and they could not release the number of subscribers in the area unless officially decreed.

4. They subscribed to broadband from MTNL, which is also their local phone company. They did not subscribe to broadband from their local cable operator because they were deterred by Conditional Access System (CAS) that had been implemented in South Delhi. This law made it mandatory for consumers to subscribe to a box that would
be supplied by the cable operator to in order to receive satellite television signals. They need to be connected to the box to subscribe to Internet connectivity. However none of the homes in Jamia that I visited had subscribed to the box as it was expensive. The cable operator in their locality was supplying them with channels that were mostly free to air.
CHAPTER 5: CHAK DE, INDIA: ACHIEVEMENTS OF TEAM INDIA AND THE ASPIRATIONS OF MUSLIM YOUTH

_Chak De, India_! Translated as “go India, strike a goal,” was the title of the hit film of summer 2007. Television channels were running a loop of the film’s promotion, Internet sites were running the banners, but it was Shakeel, a Muslim student at the Jamia Polytechnic, who drew my attention to this media text. Shakeel mentioned that he was very keen to see _Chak De India_. Shakeel had little time or money on his hands. Hailing from Bihar, he lived alone in rented accommodations in Jamia Nagar, and supported his education by tutoring students in physics and mathematics. His decision to take time out and spend something between Rs. 100 and Rs. 150 (which is more than the daily minimum wage in India) indicated that there was something special about this film. Shahrukh Khan, the Muslim Bollywood superstar, played the lead role in _Chak De India_. However, the uniqueness of the film was that Shahrukh Khan was playing Kabir Khan, a Muslim character, for the very first time in his two-decade long career. Shahrukh Khan was not essaying the role of a Punjabi Rahul/Raj Malhotra, but in his role as Kabir Khan, he was exploring the complexities of Muslim identity in independent, democratic India.

This extremely popular film became salient to the research because it had struck a chord with Muslim youth and it was released at a sensitive juncture. In June 2007, two Indian students and an Indian doctor had been implicated in the attempt to blow up the Glasgow airport. It was for the first time that middle class and educated Indian Muslims had been drawn into a terror plot. The situation created fresh doubts about loyalty of Indian Muslims to India, and the claims that only impoverished Muslims were disaffected lay exposed (see “New-age terrorists,” 2007). In these complex circumstances, the film

113
*Chak De India*, released in August 2007, provided a non-controversial talking point to initiate a conversation with Muslim youth about their identity—who they are and what they want to be.

The other distinguishing feature of *Chak De India* is that though the plot revolves around a Muslim central character, and it addresses the discrimination that Muslims face, the film is not directed solely at Muslim audiences. The film invokes the material/cultural realities and ideologies of a liberalized and globalized India. It was extremely popular among general audiences and was among the top revenue earners of the year 2007 (Kazmi, 2007 & Weekly Box Office Review, 2007). The narrative of *Chak De India* reflects rising ambitions of Indians in the wake of liberalization of Indian economy. The storyline parallels the unleashing of the potential of Indian society to face global competition. The film resonates with the themes of nationalism, achievement and materialism that dominate media of the post-liberalization India. The general audience could read the film very differently as compared to audiences belonging to the Muslim community. However, the Muslim audiences were not precluded from responding to the themes that engaged majority of Indians.

This chapter explores the way Muslim youth of Jamia read the film *Chak De India*. It reflects on how Muslim youth internalized the dominant themes of Indian media and whether these themes informed their self-perceptions and future plans. These questions are examined with reference to the material changes in Indian society and as these changes are reflected in the media.

The aim of chapter is to illustrate that the identity of Muslim youth is as much a construct of any inherited legacy, including their unique history, language and culture, as
it is of their existing social and economic circumstances. According to Ahmed (1983), the commonly held view, in popular opinion and in academic quarters, is that Indian Muslims are not responding to modernization and change in Indian society because there is something inherently anti-modern in their religious faith (p. xix). Hence, Muslim identity within the Indian context is seen as ossified, entrenched and regressive. This chapter explores these assumptions by looking at the way Muslim youth were responding to images of change and to narratives that provide new resources for construction of Muslim identity not available earlier. Moreover, the unprecedented growth of the Indian economy is creating employment opportunities that facilitate their participation in the mainstream of Indian life, as opposed to their former economic marginalization. In the light of these changes in Indian society and the reiteration of these changes in Indian media, this chapter explores whether there is a shift in the way Muslim youth of Jamia see themselves and whether the claims that Muslims are fixed within their religious and cultural traditions are legitimate.

The chapter begins with a review the plot of the film *Chak De India* and by pointing out that this media text resonates with the themes that preoccupy Indian media—especially nationalism, materialism and consumerism. It then explores the Muslim researcher’s emotional engagement with the film before analyzing how the Muslim youth of Jamia interacted with the film’s central narrative, and with the themes of nationalism and achievement. Certain media texts that were considered important by the informants and which reflected the rising materialism in Indian society are also examined. The chapter investigates how Muslim youth of Jamia balance the multiple themes of—nationalism, achievement and materialism/consumerism with the negative portrayal of
Muslims in media and the secondary treatment of Muslims in Indian society. It attempts to ascertain the priorities and the preoccupations of my informants in the changed socio-economic order. The question is: how do the youth, who live surrounded by their religious and cultural milieu perceive themselves—as part of the Indian mainstream or as members of a distinct religious and cultural community? I proceed to explore these questions by investigating their relationship with the epitomic media text *Chak De India*.

*Chak De India* and the Achievements of “Team India”

*Chak De India*’s explicit storyline is the adventure of the Indian women’s field hockey team that defies all odds and wins the World Cup. It is a story about having the courage to dream and about making dreams come true, which is told from the perspective of the protagonist Kabir Khan. He is the coach of the women’s hockey team and the former captain of the Indian men’s hockey team. Kabir Khan, in a crucial match against Pakistan, India’s Muslim neighbor, had failed to strike the penalty goal. His failure was not considered a vagary of the game because Kabir Khan was a Muslim. Instead, it was considered to be a deliberate and devious act to help the opposing team and his co-religionists win the match. Kabir Khan was branded as traitor. He retreated from public life and returned only to take up a job of training the rag-tag women’s hockey team that nobody else considered worthwhile. However, for Kabir Khan it was a chance to redeem his lost reputation. The theme of aspirations and possibilities resonates in many sport movies (for example *Hoosiers* and *Bend it like Beckham*), where the underdog emerges as the winner after overcoming many trials and tribulations. But within the narrative of *Chak De India* the underdog is not only the women’s team or even Kabir Khan but “team India.” The on-screen adventures of the protagonists, Kabir Khan and the Indian
women’s hockey team, are symbolic of India’s exploits. The Indian women’s hockey team’s victory at the world cup represents the coming of age of India, a Third World nation that is making its mark on the global scene.

Narayan Murty (2007), head of Infosys (a global leader in computer software) and the icon of young India, related his experience of watching the film *Chak De India* with a crowd of mostly twenty-something Indians. He was amazed to see how completely the youth identified with the film. They cheered with every goal and their joy was “as if India had actually won the women’s World Cup in hockey.” The film resurrects the nationalistic pride of Indians, and it is filled with nationalistic fervor, which is an enduring characteristic of Indian media in the post-liberalization era. It also reflects “the desire for recognition based on personal achievement,” which has become the new work ethos of globalized India (Varma, 2004, p. 125). The world press has described these changes in exalted terms, as the coming of age of India, a country which on many counts of human development index is still a Third World nation (see Timmons, 2007; Waldan, 2003; Zakaria, 2006; also see “The great Indian”, 2006; “Virtual champions”, 2006). The euphoria about India also reverberates among political analysts, who project India as the strategic partner of the West, especially America (see Carter, 2006; Das, 2006; Raja, 2006). According to critics like Mishra (2006) and Arundhati Roy (2008), this jubilation without being subject to any critical scrutiny circulates with even greater enthusiasm in the Indian press and other media outlets. Indian media, including the national dailies and major news channels, display a general sanguinity and provide disproportionate space to celebrity news, the rise of stock markets, the bullishness of Indian players in the global arena, and other such feel-good stories (see K. Sharma, 2005). The chorus of “India
Shinning” has been loud and according to K. Sharma, the images of glamour and surfeit have pushed from public consciousness environmental degradation and abject poverty, and they have created a grossly exaggerated sense of well-being. Arundhati Roy (2008) refers to the slogans of “Team India” and “India Shinning” as catchphrases of citizens of the sky—men and women who live a life disconnected with the real India.

However, as Murty (2007) noticed, the mood of celebration about India’s achievements is very real, even if the causes for celebration are suspect. Murty’s advice to Indians is that if they want to win real battles they must “identity as Indians first and rise above our affiliations with our states, religions and castes.” He asks Indian audiences to internalize the message of the film *Chak De India* and overcome their differences and sublimate their unique identities within a singular definition of Indianess and present a unified front to all competitors. *Chak De India* conveys this theme in the first 15 minutes of its screen time. Kabir Khan, as the coach of the women’s hockey team, strongly censures team members, drawn from different parts of India, for prescribing to their regional, state or linguistic identity. He advises them to erase these identities and see themselves only as Indians. However, the twist in this straightforward narrative is that Kabir Khan is not allowed to see himself only as an Indian because he is also a Muslim. Kabir Khan would very much like to forget that he is a Muslim. He wants to be treated as just another Indian, but that is not to be, and Kabir Khan is under immense pressure to prove his loyalty to India and resurrect his professional reputation. The experience for him is akin to standing on the edge of the cliff and he has to conjure up the trick of flying in order to survive.
The film subtly features the structural constraints, prejudice, and biases that perpetuate differences based on caste, religion, region, and language and that defy the idea of an over-arching or singular Indian identity. The struggles of Kabir Khan point to the lack of a level playing field for Muslims that many Indians, including Murty (2007), fail to acknowledge. The Indian Muslims in the audience would sympathize with Kabir Khan’s predicament and my family and I were no exception.

*Chak De India*: A Personal Reading

My family was looking forward to watching *Chak De India*. It was a much-anticipated event for us, as it was for Shakeel, the Muslim youth from Jamia. My family and I saw the movie in a multiplex theatre in South Delhi—the rich and upper middle class part of the city. We were surrounded by the upwardly mobile and middle class Indians who epitomize India’s economic success and prosperity in an otherwise poor country. My family and I blended in with the audience, and only our thoughts distinguished us. For us, it was not just an evening out at the movies. We rarely go to the new multiplex cinemas because taking the entire extended family means spending a steep sum, but this time the entire family was making the trip just to see Shahrukh Khan play Kabir Khan. I expected that the majority of the audience, with whom we were sharing the cinematic experience, would read the film much like Narayan Murty did; however our reading of the film, as Indian Muslims, was bound to be different.

The film evoked in us a strong response of pleasure and empathy. As Indian Muslims, we were sensitive to every nuance of Kabir Khan’s character and especially his use of the Urdu language. We delighted in the impeccable delivery of Urdu. It is a language that as Muslims, we speak at home but which we rarely hear in public arenas,
and it is even rarer to hear it rendered with such finesse. It was exhilarating to hear the poetic and polished nuances of the Urdu language sound resound in a public hall. The use of Urdu dialogues in the film resurrected for us, the Muslim audience, our distinct but disregarded identity in the public sphere. Not only was our culture and our language, (which has all but disappeared from media representations) brought back into focus, but also the grievances of middle class educated Muslims that are seldom invoked in public life (but which simmer nonetheless in private spheres) were given space in media discourses. So much so that while most members of the audience would agree that the theme of the film was sublimation of all differences in the monolithic Indian identity, we could not concede to this statement.

The task of reinstating a Muslim identity in the public sphere was achieved without rancor, hysteria or melodrama. Kabir Khan was presented as just another Indian. He had no distinguishing characteristic other than the fact that he spoke in Urdu and said his prayers in Arabic. Kabir Khan was neither apologetic nor defensive about these differences. The grace with which Kabir Khan essayed his distinct identity rescued us, the Muslim audience, from a silent and shuttered existence. Moreover, it was a welcome change to see a real character and not a caricature representing Indian Muslims in a media text. We appreciated the subtlety with which Chak De India treated the theme of Muslim marginalization. There were few overt references to Muslims or to their problems. In fact, the word Muslim is not mentioned at all. There is just one scene, where only one sentence and a half, is exchanged between Kabir and his friend that evokes the complexity of being a Muslim in India. His friend says “waise to ek galti sabko maff hai” [everyone is allowed to make one mistake], referring to the missed goal
in the India-Pakistan match. Kabir Khan turns around and says “Sabko?” [Everyone?]. The sentence and the short retort, delivered in a deadpan fashion and without the proverbial raised eyebrow, captures the pain and the dilemma of walking the tight rope to prove the Muslim loyalty to India.

At the end of the movie, I asked my sister to give me an example of any one scene/element from the film that had special significance for her. She recalled this short scene as being the one that moved her the most. My father’s reply was not very different. M. Faisal (2007), an Indian Muslim who reviewed the film on his blog, also pointed out that this scene affected him deeply. The screen time of this scene may be less than a minute, but I believe that its import would be lost on few Muslims. It was against this highly emotional personal reading of the film that I set out to discover its significance among the Muslim youth of Jamia. I was conscious that my strong personal involvement with the narrative might influence the direction of the research and the responses that I sought from my informants.

*Chak De India* and the Muslim Youth of Jamia

I had expected the Muslim youth of Jamia to read the film as intensely I had. I had thought that they would be equally sensitive to the fact that Muslims are looked upon with suspicion and are denied their rightful place in Indian society. I had assumed that since they lived in an exclusively Muslim neighborhood they would be even more conscious that Muslim culture has all but disappeared from the public sphere. I was also concerned about how they would read the underlying optimism of the film. Kabir Khan is able to prove his loyalty and be reinstated in public life, indicating that those who stand on the margins of Indian society (like the Muslim youth of Jamia) can be integrated into
the mainstream. Above all, I wanted to know if the Muslim youth would consider the erasure of all distinctions to be a problematic suggestion—especially as they live surrounded by sights, sounds and symbols that constantly evoke their distinct religious identity. Moreover, the pattern of their everyday life, including their name, food, language, and the manner of worship, is also the reason for their isolation. The question I sought to ask was how would they respond to the overarching theme of nationalism in Chak De India’s narrative? And taking into account their weak socio-economic status, how would they react to the stress that is being laid on achievement and material well-being? An analysis of how they would balance the different themes of Muslim marginalization, nationalism, achievement, and materialism would expose the inner battles that inform their identity. I talked to a cross-section of population, in different age groups to gauge the general response. Consider the responses of Farhat who was in her early 30s and a teacher at Jamia University:

Ruhi: Did you see the film Chak de India? Is there a message in this film?


I juxtapose Farhat’s response with Zain’s who was in his early twenties, and a student at a Faculty of Management Studies, Delhi University,

Ruhi: You know a lot about Chak De India. Do you think Chak De India had a message?

Zain: Yes it had a message. It was [that] if we work together everything is possible. (personal communication, January 11, 2008)
I had expected Farhat and Zain to first point out that *Chak De* India was a film about Indian Muslims. I had assumed that they would promptly raise the issue of the unfair treatment of Muslims. Instead, both Farhat and Zain echo the dominant reading of the majority population, as exemplified in Murty’s (2007) response. They described the film using similar terminology and appeared to be moved by the theme of nationalism in the film. I had to probe further to learn whether the issue of Muslim identity was at all on their mind. Consider the exchange with Zain:

Ruhi: Did it have a special message for Muslims?

Zain: STAR TV said that Shahrukh Khan was playing a Muslim in the movie.

Ruhi: What did your friends say about the movie?

Zain: They all came out saying what a great actor Shahrukh Khan is. All the guys who went to see the movie are Shahrukh Khan fans. (personal communication, January 11, 2008)

Zain did not respond even to my probing. I wondered if he was being difficult because he had once categorically asked me why was I keen on exploring the Muslim question. So I posed the same question (in a Google chat conversation) to Zain’s friend Rehman, the only other Muslim student at the prestigious business school at Delhi University.

Ruhi: So you think the movie had a message? What was the message?

Rehman: You can see it from several aspects. First and foremost it touched on the stereotype against Indian Muslims. Usually v r [we are] considered as supporters of Pakistan.

Ruhi: Do you think the movie dealt with the issue well?
Rehman: Actually there were other aspects as well [like] women’s empowerment, team work, etc. Muslim stereotypism was just a part.
Ruhi: So the movie was not focusing on just Muslim stereotyping alone??? It was just one of the themes and not the main theme?
Rehman: Yeah, it was one of the aspects. It also showed Hockey vis a vis Cricket and the importance of a coach.
Ruhi: Was there any other message?
Rehman: [Yes, the] importance of teamwork. (personal communication, Google Chat, January 20, 2008)

Rehman is a perceptive reader of the film and he has pointed out the film’s different themes. Rehman had realized that Chak De India features the dilemmas of Indian Muslims, however he was reluctant to dwell on the question of the treatment of Muslims as second-class citizens. Rehman also repeats the chorus of teamwork, unity, determination, and hard work that resonates in the nationalistic media discourses of “Team India” and “India Shinning.”

The reluctance to dwell on the problems that confront Muslims surprised me. Perhaps it was the optimism of their youth. I attempted to correct this by balancing the responses of the youth with the responses of people who were older and more mature. I spoke to my sister and to Farhat, who are both in their thirties. I especially expected my sister to give me a straightforward answer without worrying about being politically correct. Her initial reaction after seeing the film had been to sympathize with the predicament of Muslims. However, consider her response when I asked her the same question a few months later:
Ruhi: You have seen the movie *Chak De India*. What is the movie about?

Aisha: *Chak De India* is about the fact that anyone can make it in India. I have no problems with nationalism; that is what the film teaches. I am chilled out. I am very happy as [an] Indian. (personal communication, January 2, 2008)

Aisha forgot her initial reaction and instead whole-heartedly endorsed the positive qualities of Indian economy and society. I tried to probe Farhat further to see if she had read the film at another deeper level and if she would be more forthcoming:

Ruhi: What is the message in the film?

Farhat: It does not matter for national pride, religion does not matter for national pride it is the goal that matters. The message [is that] in India people will respect hard work despite religion. (personal communication, January 7, 2008)

Farhat repeated almost the same thing that she had said earlier. I felt I was coming up against a wall and I could not ask Farhat if she believed what she said to be true, as it would entail leading her into a direction that perhaps she did not want to take. I could not help but wonder if Farhat was being cautious in her interactions. It could be because we often met in her office, a space that she shared with a non-Muslim colleague. She would have felt uncomfortable discussing the problems of Muslims in front of her. I was always careful and did not bring up such sensitive matters when her colleague was around. But, Farhat did not let her guard down even on those days when her colleague did not report for work. I needed to understand if Farhat’s optimism was a carefully constructed response that withheld information or if it was a sincere expression that was perhaps also shared by my other informants. Hence, I reframed my query and asked Farhat if in her
opinion the scenario for Muslims was as hopeful as it was depicted in the movie. This time I got a more balanced response.

Ruhi: So the message is hope, is there hope in real life, the hope that is depicted in the movie?

Farhat: *Biasness tow hai par change aa raha hai* [There is a certain bias but change is coming too].

Ruhi: Why is the change coming?

Farhat: People now know reality. They are closer to reality. (personal communication, January 7, 2008)

Farhat’s reference to “reality” could mean other media texts like *Chak De India*, which openly address the issue of discrimination that Muslims face in India. However, what Farhat meant to say was that today when Indian Muslims were getting a chance to participate in the Indian society due to increased employment opportunities, people were getting to know them better. They were beginning to realize that Muslims were not as they have been portrayed. Farhat also said that “Muslims are gaining more confidence,” meaning that they were becoming more competent (personal communication, January 7, 2008). She had also mentioned earlier that her students, who belonged to middle and lower middle class Muslim community of the Jamia Enclave, have changed over the years. She said that they had become more focused, and they were extremely concerned about finding suitable employment. She said that her students did not enroll in just one course but were simultaneously pursuing multiple academic streams. Even Dr. Narayani Gupta, our mutual friend and mentor had said that her students, who once used to amble around campus admiring its beauty, were now wrapped up in plans of making money.
Farhat had other reasons to be optimistic as well. She said, “outsiders [meaning the general population] are beginning to be only concerned with work. They are not concerned with religion” (personal communication, January 7, 2008).

The optimism of my informants was heartening but it was also problematic. They did not dwell on the contentious concession demanded in the narrative of the film *Chak De India*, that all distinctive identities must be subjugated to the pan-Indian identity. However, their apparent acquiescence to the theme of nationalism cannot be taken at face value, even if a socially aware person like Najma (who is a media critic and a BBC Radio producer) failed to discern the implications of *Chak De India*’s nationalism for Indian Muslims. Najma reviewed the film in a personal email to the researcher (October 19, 2008), but like my other informants even she did not criticize the film’s suggestion that Indian Muslims can be assimilated into the mainstream only if they cease to be Muslims. This was indeed different from the way Muslims are expected to behave. Muslims are considered to be rigid about their identity or to put it less euphemistically they are termed as “fundamentalists.” The Urdu press, according to M. H. Lakdawala (2005), has raised the issue of erasure of Muslim identity in rather hysterical terms. In popular opinion, media, and scholarly circles, Muslims are represented as resisting the demands for imposition of uniform civil-code because they consider it to be a transgression of their Islamic identity (see Ghosh, 1987). I had expected my informants to recognize the dilemma that nationalistic discourses pose to Indian Muslims and was surprised that they ignored this and chose to reflect on the nationalistic rhetoric of hope and “Team India.” It appeared to me that something was changing at a fundamental level for Muslim youth. However, to ascertain this, I had to ruffle what could be a politically correct posture on
the part of my informants and take on a more aggressive line of questioning. Below are excerpts of a Google Talk conversation with Rehman.

Ruhi: Do you agree. . . . Should all else be erased except Indian identity?

Rehman: Definitely.

Ruhi: Hence, you agree with the main message that we can get ahead only if we forget, get over all over petty differences?

Rehman: Yeah that’s also important, regional differences should also be neglected. (personal communication, March 15, 2008)

I believe that it would be too simplistic to consider Rehman’s acceptance of the demand for eradication of all differences as an endorsement of the subjugation or erasure of the distinct Muslim identity. Rehman’s response and the responses of all my informants to the theme of nationalism in the media text Chak De India must be placed within the context of the changes that are taking place within the Indian society, including the overwhelming focus on consumption and material well-being. In the next section, I explore how Muslim youth of Jamia grappled with the themes of materialism and consumption in order to get a better insight into why they chose to privilege sentiments of nationalism and assimilation over assertion of their distinct Muslim identity.

Mediated Discourses of Materialism and the Muslim Youth of Jamia

I had assumed that the young men and women, who live in an exclusive and well-demarcated Muslim environment and attend an institution that has yet to come out of academic backwaters, would dwell upon the disadvantages that Muslim face, and on the fact that their distinct culture and heritage was being sidelined and ignored. However, my informants, who belong to a cross-section of Muslim society and represent different
aspects of the problems faced by Indian Muslims, neither stressed their religious and
cultural identity nor referred to their secondary status in Indian society. Although, the
narrative of *Chak De India* does explore the unfair treatment of Muslims in India, my
informants chose to dwell on other themes and repeated the nationalistic rhetoric. I
believe this is because the Muslim youth had made the connection between nationalism
with materialism, which is also the underlying message of the film *Chak De India*. The
film’s narrative developed the idea that espousing a nationalist identity was a necessary
condition for achieving material success. Consider the responses of my informants, who
had not attended elite public schools, who did not speak English fluently, and who lived
in a highly hierarchical society where Muslims are perceived to be culturally retrograde
and lacking in economic wherewithal.

Sajida is a shy girl. She was very conscious of her religious obligations and was a
diligent student at the Computer Science Program at Jamia Polytechnic. She never clearly
explained her father’s profession except in broad terms of “business.” Perhaps he was a
building contractor, a painting contractor or a skilled craftsman who did not have a
college education. Many skilled Muslim artisans migrated to Delhi drawn by the
economic boom. Sajida’s family also moved here in the 1990s. I did not press her to
reveal her father’s profession in front of her friends, as I felt it would make her
uncomfortable. Her mother is a homemaker, which means that she probably has only an
elementary education. Sajida’s social mobility would be a factor of her family’s
economic and educational status. However, even if Sajida’s chances may be limited she
imagined a space well beyond her constraints. Sajida loved to watch *Page 3 on Zoom TV*. This program is a take-off from the page three in print edition of Delhi Times, the
daily supplement of *The Times of India*. The content of *Page 3*, in its print edition and on the satellite television program, showcases models and high society parties; the opening of boutiques and beauty parlors; the premier of films; the achievements of Indian diaspora and everything and anything that has shine and glitter. The anchors of *Page 3* flaunt a fake foreign accent and the program insinuates that only the rich and famous are citizens of India. I asked Sajida why she watched the show. She responded,

Mam, I told you, I want change. I get to learn all those things from the program, like later on what kind of people will I have to meet. I get to see what kind of people I will have to meet. I have a strong ambition to become somebody in my life. That program tells me how did those celebrities reach that stage in their life, what kind of living standard have they achieved, how do they deal with people, what is their way of doing things. (original in Urdu, author’s translation, personal communication, December 9, 2007)

It is interesting that the billionaires, millionaires, celebrities and others that are featured on the show are people from whom Sajida hoped to learn something. She said that she wanted a change, indicating that she wanted a life different than the one she led. The world that Sajida aspired to was far removed from her immediate world but Sajida appreciated it for its sheer distance, as it offered her a vision of the future. But more importantly, the show was her learning tool. For example, according to Sajida *Page 3* taught her how to behave in the company of people that she saw on the show and whom she would meet in the future. Her burning ambition was to speak English fluently. She said, “*Mein har namaz mein uske liye dua mangti hun*” [In every namaz, I pray hard for it] (personal communication, August 3, 2007). It is a formidable challenge for her as no
one in her home or in the university can truly help her and one of the main reasons Sajida associated with me was because I spoke English fluently. Sajida’s mannerisms such as her habit of constantly looking at her watch and her fast tumbling-over-words speech reflected her desire to get somewhere and in a hurry. However, even as I realized her ambitious nature, I was taken aback when she said unabashedly and sincerely, “I want to be rich” (personal communication, August 3, 2007). I had not heard people in my generation (who are a good 15 years her senior) ever acknowledge this fact, although it may have been their burning ambition too. It was considered politically incorrect in erstwhile socialist India to ever admit a desire to pursue wealth (Das, 2001). Today, it seems, there is no shame in admitting this, perhaps because as Varma (2004) says the social consciousness of citizens of a poor country has been subdued. According to Arundhati Roy (2008), the images of poverty have been erased from the media and hence also from public consciousness. The Muslim youth of Jamia are internalizing these changes in Indian society.

But, the other distinctive feature of a show like Page 3 is that the lifestyle and dress code of the models, actresses, and celebrities depicted on the show can be considered as being offensive to Islamic moral codes. Yet, my informants, whom I expected to be stringent about Islamic values, did not critique the moral values of any of these celebrities. I had to be more assertive, in case my informants were avoiding a conversation about Muslim culture and identity. Consider this interaction with Sajida:

Ruhi: Do you ever feel that our culture is being destroyed?

Sajida: Why are you saying this? Who thinks like that? Our culture is not being destroyed. Well-educated families do not think like that. They think of getting
ahead in life. If you are thinking about getting ahead in life then you are not thinking about these things. (original in Urdu, author’s translation, personal communication, January 5, 2008)

Sajida brushed aside my concern, hence challenging the popular stereotype that Muslims are paranoid about their culture and are resistant to modernization and Westernization (see Ahmed, 1983). She was even annoyed with my question. Perhaps she thought that I was being hypocritical because I have more freedom than most Muslim women to pursue my ambitions, and my independence may be constructed as inappropriate behavior for a Muslim woman. Hence, I could not talk about the need to preserve Indian Muslim culture. But, I believe the real reason why Sajida dismissed my question is because she was not willing to entertain any views that could stymie her personal growth. She wanted to be rich and hence she needed to focus her energies on overcoming her social, economic and educational shortcomings rather than diverting them to less tangible issues such as the preservation of Muslim culture. According to Sajida, people were thinking of getting ahead and not looking back.

Sajida’s response shows that the need to acquire material wealth is an important concern among youth. But a conversation with Zain and Faisal revealed that the definition of material well-being was constructed by media’s circulation of products and lifestyle options. Zain is among those few Muslim students who have been able to break into premier educational institutes in the country. He belongs to a conservative Muslim family with modest means. His father teaches biology in a Muslim school and his mother only knows how to read and write in Urdu. She wears the full hijab (the long black coat and veil) even when she is visiting relatives. As mentioned earlier, his younger sister who
had just turned 16 was even contemplating donning the full hijab. Zain’s ambition was to work in investment banking after graduation and to relocate to Mumbai from New Delhi. I asked him what would be the first thing that he would like to buy once he gets a job. He promptly replied that he would like to have an Armani suit. This suit is worth more than what his father would earn in three years. His parents, I believe, had no idea of the glamour, opulence, and pinnacles of snobbery associated with Italian designer wear. But media texts have linked the aspirations of the youth of this neighborhood, which is cut-off even from the rest of Delhi, to global consumption and lifestyle patterns.

Symbols of material culture inform the identity of my informants in convoluted ways. Consider Faisal whose opportunities in life would definitely be less than Zain’s, as his career path was in the travel and tourism industry and not in investment banking, though his ambitions were equally strong if not stronger. Faisal carried in his wallet some newspaper clippings (probably from page 3 of Delhi Times) that I believe summed up his life’s philosophy. The newspaper clippings included a picture of the world’s most expensive watch—a Chopard costing over a million dollars. Then there were photographs of Sania Mirza, the Indian Muslim tennis player and of Narain Kartikeyan, the only Indian on the Formula One racing track. One newspaper item featured Brett Lee, the world’s fastest bowler. Faisal said that he carried the pictures of these celebrities in his wallet because he admired them and they inspired him, especially Sania Mirza and Kartikeyan who have done India proud by entering fields where few Indians have ventured. As for the watch, which is an epitome of luxury, Faisal said, that he hoped to own something like that ultimate status symbol one day (personal communication, July 17, 2007). Till then an image of that watch, a status symbol of the global elites, was a
folded and worn out newspaper clipping placed in his plastic wallet as safely as in a safe-
deposit box.

The contents of Faisal’s wallet are important as they reveal my informants’
engagement with fantasies woven around celebrity culture, affluence, and wealth.
Faisal’s collage of images also indicates the coming together of the symbols of global
life-style and affluence (as the watch and Brett Lee) with the icons of “team India” (like
Sania and Kartikeyan). “Team India” is now infused with the glamour of global brands
and Faisal’s collection of images reflects the trend of growing confidence of Indians in
their nation. In the span of just fifteen years, the nationalist sentiment among the Indian
middle-class has taken a leap, from one of deep insecurity to inflated confidence (Varma,
2004). India is no longer a third world country in their eyes. But, the real significance of
this collage of images is that it reflected Faisal’s faith in his options and validated his
believe that even he as a Muslim had a chance to make it in India.

However, my informants’ association with media images of achievers and
celebrities, of wealth and well being cannot alone demonstrate that there is a change in
their mindset, beyond the fact that they have a desire to partake in material well-being. I
had to delve deeper to know if they had stepped out of their mental ghettos and were
willing to join the mainstream. This was especially necessary as media narratives do not
just create a desire for material goods but they also give rise to assumptions that there are
equal opportunities for everyone. In the next section, I present the responses of my
informants, the youth of Jamia, who were either on the threshold of the professional
world or had recently entered it, to my queries whether they truly believed in the rhetoric
of assimilation and nationalism or did they fear discrimination in the job market because
of their religion. It was difficult to raise these questions, firstly because they were always reluctant to be drawn into a conversation about their Muslim identity and secondly, I feared that these questions might dampen their enthusiasm about their future.

Perceptions of a Level Playing Field and Dreams of Assimilation

My informants represent different individual personalities who speak from the perspective of their different circumstances and beliefs, including differences in economic status and levels of religious orthodoxy, even if they all lived within the same segregated colony. Some of them were conservative about their religious beliefs while others were not so.

Nabila, a diploma student in civil engineering at the Jamia Polytechnic, exhibited greater acquiescence to rules that define women’s behavior and dress code in Islam. She hailed from a small town in Bihar, which is one of the most badly administered and poverty-ridden states in India. Nabila’s father was a schoolteacher. She has two older brothers and they were all studying at Jamia University. Her brothers supported her education and they made ends meet by tutoring students after school hours. Nabila’s Muslim identity was most conspicuous as she wore a full black *naqab* (veil), a black headscarf and a *burqa* (black long coat) in the blistering heat of Delhi. Nevertheless, Nabila was also the best student in her class. Ms. Rana Khan, who teaches at the Polytechnic, told me that Nabila interviewed for a job in civil engineering with one of the well-established developers in Delhi, dressed in her full *naqab* and *burqa*. Ms. Khan admitted that she was very apprehensive about how Nabila would be received by the prospective employers, as she proclaimed her Muslim identity so loudly. Ms. Khan believed that since there was a general sentiment against Muslims, it would be difficult
for someone who was so stridently Muslim to stand a chance (personal communication, August 6, 2007). To her surprise, Nabila got the job (though she did not take it up as the hours would have left her with no time to prepare for the entrance exam for the engineering degree program). At a later date, Nabila narrated to me what had transpired at the interview. She said that the first question she was asked at the interview was if she were a strict Muslim. Nabila said that this made her feel very uncomfortable and she did not know how to reply, and she just nodded her head in agreement. After that she was asked only technical questions. Then, Nabila proudly explained, she felt that she was on firm ground. They had asked her about how to reinforce concrete and according to her, this was a very basic question, so she presented a number of alternative methods and impressed them enough to be offered a job (personal communication, August 13, 2007).

Nabila perhaps can feature as the poster child of how education has the potential to change one’s life. It was heartening to see Nabila smile and say that she wanted to work because if she did get to work (especially for some multi-national) she was sure she would rise very high in the organization. She said, in her halting English, “I am very concentrated” (personal communication, August 13, 2007). She had meant to say that she was focused and hence she was confident that she would excel at her job. Nabila seemed to give the impression that she saw no prejudice, no disaffection standing in her way. I wondered how a person as intelligent as Nabila could not know or at least not notice the discriminatory treatment of Muslims—especially since her prospective employers had indicated that they were not entirely comfortable with her Islamic attire.

Nabila, however, was not naïve, she was only unwilling to engage in a negative conversation about the general prejudice against Muslims. She had taken time off from
her busy schedule to meet me for her own reasons. She knew very well that her inadequate command over the English language would stand in her way and she wanted advice on how to speak the language fluently. She also wanted to know, from a person living and studying in the States, how to appear more confident in the next interview, and how to answer with dignity and poise the question whether she were a “strict Muslim.” Nabila is a Muslim, and she wanted that job. It was not just for the money but because she believed she would excel at it. She wished to pursue, like everyone in India, materialistic goals but without giving up her headscarf, her veil or her long coat and without being defensive about her identity.

The religious identity of a veiled woman may be obvious, and the case may be different for young men who do not wear or carry any such obvious references to their religious identity. There are, however, other markers such as religious practices and observances that call attention to their Islamic identity. For example, Fahim, a Jamia alumnus, who worked with a courier company and also ran a small side business in computer maintenance, said that his Muslim identity was not something he wore on his sleeve, but it was evident the minute he announced his name. He explained, in halting English, that this did not necessarily hinder his professional prospects. Fahim said, “In the private sector, they want performance” (personal communication, July 17, 2007). He was saying that if he was efficient and could show good results, nobody would enquire about his identity. However, there were times when he had to balance his professional commitments with mandatory religious requirements. He said that it was at such junctures that his Muslim identity became noticeable. For example, attendance of Friday prayers or namaz in a jamat, meaning praying together with other Muslims in a mosque
or any place where they may congregate, is obligatory for Muslim men. Fahim said that his colleagues often reminded him when they were in the middle of work that he had to go for namaz, and they did not object that he would need to take a break. However, he said his colleagues also jocularly asked him why are Muslims terrorists, and what is jihad. He had no answer, but unlike Nabila he did not ask me how to respond to these queries.

Zain’s experiences of life are similar to Fahim and he also reported that when he would pray in his room at the dormitory of Delhi University, his non-Muslim roommate was very accommodating. Zain also provided me an insight into why there was a mood of optimism among one of the most depressed sections of Indian society. As Zain happens to be a distant relative, I asked him outright, without fear of discomforting him or myself, if he were apprehensive that his job prospects could be affected because he happens to be a Muslim. Zain laughed at my question and said, “I am not looking for a job with the Government” (personal communication, August 15, 2007). He had meant to say that with the rise of the private sector, after the liberalization of Indian economy, individual ability was becoming more important than one’s religion or caste. Zain believed that in the private sector an individual was judged on the basis of his personal merit. Rehman, Zain’s Muslim friend voiced a similar opinion that the new work ethic of the changed economic climate was creating more opportunities for Muslims. He said,

We stand a chance but we have to work extra hard. I believe that if you are really talented there is no stopping you. Currently in India there is so much growth, so much euphoria, [that] all of us, all of us educated masses, we all feel we have a bright future. (personal communication, March 15, 2008)
Rehman, a business major at one of the premium management schools in the country, believed that there is a brighter future for educated Muslims. The economic growth in India and media’s constant reiteration of the positive trends in the Indian economy has not only infused a sense of bonhomie among the Muslim youth, but even the older generation felt buoyed up by these prospects. For example, Abrar Cha said,

Consider the private sector; our children are going places in the private sector. Why are they successful in the private sector? In the private sector, you see our children there, they are intelligent, they have the power… [interruption]…this tells us that there is some feeling of discrimination. Why are [our] children succeeding in private sector and not in the government sector? (original in Urdu, author’s translation, personal communication, December, 4, 2007)

The “government sector” stands for the old ethics of discrimination and favoritism that hindered participation of minorities. There was a positive feeling for liberalization, globalization and for the expanding private sector as they offered a chance for the economic inclusion of Muslims in the mainstream of Indian life. Not one of my informants acknowledged that they feared outright discrimination in the job market because of their religion. It is interesting that the Indian minority Muslim population viewed liberalization, globalization and privatization as enabling conditions that created options for their participation in Indian economy and society. Moreover, the media have also played a part in creating the feeling that the new order is coming and the old order has passed. As Aisha said,

The one thing, the only thing that media has done for young people is to give people other things to think about, other things, rather than the BJP values
[referring to politics of Hindu right-wing party]. . . Media has told them about life-styles, brands, good stuff in life, food, travel. It has told them how you can travel to different places rather than who killed Indira Gandhi. I tell you young people don’t know who is the President of India. Just try asking them who is the Vice President, I promise you they won’t know. . . They know Manmohan Singh only because he is PM [Prime Minister], what he has done for economy, improving the country. (personal communication, January 2, 2008)

Aisha’s response suggests that media’s focus on material well-being had taken the spotlight away from deeply contentious issues of religious identities and caste affiliations. Muslim youth of Jamia believed that they benefited from the declining stress on distinct identities. Perhaps that is why they did not comment on the problematic issue of the sublimation of unique identities to the overarching Indian identity, as was proposed in the narrative of the film *Chak De India*. They preferred to join the nationalist chorus of “unity, determination and hard work” in a liberalized and globalized Indian society, as they stood to gain materially.

In retrospect it appears that in my reading of the film *Chak De India* I had focused on the problems that Muslims face and I had delighted in the resurrection of the Muslim identity in media. However, my informants did not respond to the film as I had. Instead like other Indians, they also internalized the film as a celebration of India’s potential. This created a tension in our interactions. I struggled to understand why my informants did not share the same concern over the question of the Muslim identity, especially as they lived in a Muslim community and were constantly reminded of their Muslim cultural and religious ethos. The point of diversion between the ethnographer’s expectations and
the informants’ responses brings into sharp relief the particular conditions, including media narratives that shaped the worldview of the Muslim youth of Jamia.

However, the desires of the Muslim youth to participate in the growing material wealth of the country did not mean that their Muslim identity had been erased. For example, Zain desired to possess an Armani suit, and to feel included in the festivities of consumerism but he was not willing to entertain questions that tested the tenets of his faith. When I asked Zain whether tenets of Islam, like praying five times a day, placed unrealistically high expectation on Muslims and was it possible for us to follow Islamic injunctions and also be active participants in the material world, he responded a little curtly,

I don’t think so. We can fulfill the expectations, if we try hard, although I am not a good Muslim. . . . I mean being a Muslim doesn’t end or begin with namaz only. . . . We can pray five times. It’s possible. Namaz is just one of the pillars of Islam. There are four other pillars too. You asked this only? Or something else? . . . If we put our mind to something, we achieve it, don’t we? So, if we try hard, it’s possible to do namaz five times each day. Tell me what is bothering you? Why are you asking so many questions like this today? (personal communication, January 20, 2008)

By proclaiming himself to be a bad Muslim, Zain’s had shielded the position of Islam without committing himself completely to following its tenets. However, his defensive posture implies that he struggled to maintain a balance between the private religious sphere and the demands of daily life in the Indian society. He was also irritated with me because he expected me to understand this implicitly, without having to talk about it.
The responses of my informant indicate that they aspired to find a job, to make money or to simply be rich (to quote Sajida); and if in the post-liberalization India avenues for participation in the economic sphere were opening up based on individual talent and skills, Muslim youth of Jamia were reluctant to highlight their religious identity (even if they were not willing to give it up). However, the ambitions of Muslim youth of Jamia to be included in the expanding opportunities (which are perhaps grossly exaggerated by media) could not be realized as easily as the responses of my informants seem to suggest. In the next section, I present an event that occurred in the summer of 2007, which exemplifies the challenges, that Muslims face in their attempt to realize their full potentials as Indian citizens and consumers.

Media Representation of Indian Muslim

It was barely a week since I had arrived in New Delhi that the bombing of Glasgow airport on June 30th, 2007, started to dominate the news channels in India. On July 3rd, 2007, Dr. Haneef was arrested in Australia. Haneef was an Indian doctor practicing in Australia and his crime was that before he had emigrated to Australia from London, some eighteen months previously; he had given the SIM card of his mobile phone to his cousin Sabeer. Sabeer’s older brother Kafeel had been involved in the bombing of Glasgow airport on June 30th 2007. The events in Glasgow and Australia were dominating the headlines of newspapers and satellite news channels. Journalists and columnists were arguing that Indian Muslim middle class youth, who were hitherto considered to be well integrated, were now getting involved in subversive political activities (see “New-age terrorist,” 2007). Only two years prior to this incident Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had proudly admitted that India’s 150 million Muslims had
steered clear of extremist terrorist groups (see Swami, 2007). But this seemed no longer true.

The Australian government had no evidence against Haneef, except that the SIM card of his cell-phone was found with his cousin Sabeer, yet they kept him under solitary confinement. His innocent act of generosity, toward his extended family, jeopardized Haneef’s life and career. It also sent a message out to us, the middle class Muslims that we had to be cautious even in our personal associations. They could become suspect, and there was no guarantee of our civil liberties. My mother was particularly upset about my research topic. She feared that my work in Jamia area would bring harm to me in the same tortuous fashion that Haneef had been hurt. There was a mood of dejection, paranoia and fear within the community.

The arrest of Haneef was particularly tragic for middle class Muslims, as it implied that the chances for social inclusion and well-being, through participation in the work-force, were being jeopardized. There are few Muslims in the higher education stream as it is not easy for members of an economically and socially backward community to succeed in the extremely competitive Indian educational system. Haneef’s achievements were exceptional, as he not only trained as a physician in India, but also qualified to do his residency at hospitals in UK and Australia. I was keen to know how my informants’ dreams for the future fared in the light of these developments.

Again, it was just not easy to broach this topic even though it was on the mind of every Muslim. My informants were wary. It was difficult to approach them. I would call to fix a time to meet but often they would not pick up the phone or not return my call or forget to keep the appointment. I understood that they were exercising caution. Nobody
seemed to know whom to trust. I, as a researcher, studying at an American university was definitely suspect—why was I studying Muslim youth and whose agenda was I trying to fulfill? A family acquaintance even admitted this to my face.

Finally, I met with Faisal and Fahim in a coffee house, situated across the divide between Jamia and Friends colony and close to my home, more than two weeks after the bombing in Glasgow. We talked about everything and anything. We discussed at length the SMS (or text messaging) campaign to include Taj Mahal among the eight wonders of world. We discussed the complicity of mobile phone companies to make money by playing on nationalist sentiments. Faisal told me he lost so much money because the SMS to cast the vote for Taj Mahal was expensive and that the phone company cheated him by not declaring the terms clearly. We avoided, hedged around the one event that troubled us. At last, after an hour and more of coffee, ice-cream, and meandering conversations, I, very obliquely, in very few words, in a very public place, said very quietly, “Look at what is happening around us.” This was a cue for a dam to burst. Suddenly we were on the same wavelength and talking about something that we all felt strongly about. Faisal responded equally quietly, “Karta koi hai bharta koi hai” [Someone else’s misdeeds and someone else has to bear the consequences]. He was saying that Kafeel’s actions had endangered the future of the whole community. Fahim added, “Agar yahan naukri karni hai to bahut sabar se” [If you want to work here, earn a living, then you must exercise a lot of patience]. Faisal responded by uttering almost under his breath, “Sabar, sabar” [Patience, patience] (personal communication, July 17, 2007). In a few words they told me the complete story.
The summer 2007 was a particularly tense period, however my informants did not dwell on this issue excessively. The daily life of Muslim youth is constructed within opposing narratives of hope and hindrance. My informants from across a cross-section of society understood the challenges before them but they still appreciated the new opportunities that were coming their way. Rehman, who more closely represents the opinions of upper class Muslims said,

We do get a chance but there is a struggle involved, which is not very evident. . . . Just as in the movie, a small mistake creates a lot of finger pointing. Jadeja was not abused so much as Azhar was for the match fixing scandal. (personal communication, March 15, 2008)

Rehman was saying that as in the movie where Kabir Khan’s missed penalty goal destroyed his professional career, the Muslim cricketer Azhar was penalized more severely in the match-fixing scandal than Jadeja who is a Hindu.

My informants, notwithstanding the differences in their educational and social status, proposed a common strategy of withdrawal and silence for dealing with their difficult situation. Rehman, who is more educated as compared to Faisal or Fahim said,

There is a feeling still there, but we are educated classes, people are broadminded and we do not talk about these things. I was in Pune doing my engineering during 9/11 and at that time there was an ill feeling, my friends would ask “what is this whole idea about jihad?” It was uncomfortable. (personal communication, March 15, 2008)

Rehman was saying that in polite company, educated Muslims do not talk about contentious issues and they practice diplomacy, a patience of another kind. The problems
that Muslims face are not discussed because it can lead to an acrimonious debate when harsh facts of discrimination that are hurtful to both Hindus and Muslims are raised. These young men advocated maintaining a veneer of peace.

Such passiveness may perpetuate the stereotyping of Muslims. However, my informants’ strategy of withdrawal is significant because it points to their keen desire to be part of Indian society, especially as the entitlements of assimilation are economic and material well-being. In the next section, I present a picture of the Indian Muslim consumer that may be considered an exception rather than rule. But, Shabana’s example illustrates the compulsive pull of media texts that celebrate global consumption and lifestyle patterns.

Materialistic Markers of Identity and the Indian Muslim Consumer

The meeting with Shabana at Barista coffee shop (the Indian equivalent of Starbucks) demonstrated how media’s circulation of global consumerist lifestyles and the emphasis on consumerism in media and popular culture influenced the self-esteem of the Muslim youth of the Jamia enclave. The meeting also highlighted that materialistic values promoted by media shaped rules for Muslim participation in Indian life.

The Barista coffee shop is in close proximity to Jamia University and it just across the road from the Jamia residential area, but one has to cross the road to realize that a wide chasm separates two sides of the road. The coffee shop is stylized, and it recreates for Indian audiences and consumers the space of Central Perks, the coffee shop in the popular American show Friends. A coffee at Barista reaffirms to the Indian patron his or her economic capital and cultural competence to recreate the leisure experiences of the more evolved consumers from the West. The nonchalance with which the ideal Indian
consumer would pay for a cup of coffee, more than what millions of Indians earn after 8
hours of hard labor, is a mark of his or her global citizenship. Barista is a place to be seen in.

My informants belong to middle and lower middle class Muslim community and a
cup of coffee at Barista is a luxury item for them. They can drink, for the price of that one
cup of coffee, fifty cups of tea. Moreover, coffee does not feature in their generic food
habits. Initially, I was concerned that Barista may not be the right location to meet my
informants. However, after the meeting with Shabana I changed my mind as this location
evoked the tensions that their desire for inclusion in the consumerist society created in
their lives.

Shabana has lived in Zakir Nagar all her life but I met her on-line after reading
about her project on Zakir Nagar. She is also a product of the media school from which I
graduated. When we met for the first time on July 9, 2007, I was dressed in the Indian
salwar kameez (loose pants and loose long shirt) and Shabana was dressed in a Western
outfit, like the other patrons at Barista. She wore well-fitted jeans and a black T-shirt. It
was very hot and humid outside but Barista was blissfully cool. I asked Shabana what
would she like to drink. Looking very self-assured, she said that she always drinks
cappuccino, suggesting that she visits Barista often. I ordered ice-tea for myself.

Our conversation began with recollections of our time at the media school in
Jamia. Then she told me about her project that I had read about on-line. She said that she
had made a film on Zakir Nagar, a neighborhood in the Jamia area, to overcome her acute
discomfort about living there. Her classmates and crewmembers on the film were alumni
of St. Stephens and Mayo College (highly elitist educational institutes in India). She said
that they did not treat her well because she lived in a crowded and exclusively Muslim colony. They did shoddy work as members of her team and she felt isolated. As I was listening to her story, I thought about how different things had been fifteen years earlier. At that time people displayed a reverse snobbery, they vociferously proclaimed their socialist leanings, dressed in Khadi (the home-spun cloth promoted by Gandhi) and pretended to be aligned with the poorer sections of the society. I was discriminated against because the more radical students found my foreign accent to be a sign of Western sensibilities, which their socialist politics decried and looked down upon. The state of affairs has obviously changed drastically since then.

Shabana told me that someone in the media school had the audacity to even ask her if she possessed a pair of jeans. She was embarrassed to say that she did not. A pair of jeans (especially if it is branded) can cost more than three Indian outfits—the salwar kameez. Now, according to Shabana, she wears jeans all the time. She said that she even wears jeans in Zakir Nagar. Her neighbors do not approve of her and have stopped talking to her but she said that it does not bother her. According to Shabana, there is an enormous desire among the Muslim youth of Jamia area to get out of their ghetto and experience the glitzy city, but are too afraid to do so. Shabana said that compared to most people who lived in the Jamia area she was very accomplished because she could navigate the big city of Delhi and also move around comfortably in places like Khan Market (the posh hangout of diplomats and bureaucrats). Then she said something, which completely took me off guard.

She said that now that she has come into her own, referring to her accomplishments as a filmmaker with an independent income, she has even started
“lounging.” I did not know what the word meant, so I asked her and that ruffled her. She explained that “lounging” meant going to a pub where people relax and enjoy a drink. She looked at me in a manner that seemed to imply that if I did not know what the term meant, then was I really a student at an American university? Her admission was unusual because consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Islam and also because Muslims who flout the directives of Islam do not usually admit it in public. I think that Shabana, by sharing this information with me, was trying to make an impression that she was not a backward girl from Zakir Nagar but somebody in her own right—Westernized and independent. She was impressing on the Western returned researcher that it was not just at Barista that she feels comfortable, but that she had access to eve more luxurious settings. The pubs and lounges, according to journalist Ravindran (2008), have emerged as the new haunt of financially and professionally successful urban Indian women. They offer these successful women a place where they can challenge the conservative Indian norms that control women’s expression of sexuality and independence. They also make the female patrons feel more sophisticated as they participate in lifestyle patterns of the West. Shabana’s admission that she had started “lounging” implied that she was also one of these upwardly mobile and Westernized career women. However, I could not contain my surprise at her admission. I almost blurted out, how did her parents react to her new lifestyle? She clamped up and shut me out. I assume that as someone studying in America, I was supposed to understand that there are aspects of one’s life that one does not share with one’s parents. You live a dual life. I had committed a mistake and I tried to amend it by having a stilted conversation about the trendiest places in Delhi. However, she could see that I did not know the modern Delhi and was not her ideal consumer
despite my Western education. I think that I finally put her at ease and she left after drinking her cappuccino.

As I sipped my weak ice-tea and contemplated the hot weather outside, I thought about Shabana’s efforts to acclimatize to the lifestyle of global consumers. Her choice of clothes and the cappuccino may not be suitable for the Indian weather, but they made her feel included and confident. In her effort to be included, Shabana had broken off with the community and moved out of the colony. She said she that she was not on good terms with her former neighbors and had no friends left in Zakir Nagar. However, on closer scrutiny, it seems that Shabana had not so much structured a break with her Muslim identity but had rejected her lower middle class status/identity associated with the place of her residence. She did not wish to be defined by the Muslim ghetto.

The next time when I went to Barista with Fahim and Faisal (on July 17, 2007) they ordered the huge ice-cream sundaes and looked uncomfortable. Unlike Shabana who had made an extra effort to look comfortable, they were stiff and self-conscious. The gulf that separated them with the world symbolized by Barista was perhaps much wider than in the case of Shabana. Fahim worked for a courier company and Faisal was a student working part time at a travel agency. Barista was not a place where they could afford to come, and they did not make any extra effort to try and fit in, unlike Shabana. However, as I sat through our conversation and glanced occasionally at MTV that played on overhead TVs, I could see a similarity in Faisal’s and the MTV’s video jockey’s hairstyle and clothes. As I mused over the realities of these young men from the middle class Muslim neighborhood, I wondered how strong was the pull of their unique history, culture, and language in the construction of their identity.
The importance of language has been stressed by Anzaldua (1987) who says, “so if you want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. . . . Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (p. 59). However, none of my informants in the age group of 18 to 29, including both Faisal and Fahim, could read or write Urdu. According to the local bookstore owner, the sales of Urdu publications were falling as the younger generation preferred to read in Hindi. As stated earlier, Lakdawala (2005) also notes that readership of the Urdu press is steadily decreasing. But, when I discussed with my informants the sorry state of the Urdu language, none of them shared my anguish nor was any one keen to elaborate on the issue. In fact, when I wanted to talk about the erosion of Muslim culture in Indian society, I was brushed aside rather brusquely by Sajida. The nostalgia of history, culture or language did not preoccupy Muslims youth of the Jamia area. They were abundantly immersed in the present and rather than lamenting the demise of Urdu, their burning ambition was to speak English fluently. In the next section, I present an example of the declining pull of Muslim culture and language in the lives of my informants.

**Muslim High Culture: An Elite Consumption Pattern**

In the winter of December 2007, in the Jamia area, I saw posters and banners announcing a concert by Munni Begum, an acclaimed Urdu *Gazal* singer. She was giving one of her rare performances at Ansari Auditorium at Jamia University. The concert was sponsored by *The Times of India*, India’s leading newspaper, and a well-known NGO. The charity event was covered in the newspaper and by television channels (see “Munni Begum,” 2008). It was an event for the elites of Delhi because only they could afford the passes (as tickets are referred to in India), which were in the range of Rs
500 to Rs 5000 (from about $15 to $120). Muslim high-culture may have curiosity value for upper middle class Indian audiences who now sample from cultures across the world (in the wake of globalization). However, this event was out of the reach of my informants as even the least expensive of tickets was too costly for them. But, what surprised me was the lack of interest in the event. Not one of my informants exhibited the slightest curiosity or desire to hear the diva Munni Begum sing in their university’s auditorium. I believe, the Muslim youth of Jamia had no interest in their high culture because participating in it did not improve their chances for inclusion in the upwardly mobile Indian consumer class.

This event brought to my mind a conversation that I had with my sister that exemplified how material conditions influenced perceptions about Muslims among the general population. My sister believed that there was no need for Muslims to be defensive about their identity or to feel persecuted or neglected because people were interested in Muslim culture and way of life. She said that her Punjabi friends wanted to know more about Muslim clothes, food, festivals, and other aspects of daily life. The curiosity about Muslims could be because there are no references to Muslim culture in the media. But, Aisha added that her friends wanted to know, about “normal” Muslims and not about those who live in “Delhi 6” (personal communication, January 2, 2008). “Delhi 6” is a derogatory term used to describe Muslims who live in the overcrowded old city of Delhi. The term evokes disparaging images of Muslims, including their tendency to live in segregated, congested neighborhoods that lack civic facilities and are disorderly and filthy, and where meat shops abound. While the “normal Muslims” according to Aisha’s Punjabi friends are those who feature in Pakistani dramas—“Ankahi, Ana, and
“Dhoop Kinare” (personal communication, January 2, 2008). The Muslims who feature in these Pakistani dramas (that were widely circulated on VHS format in the pre-satellite television days) are the feudal, superrich, and aristocratic Muslims of Pakistan. Aisha’s Punjabi friends may be disappointed to know that the “normal” Muslims in the Pakistani dramas are a slim minority even in Pakistan. These “normal” Muslims are even more of a rarity in India, where Muslims have fallen behind in key indices of education and employment (Sachar Committee, 2006).

India is a country where religion, language and culture used to be important markers of identity, but today, material factors are defining grounds for inclusion and exclusion. The above incident and conversation have shown that Muslim high culture can be aspired to but poor Muslims who live in ghettos tend to be erased from public consciousness. The theme of materialism may have taken focus away from the contentious issues of religion but it disempowers those who are economically weak.

Summary

The aim of the chapter was to analyze how the Muslim youth of the Jamia area, a secluded and distinct religious community, were responding to the upsurge of nationalism, and materialist consumerism in Indian media and society and the way these themes influenced their perceptions about who they are.

The responses of the Muslim youth of Jamia did not conform to the stereotypes that present Indian Muslims as being entrenched in their faith and opposed to change and modernization. Hall (1996a) claims that identities are constructed using resources of “memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth” and are a repository of inherited traditions, culture and language (p. 113). Indian Muslims can lay claim to rich traditions in

153
language, music, art and architecture. However, my informants did not foreground their heritage or their language in the construction of their identity. They did not indulge in reactive conversations about the sidelining of Muslims culture and identity in the Indian public sphere. Instead, the Muslim youth endorsed the nationalist sentiments as expressed in the film *Chak De India*.

The reason why Muslim youth of Jamia joined the chorus of nationalistic slogans is because their dreams for prosperity are woven around the concept of a vibrant and growing nation. The Muslim youth of Jamia needed to believe in the over-arching pan-Indian identity and in the promises of “unity, determination and hard work,” because ironically they stand to benefit when religious, caste, and linguistic affiliations are not given importance. They responded enthusiastically to process of globalization and liberalization as they have generated a working environment where there is greater stress on talent and ability rather than on religion or caste. The youth also felt that they had better chances to improve their conditions in an environment where the focus is on creation of wealth rather than construction of religious or cultural enclaves.

The experiences of Muslim youth of Jamia belie Castells’ (1997) claims that Islamic identities are constructions in opposition and/or resistance to forces of globalization and modernization and can be described as defensive convergence around “communal principles” (p. 11). Muslim youth of Jamia were stepping out of their mental ghettos. They were not structuring their sense of selfhood around communal ideologies despite the fact that they live in a Muslim ghetto. Muslim youth of Jamia were giving greater credence to their nationalist identity rather than to their religious identity. Their
experiences indicate that blanket assertion about any group, especially one as large and as
diverse as the Muslims, cannot be made.

The Muslim youth of Jamia were pushing into the background the role of history,
culture, language, and even religion in the definition their identity. However, the question
is this: would the youth of Jamia support nationalist agendas over religious identities if
the Indian economy were not growing at a rate fast enough to accommodate them in the
economic mainstream? Would they see themselves differently if economic circumstances
did not provide them the opportunity to develop their identity as consummate Indian
consumers? I propose that discussions about construction of identity and about
relationships between media and individual self-perceptions must be grounded in
economic and material realities.
Footnotes

1. Punjabi – People belonging to the north Indian state of Punjab are referred to as Punjabis. There are several established producers and directors in Bollywood who belong to Punjab. The trend in Bollywood cinema is that most male and female characters tend to have Punjabi surnames and names.

2. Team India – Popular slogan that refers to the Indian cricket team. It has become an inclusive term because media extensively uses it to refer to achievements of Indian corporate and other sectors in various other fields.

3. India Shinning – The promotional campaign used by the BJP before the 2004 general elections that hailed the success of Indian economy. The campaign grossly exaggerated the claims of economic growth and well-being, even as the BJP claimed the credit for the positive growth. The campaign back-fired as the reality on the ground was far removed from the glossy images of the promotional campaign. The BJP lost the 2004 elections, as there was a strong ground swell of reaction against its largely urban centric development programs.

4. Gazal – A poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain that is extensively used in Urdu poetry, celebrating love and loss.
CHAPTER 6: LIBERALIZATION, LIBERAL MEDIA AND ASPIRATIONS OF
MUSLIM WOMEN OF JAMIA ENCLAVE

The extensive spread of media technologies and concomitant explosion in media content are supporting the rising consumerism in Indian society (Appadurai, 1996; Khilnani, 1997; Mazzarella, 2003; Oza, 2006; Varma, 1998). According to members of Indian advertising industry (as quoted in Mazzarella), the true import of Indian audiences’ encounters with enticing and sensuous imagery of new life-styles and products is the release of suppressed libidinal energies and needs. Indians have done away with guilt, which was linked to consumerism in the former media starved and state driven Indian society. The advertising industry professionals believe that today Indians have a new attitude towards money and savings and they whole-heartedly endorse the slogan “yeh dil maange more” [this heart wants more], conceived by global aerated drinks giant, Pepsi. The abundance and richness of commodity imagery in the public sphere, which have allegedly liberated pent up desires to create a new sense of freedom among Indians, must have implications for the construction and representation of gender in Indian media and society.

Western feminist media theorists have long argued that there is a connection between consumerism and representation of women’s body, and it is reflected in presentation of women’s bodies as sexualized/eroticized commodities and in packaging of goods and services as erotic fantasies (see Mulvey, 1996 for overview). Postcolonial feminist media scholars have analyzed how increasing materialism in Indian society, following the opening up of the economy, is transforming the meaning and definition of gender in Indian media and society.
Parameswaran (2004a) notes that there is a stress on “feminine agency” in media narratives today, but their aim is to support “the ideological interests of India’s consuming class” (p. 346). The emergent ideal of India’s consumer class is a hybridized femininity—combining energy and enterprise of Western femininity with the care giving qualities of the Indian women. The new hybridized Indian woman is a competent consumer of global lifestyles and products that are now available in India (Munshi, 1998). Moreover, in the cultural and economic sphere of product advertising the trend is to foreground women’s needs (especially in the marketing of culturally sensitive products like contraceptives) and it poses a challenge to gender norms of Indian society (Mazzarella, 2003). Postcolonial feminist theorist Mankekar (2004) argues that Indian culture and values are being redefined by the “mutual imbrication of erotics and the yearning for commodities,” which has inundated the Indian public sphere with eroticized/sexualized images of women (p. 410). According to Mary John (1998/2000), as the Indian economy joins international markets, and global media flows become actively involved in extending/reorganizing the visual fields, there is a “globalization of sexuality,” indicating that there is an adoption of more liberal attitudes towards expression of sexuality (p. 368). However, though John agrees that the “sexualisation” of Indian women in the post-globalization era was imperative to recruiting them as consumers (p. 382), she believes that the heroine of Bollywood cinema today is not a passive receptor of male desires but “displays a responsive, active and at times disturbing sexuality” of her own (p. 378). In a similar vein Sunder Rajan (1993) suggests that women’s rejection of sartorial modesty and the of donning of bold and Westernized
attires, is a creative action and a sign of women’s emerging modernity, which challenges Indian patriarchal values.

Postcolonial feminist media scholars are unable to resolve (much like Western feminist media scholars) whether the sexualized representations of women are a sign of their empowerment or subjugation. But, the fact is that the new Indian woman has rejected many of the confining norms and stepped out of the conservative molds that formerly constrained her options. Urban Indian women are taking charge of their lives and expressing a greater initiative, especially as the expansion of the Indian economy has created many new job opportunities for women and given them greater financial control over their lives (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2007). The increasing purchasing power of women has pitched women as powerful consumers who must be addressed differently and it is no longer possible to show Indian women as passive, retreating, and diffident in media narratives (John, 1998/2000).

This large body of research has explored the links between transnational flow of media images, narratives and the construction and representation of Indian women in media. The research has concluded that the new hybridized construction of Indian woman in media, though serving capitalist interests are nonetheless expressions of woman’s agency (John, 1998/2000; Mankekar, 2004; Oza, 2006; Parameswaran, 2004a & 2004b). But, despite the contribution made by this body of research to our understanding of globalization from a gendered perspective, postcolonial research has not clearly explained the interactions between consumerism and construction of gendered identity. Wells (1998) says that although shopping is an important “gender-typed” activity, research in Western societies has also not clarified “what is the link between
consumerism, capitalism and gender” (p. 1)? Wells argues that consumerism was the motivating force propelling women to join the workforce and that there is need for investigation of both class and gender issues in the study of consumerism. The problem with postcolonial scholarship is that much of the research has focused on analyzing media spectacles and/or media texts. Research in postcolonial contexts have not foregrounded the experiences of women to understand how rising consumerism has influenced women’s priorities and decisions, and led to creation of new identities. This research aims to address this shortfall by looking at the way circulation images of new products and lifestyle are interacting with the perspectives of Muslim women and influencing their life options.

The lives of young middle-class Muslim women of Jamia Nagar are shaped to a much greater extent by traditional and conservative values (see Ahmed, 2008; Ahmed, 1983; Lateef, 1983; Roy, 1979; Vatuk, 2007). The sequestered life of these Muslim women is shaped within the enclave, which was created (among other reasons) to preserve the unique Muslim culture. However, today, the streets are littered with billboards and signboards carrying images of scantily clad women that beckon veiled Muslim women to subscribe to products and services; and television screens at home invite them to participate in life-styles very different from their own. This chapter explores how young women of Jamia are responding to the developments in Indian media and society, and whether the initiative and agency, ascribed to woman in media narratives, and expressed by urban workingwomen, inform the dreams, aspirations and future plans of young women of Jamia enclave (aged 19 to 25 years and raised into adulthood in the period following economic liberalization in 1991 when the media were
rapidly expanding). It seeks to understand how the young women manage the differences between consumerist lifestyles of urban women promoted by media with the lived ideology of their community and religion.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the transformation of Indian womanhood in media narratives and in the Indian society since liberalization. It then explores the everyday realities of young Muslim women in Jamia enclave and refers to the frameworks of religion and tradition that define appropriate gender roles, norms and behavior. The experiences of Muslim women, their relationship with media and their aspirations for the future are considered against the backdrop of the daily realities of Muslim society of Jamia enclave, including the apprehensions of young Muslim men about media’s influence on women. Finally, Muslim women’s plans and dreams for their future are analyzed in the light of changing socio-economic conditions in India.

Post Liberalization India, Indian media and the New Indian Woman.

Social analysts and columnists have noted that since liberalization of Indian economy a new iconography represents Indian woman in media (see John, 1998/2000; Mankekar, 2004; Oza, 2006; Parameswaran 2004a & 2004b; Runkie, 2005; and also see Ahmed, 2003 & Daura, 2005). This section looks at a few of the media texts that have been important markers in the road towards transformation and denote important trends in urban Indian society.

A media phenomenon, which took urban India by storm, in the years immediately following the opening up of the economy, was the beauty pageant—the Miss World and the Miss Universe contests. Indian contestants Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai won the two international contests in the year 1994 bringing instant recognition to the beauty
pageants, which were supported by global cosmetic companies. Mary John (1998/2000) writes that the immense popularity of the contests among young urban Indian women was just as surprising as the active support that staid middle-class Indian families extended to the young women aspirants in the contests. And this was despite the fact, as Parameswaran (2004b) points out, that the dubious modernity associated with the contests hurt Indian sensibilities, which stress women’s modesty and virtue. Conservative Hindu right wing groups and the Left wing socialists came together on a common platform to vehemently protest against the staging of Miss World contest in Bangalore in 1996. These initial protests have since petered out and the beauty pageants, packaged and presented as “a modern ritual of feminine achievement,” have become a regular routine (Parameswaran 2004b, p. 373). The Miss World and Miss Universe contests have not only showed Indian urban middle class women how to join the First World Order on the basis of hard work and individual talent, but the success stories of the Indian beauty queens have helped a Third World nation renegotiate “its marginal position in the global economic order” (Parameswaran, 2004a, p. 347).

The other media texts that marked the growing emancipation of women were the highly popular soap operas, in the early to mid 1990s, on the privately owned satellite channel broadcasting from Hong Kong, Zee TV. According to Oza (2006), shows like Hasratein (translated as Desires) portrayed financially independent and self-confident women who threatened the traditional Indian family structure by unabashedly seeking personal fulfillment and sexual gratification. These shows displaced from the public imagination pious women like Sita (wife of Ram in mythology of Ramayan telecast on state broadcaster Doordarshan in late 1980s) who upheld the patriarchal order. Oza says
that the strong women of the shows on Zee TV had much in common with the role models of modernity that were created by the state broadcaster in early 1980s. However, it must be noted that while the lead female character of the mini-series *Udaan* (meaning Flight), created by Doordarshan in mid 1980s, was an intrepid police officer who fought caste injustices, feudalism, and corruption in governance, the struggles of the leading ladies of popular shows on private satellite television, were in the personal realm. Today, dynamic female characters, who address deep-rooted social problems, may be largely absent in media narratives. However, if the vociferous demand of the Afghan clerics to impose a ban on Indian soap operas for spreading immorality is to be taken as a measure (see “Afghan defiance,” 2008; Burch, 2008; Wafa & Gall, 2008), then even an individual women’s search for a more fulfilled life can unsettle the dominant social order.

Today, the greatest challenge to male dominance in Indian society comes from the increasing financial independence of urban Indian women. The liberalization of Indian economy has created new employment opportunities for educated and trained urban women in the IT sector, export-oriented industries and the service sectors— including call-centers, airlines, hotels, and back-office operations (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2007). The nature of these jobs requires women to adopt Western attire and attitude (including accented speech), as they deal with international clients. Many of these jobs, such as those at call-centers, airlines and media, also call for unconventional working hours. For example, women at call centers must work through the night to serve clients in America where it is day. These working hours would have been frowned upon in traditional Indian society, but they have become a way of life for many Indian women.
There are significant changes in the lifestyles of urban Indian women, and consumer-marketing strategies further promote aspirations of young Indians to participate in discourses of Western modernity (Mazzarella, 2003). In fact the impressive growth of the beauty industry maps the desires of Indian women to participate in “Western metropolitan modernity” (Parameswaran, 2004b, p. 376). And according Runkie (2005), the beauty industry’s efforts to penetrate markets in small town and semi-urban areas have ensured that sexualized and assertive modernity of the new urban Indian woman has become the universal role model across India. In this regard, mention must also be made of the advertisement for KamaSutra brand of condoms (released in mid 1990s), which according to Mazzarella, was a landmark text for its treatment of sexual intimacy in highly conservative Indian society. The advertisement turned the discussion about sexuality, dominated by the need for population control, on its head. The tagline that declared “For the pleasure of making love,” and the explicit imagery (of a man and a woman in passionate embrace) came under heavy criticism. According to Mary John (1998/2000), the advertisement was not particularly brazen when compared to suggestive imagery and crude display of women’s bodies in Indian film songs (also see Bagchi, 1996). However, the advertisement’s stress on sexual intimacy between partners contested patriarchal authority of the traditional Indian joint family. Today, the furor that surrounded KamaSutra advertisement sounds shrill in retrospect as the narrative of many a new Hindi film and song have become even more daring in their depiction of sexual intimacy (see Ahmed, 2003; Daura, 2005).

In the contemporary Indian media women are presented as achievers and as self-assured individuals who seek their individual destinies. The creative expressions of
women, in successful careers, in love relationships, or in adoption of Western attire and attitude, test the values of patriarchal Indian society. The confronting postures of women appear credible as they are backed by a growing financial wherewithal, due to increased employment opportunities. In the light of these significant shifts in Indian popular culture and society, the next sections look at the life of Muslim women in the community of Jamia; and analyze how Muslim women internalize media narratives of consumption, pleasure and agency; and how they manage the difference between the values promoted by media that are restructuring perceptions about women in larger Indian society and the norms that govern their lives in the Muslim enclave.

Segregated Enclave and the Lives of Young Muslim Women

Life in Jamia Nagar is different from the rest of Delhi, because here Indian Muslims live in close proximity only with other Muslims. The dynamics of the living environment influenced the experiences of my informants. There was a greater stress on adherence to Muslim traditions because living with a population composed only of Muslims means that there is no exposure to alternative lifestyles or ideologies. A modest behavior is emphasized for women and there is a constant surveillance of them, especially of the young women who are approaching marriageable age. The community’s watchful gaze was focused on the young women and as mentioned earlier everyone was interested in where they were going and what they were doing. The parents carefully monitored their interactions, especially with members of the opposite sex, as they were worried that a negative evaluation by a neighbor would damage the young woman’s reputation and hence her prospects for marriage. Such a constant vigilance restricted women’s physical space and limited their repertoire of experiences.
For example, Fawzia confessed that she does not even go out into her balcony. She said, “mujhe aacha nahin lagta” [I don’t like it] (personal communication, August 19, 2007). Fawzia was implying that she does not like to be observed by so many strange people. Sajida, Fawzia, Nazneen, Nabila also reported that they rarely step out of their homes alone, other than to go to the university or to special tutorials classes. At other times when they visited friends and relatives or went shopping, they were accompanied by a member of their family. My experience of arranging a meeting with Fawzia at her home illustrated that parental authority, especially the father’s, played an extremely significant role in framing the experiences of young Muslim women of Jamia. I had wanted to visit Fawzia at her home, and she had suggested that Saturday would be a good day, as she did not have class and she would be at home. Then, she called a little later to defer the meeting to Sunday. She excused herself by saying that her mother had a doctor’s appointment. I offered that I could come by when they returned, but she was reluctant. On Sunday, when I reached her home, I realized why Fawzia had shifted the meeting. Fawzia’s father is at home on Sundays. I believe that he had wanted to meet me and approve of me before I could be allowed to meet with Fawzia and the rest of her family.

Incidentally, this was not very different from the way my father had behaved though I am not as young as Fawzia. On August 19th when I mentioned that I was leaving for Jamia Nagar to meet Fawzia, my father offered that he would drop me as he was also going to Jamia to meet a relative. I knew that there was no one whom he had to meet on such a short notice, but this was his oblique way of ensuring that he knew where I was going. Neither Fawzia nor I protested because deference to authority was maintained.
through filial love. However, the affection and concern for the family’s honor also creates a sense of inner vigilance, as this incident, which involved Fawzia and me, illustrates.

*Deportment of Muslim Women: The Tendency for Internal Surveillance*

The event was a wedding in Sameena’s family and I had gone to fetch Fawzia from her home so that we could travel to the venue together. It was about 6:30 in the evening on December 15, 2007, but since it was winter, the early evening seemed like night. As the car turned into the main lane of Zakir Nagar, the road on both sides was occupied by street vendors who were selling everything from vegetables to clothes. But, I was interested in the small cart selling *seekh kebabs* (made of ground meat that is wrapped around skewers and cooked over charcoal fire) and *rotis* (round bread made from leavened flour). A wonderful aroma emanated from the small humble cart and a group of at least 15 boys surrounded him. As the car was stuck in the traffic on that narrow road, I wanted to get out and inspect the street and maybe even talk to the boys who were standing at the cart. However, I could not because I knew I would shock the boys. I was also worried that someone who knew my family or me might see me here. They would think that because I study in America, I no longer respect the norms of the Muslim society. So I just sat in the car and waited for Fawzia.

Fawzia and I had agreed to meet at the intersection of the two main roads that run through the neighborhoods of Batla House and Zakir Nagar. It was difficult to take the car right up to her home, as the arterial roads of the unplanned residential area are unmarked, potholed and narrow. Fawzia was late and I was happy with the opportunity to watch the busy street at night, especially as there were such few occasions to do so. In the street, as far as the eye could see there were only men of all ages. They were there at the
stores that lined the road, and at the carts that were selling odds and ends. In the teeming crowds that passed, there were only a few women and they were mostly middle-aged women who were dressed in full hijab (headscarf that covers a woman’s hair and neck). I finally spotted two young women who had entered a shop selling woolen shawls. They were accompanied by their mother, and all of them were wearing the hijab. I wanted once again to get out of the car and speak to them and extend my circle of acquaintances. But, I did not because I knew that they would not like to talk to me. They would think of me as someone bold as it was night, and I was moving about unaccompanied.

Fawzia finally arrived after nearly twenty minutes. She was escorted by her older brother. He looked into the car, perhaps to check that it was really me who was waiting for Fawzia and not someone else. He checked out the driver, and then helped Fawzia into the car before wishing us good-bye and walking away. I enquired what had held up Fawzia. Fawzia said that she started from her home after I had called to tell her that I had reached the cross-section. I was under the impression that Fawzia would already be there and waiting for me. But, Fawzia started from her home only when I reached the intersection. I was not surprised by this. I could see that Fawzia would have been hesitant to wait, dressed up to go for a wedding, at the cross-roads and in a crowd composed almost entirely of men. She would not only be the center of attraction but also be grist for gossip, and she definitely wanted to avoid that. My situation may be different from Fawzia’s in many ways, but I too shared her concerns. Neither of us wanted to be in a situation that could be considered inappropriate by the Muslim community, as our families would hear of it, much to our chagrin and to their embarrassment. Each one of us, despite the differences in age, education, and exposure to the world, was very aware
of the unspoken rules of our society. As Muslim women, we constantly worried about being observed, and we practiced an inner surveillance of our own behavior and retreated from public places. The tendency to retreat from the public spaces sometimes means that Muslim women give up their legitimate rights for the fear of being critically judged by the Muslim community. For example, Muslim women of Jamia do not even go to the University canteen to get a cold drink.

*Muslim Women and Public Spaces*

Jamia University is a co-educational institute and both young men and women have equal rights to public spaces. Yet, none of my female informants would venture into the canteen; they would rather suffer their thirst in the Delhi heat. The canteen was an exclusively male enclave. The young men not only enjoyed the subsidized food and drink; they also used the tables in the courtyard to socialize. However, Fawzia, Sameena, Sajida, Nazneen, Nabila, Farhat and even Ms. Khan, a faculty member, brought their lunch from home. They also carried their water, which of course soon became warm.

Swati, a non-Muslim girl and a classmate of Sameena and Fawzia, complained to me that on numerous occasions she had requested her friends to go to the canteen and to eat biryani, the delicious rice and meat dish. But, her friends never complied; hence Swati was unable to taste this Muslim specialty, which the boys enjoyed for lunch every day. She was rather irritated but even she did not dare to go into the canteen alone.

However, even I could not use the Jamia University canteen which I had assumed would be a central place to meet my informants. For example, I had arranged to meet Nabila and her brother Zafar, at the canteen. Over the phone, Zafar agreed that he and Nabila would meet me there the next day. However, I ended up waiting alone in the
spacious courtyard surrounded by a cluster of young men, and I felt very uncomfortable and confused. Finally, Zafar arrived but alone and he guided me to the staff-room where Nabila was waiting. He said rather proudly, "Nabila kabhi canteen nahin jati" [Nabila never-ever goes to the canteen] (personal communication, August 13, 2007). Zafar was telling me that Nabila chooses to withdraw from settings where men and women can mix freely and this, according to him, was appropriate behavior for respectable Muslim women.

Zafar’s remark reminded me of another occasion, when I had clearly embarrassed Faisal by suggesting that we could wait for Farhat, his instructor and a faculty member, in the canteen. Faisal and I waited for Farhat for a long time but she never joined us. All the while that we waited for Farhat, Faisal looked very uncomfortable. He later explained that in Jamia it is difficult to interact with women as friends and colleagues because of the mindset of the community. He said that people view all interactions between men and women in terms of a romantic involvement (personal communication, July 3, 2007). Hence, as even women faculty members did not venture into an area where men and women could interact freely, and as talking to men in public spaces clearly embarrassed them, I finally gave up the idea of meeting my informants in the canteen. I also got used to carrying a water bottle, just as my informants did.

There are two facts that stand out in this episode. First is the pride with which men like Zafar endorsed behavior that they saw as Islamic and as appropriate for women. The other is the way women conceded their rights without any opposition. The life of young women, which is so closely scrutinized by members of the community is comparable to Foucault’s (1977/1995) description of the panoptic prison. The submissive
behavior of Muslim women would suggest that they were unmoved by the changes that are sweeping Indian society. The next section reflects on this assumption by analyzing Muslim women’s consumption of media and their relationship to media narratives.

Media, Celebrity Role Models and the Ambitions of Young Muslim Women

As just described, young Muslim women of the Jamia area live a sheltered life. Their contacts with the world were controlled. Media, especially television, could provide them with a more expansive view of life. However, none of my informants reported that they spent an inordinate amount of time watching television. Compared to young men of Jamia, their access to mobile phones and Internet was also limited. Young women did not visit Internet cafes, and only a few of them had access to a computer and Internet at home, just as only a few had mobile phones. These items were considered a luxury in middle class Muslim homes, especially for women. My informants’ access to new Bollywood releases was channeled through television because few of them could afford to visit urban multiplexes. Instead, they watched pirated versions of the films on their local cable networks, or viewed the films when they were released on satellite television channels.

The television-viewing patterns of my informants can be described as scattered on weekdays, with no real routine or favorite program line-up. On weekdays, the young women reported that they watched television to relax and to unwind after attending the university and before settling down to covering the next day’s assignments. They watched, for an hour or less, snippets of news, cartoons and music television. Their viewing choices were light because even news is packaged as entertainment. Indian news channels devote substantial time-slots to coverage of celebrities (see Peer, 2007).
However, it is interesting that music television channels that feature songs from Hindi films and promotions of the new Bollywood films played in the background as my informants went about their work. Music television was the preferred choice of programming for young Muslim women and men, even though songs from new Bollywood releases are filled with eroticized and sexualized imagery of Indian women. Hence, within the close confines of their homes, young Muslim women had access to images and behavior options that would be considered highly inappropriate for Muslim girls. Moreover, as the television was kept in the common area, everyone in their homes would know what my informants were viewing. And when I inquired if their parents had any objection to the music television programming, Sajida replied, “What is there to mind in those programs, there is nothing to mind. . . . I can watch anything in front of my mother” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, January 5, 2008). Even Zain, a young man from Jamia Nagar, said that he could view the Hindi film songs in front of his parents as they were “pretty sanitized” (personal communication, January 11, 2008).

None of the young women were habitual viewers of soap operas, though they reported that their mothers watched soap operas with great regularity. Sometimes they felt inclined to watch with their mothers, as it was a way of spending some time together, but they were not involved in the narratives. According to Sameena, “they [referring to soap operas] are so unrealistic. How can you believe that in India a man will accept a woman, who has two grown up children, to be his wife? But they show this women marrying so many times” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). Sameena believed that the Indian soap operas were far removed from the reality of Indian society.
According to Fawzia, their mothers watched the soap operas because of “the big houses and the clothes. They get to see all the things that they do not have in their real lives” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Fawzia’s keen observation illustrates that though my informants comprehended the escapist nature of media narratives, they did not subscribe to them.

My informants were drawn to celebrity culture and to the world of glamour and wealth as shown in their favorite celebrity lifestyle and talk shows like Page 3 and Coffee with Karan. The world and the people depicted on these shows are light years removed from their real life. However, these young women were not mere voyeurs of a distant world but avid pupils. According to Sajida, Page 3 taught her about proper deportment and demeanor of high society. She elaborated, “If you have charm and if you know how to talk, you will be surrounded with people” (author’s translation original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Sajida was saying that in addition to teaching her about the mannerisms of high society, the celebrity shows also taught her attractive manners that would win her friends and make her popular.

My informants’ other favorite programs were talent shows that were clones of American Idol. On weekends Fawzia, Sameena, Nazneen and Nabila regularly watched the various versions of American Idol that were playing on Indian channels—Zee TV, Sony, and STAR TV. These programs were showcasing Indian talent in singing and dancing and were packaged as grueling tests of skill and endurance. The shows were programmed head-on (played simultaneously) on the three channels on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. One of the shows Nache Baliye was a copy of Dancing with the Stars and it featured couples who were married or were dating. The couples were shown
dancing together, holding and touching each other intimately. My mother often commented that some of the dance postures were suggestive, crude, and vulgar. She always frowned if my nieces, aged 5 and 8 years old, tuned into the show. But Fawzia reported that she loved the show. Again I asked her how she managed to see it as the television was kept in her parents’ room. Fawzia said that her parents did not mind, and besides they were doing other things while she watched the show. Both Fawzia and Sameena had also seen the Bollywood film Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna (when it was released on SONY TV), which has several intimate scenes, even though the single television in their homes is kept in their parents’ bedroom.

My informants were also avid viewers of Bollywood films, and as mentioned earlier they mostly watched the pirated versions of new releases on their cable network or viewed them when they were released on popular channels Zee TV, Sony or STAR TV. During 2007 three films topped the popularity charts, Chak De India, OM Shanti Om and Jab We Met (Kazmi, 2007). My informants were absolutely fascinated with the female lead of the film Jab We Met (translated as When We Met). They could not stop talking about Kareena Kapoor and her character in that film. Jab We Met is the story of a girl who runs away from home to marry the man of her choice. She travels to her boyfriend’s town in the company of a man whom she had met on the train. However, after many adventures when she reaches her destination, her boyfriend rejects her. She is left with no option but to live alone, as she had cut-off all ties with her family, until her family rescues her and the man she had met on the train marries her. My informants were so enamored of Kareena’s character that they said that this was the best movie they had seen that year and they could see the movie again and again. According to Sameena “Every
girl should be like Kareena, she is so free, not scared of anything. Mam you must watch this movie” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). I did watch the movie on their insistence and was quite surprised that they could appreciate someone so bold and fearless. Sajida said, “Every girl must be so self-independent, [and] she should fear nothing” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). Hence, my informants, the young Muslim girls, admired the lead character in *Jab We Met* who had the courage to defy authority, chart out her independent path, and fulfill her dreams.

The viewing choices of my informants showed that they admired programming, which projected life-styles and values very different from their own (such as celebrities shows, Hindi movie songs, and talent shows). They also admired characters who were independent and showed a disregard for tradition; and they did not criticize programming trends for increasing immodesty in media. None of my informants mentioned that any of the shows on television were offensive or that their parents objected to their viewing choices. However, their own behavior was completely different from the narratives and the actions that they endorsed.

Young Muslim Women’s Dreams of Self-Reliance and Independence

My informants, the young women of Jamia, irrespective of the differences in their family backgrounds, the level of education of their parents, and whether they were born in Delhi or if they migrated here from small towns and villages in Bihar, nurtured great ambitions for their future. They also seemed to have clear plans of how to achieve their dreams. The ambitions of Fawzia, Sajida, Nabila, Nazneen, and Sameena, the sheltered Muslim girls may not be as bold as Kareena Kapoor’s but they were dramatically different from the dreams nurtured by their mothers. It is extremely unlikely that their
mothers ever expressed their desires as directly as “I want to be rich,” which is exactly what Sajida pronounced (personal communication, August 3, 2007). The imagination of their mothers probably did not even take them as far as “I want to be a successful working-housewife,” which was Fawzia’s expression of a desire to have a family and a career (personal communication, July 31, 2007). Their mothers lived their lives in accordance with norms and expectations for Muslim women. They remained veiled, looked after their homes, and except for Sameena’s mother (who is a teacher), none of them thought of a life outside their home. Today, if any of their mothers supported the young women’s desires to train for a job and career, they considered these efforts at best as a safety net against uncertain times, and as poor alternatives to a good marriage. For example Fawzia’s mother said, “It would be better if she [Fawzia] spent the time studying, as her course is quite demanding. But, she must do housework too, because it is important to keep a good house. What is a home where food is not cooked well?” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, August 19, 2007).

However, the young women of Jamia enclave were desirous of joining the workforce, because they felt paid work allowed them to take charge of their lives. Each one of them felt, what Nazneen put into words, “everyone has to be self-independent” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). According to Fawzia, “apne pairon par khada hona bahot zaroori hai [it is very important to stand on your own two feet]. To be self-independent is very important” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). Nabila who is veiled and has a similar background as Nazneen said, “I want to work. I know that if I get to work I will rise very high in my job. I know because whatever I have done till now, I have done very well.” (author’s translation original in Urdu, personal
communication, August 13, 2007). Sameena was more blunt, but also bold and pragmatic, she said, “I want to have a job and be independent so that no one can boss over me” (personal communication, December 9, 2007). However, it was Sajida who expressed herself most succinctly. She said in a matter of fact manner, “I want to be rich” (personal communication, August 3, 2007). Being rich was important even to Nabila even though her conversation seemed to indicate that she was motivated by the higher needs of fulfilling one’s potential. Nabila also admitted that one day she wanted to earn a lot of money (personal communication, August 13, 2007). Soha was the only one who was drawn to glamour and excitement rather than financial independence. She said, “I want to be an air-hostess” (personal communication, December 20, 2006). Air-hostess is a profession which is considered inappropriate for a Muslim girl as it requires travelling and living alone. Soha, nevertheless, interviewed for the job. She was accompanied to the interview by her best friend, who was an air-hostess. However, she admitted that she did not inform her mother as her mother would not have approved and possibly even forbidden Soha from going for the interview.

In the dreams of self-reliance and personal achievement of my informants, I could hear the echo of media’s celebratory tones. Sajida, who loved to watch celebrity shows, was deeply involved in stories of self-made millionaires. For example, Sajida admired Shahrukh Khan, the Bollywood star, because he overcame the odds of his humble beginnings and made his fortune. According to Sajida, “woh age bad raha hai, aur sirf apni waja se” [he is moving ahead, and only on the basis of his own capabilities]. Fawzia whole-heartedly agreed with Sajida and said completing Sajida’s sentence, “woh itna good-looking nahin hai par phir bhi usme bahut sari qualities hain jaise ke intelligence,
wisdom” [though he [Shahrukh] may not be good looking, but still he has so many qualities such as intelligence, wisdom] (personal communication, December 9, 2007).

Sajida also admired her cousin. She said, “pehle unke pas kuch nahin tha par ab bilkul society wali life hai” [he had nothing before, but now he knows how to live in society] (personal communication, December 9, 2007). Hence, Sajida respected her cousin because like her favorite Bollywood actor, her cousin too struggled against many difficulties and became successful. The phrase “society wali life” referred to a life filled with middle class amenities and it pointed to Sajida’s fascination with high-society life featured on celebrity shows and her desire to emulate that life.

The role model for Sameena was Barkha Dutt, an intrepid reporter and a Jamia University alumnus. Dutt achieved her celebrity status after covering the Kargil War in 1999. She was the sole female correspondent who went into the inhospitable terrain of the high-altitude battlefield and reported the fiercely fought but brief war between India and Pakistan. Fawzia, Nazeen, and Sajida shared Sameena’s admiration for Dutt, especially as she was not afraid to travel to the war front even if she was a girl. My informants’ fascination with fearless women is as interesting as their absorption with personalities.

Mankekar (2004) based her ethnographic observations on lower middle class Hindu women of Delhi, and states that gazing upon commodities in advertisements and shop-windows was a way for these women to seek other worlds, other people and their lives. But, my informants were disinterested in talking about commodities, although media is filled with images of products, attractively packaged and displayed. They even refused my offer of cosmetics, moisturizers or perfumes from America and like children
they were content with a gift of chocolates. My informants focused on personalities and through them they were introduced to other worlds and other lives. They also tried to emulate the mannerisms of their role models. On several occasions, they said that they admired me even when I pointed out that I was not the ideal Muslim girl. Firstly, I was not married and then I was too independent. Nonetheless, they assured me that they wanted to be like me because I was so confident and I spoke so well. I understood that it was my fluency in English that they looked up to. My informants desired, in the words of Parameswaran (2004a), to become modern and to escape “the stagnant margin of India’s vernacular languages” by speaking fluently in English (p. 359). Moreover, an ability to speak English would allow them to enter the new transnational worlds shaped by media and a globalized economy.

But, even as my informants desired to extend the repertoire of their experiences, Muslim society places an inordinate amount of stress on circumscribing women’s behavior, and in ensuring that their chances of a good marriage are not hurt. I could not resist teasing my informants. I asked them why was it important to be independent when the ultimate goal was to get married. Fawzia was a little hurt by my flippancy. She replied, “I, too, want to become somebody in life. Just because I am a girl, it does not mean I do not have any dreams. Like men have dreams, I, too, have dreams to do something in life” (author’s translation original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). However, despite Fawzia’s fervent assertion that women were equally desirous of joining the new world of opportunities, the approach of my informants was hesitant and halting.
This fact is very evident in the way Muslim girls appropriated fashion. According to Farhat, today there is a beauty parlor at almost every street corner of Jamia Enclave when there was none, a decade ago (personal communication, August 9, 2007). The Muslim women of Jamia Enclave are drawn to new fashions and trends, and they have been seduced by marketing strategies of the burgeoning beauty industry. But they have not yet adopted the Western attire, which is becoming common in urban areas. They still dress in traditional Indian salwar-kameez and cover their head with the dupatta or else wear the veil. But, often I would see a young Muslim woman sporting a scruffy jean jacket over her kameez thereby establishing the discrete influence of the world outside. Yet their attempts at experimentation were at best cautious. For example, Soha, who is the most fashion conscious among my informants, was always dressed in non-descript traditional Indian clothes, like all other women, whenever I saw her at Jamia University. But, when she visited me at my home, she had exchanged the Indian pants for cropped jeans and wore a well-fitted (but still long) top instead of the loose and modest Indian kameez and her large dupatta had been replaced by a slim scarf. Soha believed that nobody at my home would notice or comment on her attempt to construct an eclectic mix of the East and the West in her attire and personality, though this behavior would have attracted attention in the Jamia area. Hence, she was more adventurous. Soha’s actions show that she was comfortable in experimenting with new options only to the extent that they did not invite any controversy within the family or community.

So, my informants admired assertive and intrepid women. They were moved by narratives that stressed personal potential and achievement. However, their outward behavior was guarded and careful. There is a discrepancy between what they said and
how they behaved. The next section looks at the role of religion in the socialization of
women to understand the inconsistency between practice and rhetoric.

Religion, Patriarchy and Aspirations of Young Muslim Women

One Friday afternoon, my informants and I prayed together. This incident allowed
me to explore how religious ideology shaped their approach to life. Friday prayer is an
important religious obligation for Muslims. Men are mandated to offer Friday namaz
(prayer) in a jamat—that is in the company of other Muslims. All his professional life,
my father, like other Muslim men, used his lunch break to seek a mosque and offer his
Friday prayers. I know of no men in my immediate circle who would miss the Friday
namaz, though they may not be so conscientious at other times. Hence, that afternoon
most of the boys had gone to the various mosques to pray. Women in north India do not
go to the mosque, but they pray at home. As a student and as a professional in India, I
rarely got a chance to perform the Friday prayer, as going back home was not an option.
However, my informants told me that it was possible for women to say the namaz in their
university. Sameena and Sajida had permission from their instructors to use the faculty’s
common room for Friday prayers. They said that there were even prayer rugs in the
cupboard. However, they could not find any prayer rugs that afternoon and as they
needed a clean space to kneel and bow down in namaz, they decided that they would
stand atop the clean table and pray. They invited me to join them, but I found the option
awkward and rather funny so I demurred. I said that I would say my prayers at home but I
would join them and recite my prayers while sitting on a chair. As a consequence, I got
an unexpected opportunity to watch as they prayed.
I noticed that Sajida and Sameena performed the *sijda* (the act of prostrating before God) differently. Sameena performed the *sijda* exactly as it is performed by men—going down on the knees and then bowing with arms extended forward and the forehead touching the ground. In this position, the spinal cord is absolutely straight, the feet are curled at the toes and your seat is raised about half a foot above the ground. However Sajida’s posture was different. She did not sit on her haunches rather she folded her knees beneath her and when she bent forward she was still sitting on the ground. Her posture looked more modest and elegant as compared to Sameena’s as it did not draw attention to any part of her body. However, at home when I tried to imitate the pose, and I found it to be extremely uncomfortable. It is common knowledge that as one bends down in *sijda*, blood flow to the brain increases; and when the brain is suffused with oxygen, there is a moment akin to bliss in human consciousness. But, this moment of bliss would be denied to Sajida, because she was not prostrating in the right manner. My mother told me that most North Indian Muslim women pray like Sajida, and even she was taught to pray in the same manner because it was considered immodest to raise your seat above the ground and bend forward like a man. However, she did not teach me and my sister to pray in that manner as she had observed that women in the Middle-East (where I grew up) performed the *sijda* exactly like men.

At a later occasion, I brought up the issue of the difference in Sajida’s and Sameena’s way of doing the *sijda*. I pointed out that women in the Middle-East (where Islam originated) prayed like Sameena and there were many benefits in performing the *sijda* that were denied in the posture, which Sajida followed. Sajida listened to me politely and said, “this is the way my parents have taught me to pray. The *namaz* is
different for girls and it is different for the boys... Sameena was praying wrong” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Sameena did not correct Sajida, rather she said, “I was praying like that because my churidar [pants] was too tight” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Priyanka, their friend who is not a Muslim and who was overhearing the conversation, interjected and said, “there are many differences in Islam among boys and girls. Girls have a lot of limitations” (author’s translation, original in Hindi, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Neither Sajida, Sameena nor Fawzia commented on Priyanka’s observations about Islam. So, I asked them if they would like to change the way they prayed because it was not fair to deny women the right to be natural even when they are before God. My informants drew a line at this question and they kept silent. I share a very friendly and warm relationship with Sajida, Sameena, Fawzia, and Nazneen, however they did not allow me to question the implicit rules of their religion. Finally, Sajida retorted, “ladkiyon ke liye har cheez, bahut si cheezen, mushkil hai. Yeh to chooti si baat hai” [everything, so many things are complicated for women. This is such a small incident] (personal communication, December 9, 2007). Sajida had said that small differences in religious obligations between men and women were immaterial, and it was not important to challenge these issues when the world posed other tougher challenges.

For example, Sajida’s difficult test was to speak English fluently, as it is an essential qualification for those seeking employment. I watched her struggle over the one year that I met with her. She was trying hard but there was only a little improvement in her speech. Her limitations were that she did not attend an English medium school, and in
her family and social circle there were few people who could speak English. Her only teacher was the hostess of the show Page 3. Sajida understood that it would not be easy for her to realize her goals because she said, “I don’t think too much about the difficulties that lie ahead for me. And how will I achieve what I want to achieve because if I thought about it I won’t be able to do anything. I would get disheartened” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 9, 2007). Sajida believed it was more important to focus her energies on pressing issues like becoming better educated and securing a job rather than attempting to change equations within the sphere of her personal faith.

However, even if my informants believed that their religion and culture did not block their growth, they feared to take any action that would hurt their relationship with their family and community. I present the example of Nabila, an exceptionally good student. She was the brightest student in the diploma program in civil engineering and she secured admission to the civil engineering degree program after clearing the highly competitive entrance exam (conducted at an all India level). Her older brother has not been able to pass that same exam even after trying for two years. Yet, despite her capabilities Nabila said that she does not dream of going abroad to study because her family will not allow her. She cannot discard her veil, or get on a plane and go so far away from her family. She believed, “it is more important to have good relations within the family. After all what you achieve is for your family. If your relationships are good, you are more satisfied, you have better results” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, August 13, 2007). Nabila preferred to contain her dreams rather than upset her family. Even Soha, who had attempted to push the limits of Muslim
culture and her family’s values by dreaming of becoming an air-hostess, was training to
become a kindergarten teacher. She did not say if she would interview for the job of an
air-hostess again. Shabana was the only person among my informants who did not defer
to Muslim cultural norms. She wore Western clothes, and experimented with lifestyle
options like visiting pubs. I believe this was so only because she was married and she
had the support of her husband, who now represents her nuclear family.

My informants did not challenge the dictates of either religion or culture because
they are embedded within familial commitments and obligations and thus are not open to
debate. They also did not reflect upon the inconsistencies between their actions and their
desires and between values of Muslim society and their ambitions. Rather, my informants
hoped to realize their dreams within the structures imposed by religion, community and
family and without creating a conflict in any of the three realms. However, it may not be
possible to do so, because conversations with Muslim men revealed that they were
apprehensive about the changes in Indian society.

Media, Fashion, Freedom, and the Anxieties of Muslim Men

On several occasions, in my discussions with Muslim men, I heard their critical
views of women. The young men also believed that media was responsible for much that
was not right about women’s conduct. For example, when Faisal introduced me to his
friends Fateullah, Maroof, Abid, Haider and Nadim (on July 3, 2007), and we started to
converse about media’s influence on society, all of the young men jumped in with their
unanimous opinion that “media is spoiling women” (personal communication, July 3,
2007). They were silent about how media could be affecting young men; but as far as
women were concerned, they were convinced that media was affecting women
negatively. Although, they used the word “women” that could refer to Indian women in
general, but as the conversation progressed I understood that they were actually talking
about Muslim women.

Fateullah said, “girls want to be free, they now want to do everything” (personal
communication, July 3, 2007). The word “everything” is broad and unclear and it was
difficult to understand the meaning. However, the sarcasm in his tone indicated that he
had intended to say that women now desired sexual freedom. According to Haider, “girls
more than men want to do fashion” (personal communication, July 3, 2007). Haider used
the term “fashion” to indicate something more than just a style of clothing. He was
implying that young women were inclined to ape not only the attire of models and
celebrities but also their immodest behavior. I interjected in the conversation and
reminded Faisal about what he had said on a previous occasion.

Faisal, who is less excitable as compared to his friends, had said to me earlier that
risqué fashions, promoted by media, were a threat to Muslim identity. He had said that
interactions with media were creating a difficult situation for Muslim women, because
Muslim women did not have the freedom that media took for granted. His words were,
“aurton par bandishen hai” [women have limitations/restrictions] (personal
communication, December 20, 2006). I used the word bandish, which Faisal had used to
refer to restrictions, and asked Fateullah and Haider if they also believed that the values
which media promoted were complicating Muslim women’s lives because Muslim
women could not exercise their choice freely. All of the young men, except Faisal, took
affront and they criticized me for using the word bandish. Maroof said that it is written in
the Quran and the Hadith that women must cover themselves from head to toe. He said
that women are allowed to show only their hands and that they must wear a veil. I asked if these were the exact words of the Quran, to ascertain the difference between religious dictates and cultural norms. However, Fateullah did not answer my question. Instead he only repeated what Maroof had said that women must be veiled. He emphasized that there could be no debate about the veil. He also strictly admonished me and said, “aur phir bandish kaha apne” [again you used the word restrictions] (personal communication, July 3, 2007). According to Fateullah, I cannot refer to the guidelines of Islam which were meant for women’s own good as restrictions; even though he did not clarify if these were the explicit instructions of the Quran, as written in a particular sura or verse. The young men ignored the finer point of my argument and kept insisting that women must not wear revealing clothes or “do fashion” (personal communication, July 3, 2007). I had to clarify from my mother what were the exact words of the Quran. According to her, the Quranic verse says that women must be modestly dressed in public, cover their chest, and not attract attention to their person. There is no mention of the strict injunctions pointed out by the young men.

The young Muslim men had referred to fashion and immodesty in the same breath. And they associated media, fashion, freedom, and immodesty in a complicated manner. Even Abrar Cha, who is older, mentioned in his conversation that he has advised his daughter not to be too friendly with the girls from Old Delhi (referring to a concentration of Muslim population in north Delhi). He expressed his disapproval of the young women of Old Delhi by saying, “Look at the burkhas [long black coat with veil] they wear, so stylish, with embroidery and designs. And it reveals their figure” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, December 4, 2007). His statement
implied that Muslim women were prohibited from aspiring to images of beauty, glamour, and freedom that media promotes. It also implied that Muslim women should look dowdy, as a well-dressed, well-groomed woman will be considered immodest (even if she is dressed in a burkha and is covered from head to toe).

However, appropriation of fashion has become a necessity for Muslim women especially if they aspire to join the workforce. The contemporary professional world in India requires good personal grooming and a smart dressing style. The professional world reflects the changes wrought by globalization. A Westernized presentation style has become mandatory for women in the service industry, in multinational corporations and in media and advertising. For example, when Nabila went to interview for a job in her burkha, her instructor Ms. Khan was worried that Nabila would fail to impress her prospective employers. Ms. Khan was anxious not only because Nabila’s attire loudly announced her Muslim identity, but also because Nabila’s burkha was unattractive and old fashioned. Ms. Khan told me, “mein usse aisa burkha lake duungi jaisa aurten Turkey mein pehenti hain” [I will buy Nabila a burkha similar to what Muslim women in Turkey wear] (personal communication, December 10, 2007).

However, even as it was becoming essential for women to be well-groomed, men opposed fashion essentially because they resisted women’s agency. For example, Fateullah who had disdainfully said that Muslim women now wanted to do “everything,” asked me, a relative stranger, point blank, the very first time I met him, “what did you gain by becoming a journalist? A woman is the queen of her home” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, July 3, 2007). He not only dismissed my achievement without any qualms, but also, in his opinion, put me in my place. While
Haider said, “meri biwi ko kam karne kya jaroorat hai, agar mein theik kamat hoon” [why should my wife work if I earn well] (personal communication, July 3, 2007). These statements reveal that men were anxious about women’s assertion of their individuality either through their appropriation of fashion or through acquisition of financial and other independence.

However, despite men’s critical attitude towards women and media’s influence on women, they were not impervious to the values projected by media, as the following incident reveals. I was given an opportunity to address a rare forum where young Muslim men and women got a chance to talk to each freely, when Ms. Khan invited me to address her English conversation class at Jamia Polytechnic (on July 31, 2007). It was a group of nearly 60 people and only eight of them were women (a clear indication that few Muslim women were enrolled in professional and technical courses). I started the meeting with questions about their favorite television shows, movies, celebrities and other related matters. But, even as we were talking about media, my informants veered the conversation toward issues that were important to them. The girls began first, by protesting shyly and later vehemently, about young men’s behavior. They said that men did not treat women as normal human beings. They were upset that men teased and taunted them all the time. However, the boys retorted and said that they teased and troubled the young women only because they wanted to be friendly with them. A few of the young men who were very agitated said that the girls were selfish and rude and they did not have the courtesy to exchange pleasantries with their classmates. I inferred that the young men were desirous of having a friendly and easy relationship with members of the opposite sex, just as they see on television and films and in other areas of Delhi. I
believe the young women were not totally averse to the idea because they continued to talk to the young men, even if it was to protest and to complain. And I was invited by both young men and women to come again to their class and to help resolve the issue. Their instructor agreed to hold the session as everyone was participating and conversing in English.

However, despite two marathon sessions I could not broker peace between young men and women. The young women ignored the overtures of friendship from the young men. I believe the young women understood that the situation was filled with contradictions. For example, Shahir, one of the male participants in the discussion, sent me an email and criticized his classmates who wanted to have friendly relationships with the young women. Shahir’s email message said,

We are getting more influenced by Western culture which is creating a havoc like state in our conservative culture. . . . This is all happening [referring to the problems between young men and women] because they are all watching TV, movies, Internet, [so] they all want to implement these things in their lives. Which is certainly impossible. . . they are not caring that mingling is forbidden in Islam. (personal communication, August 1, 2007)

Shahir’s email said that young men and women who wanted to experiment with new lifestyles would be condemned. The restrictions in Muslim society in Jamia Enclave are at variance with what is happening in the rest of Delhi. The interactions with media are increasing the complexities in the relationship between Muslim men and women, and they are also creating new tensions with members outside the community. The incident, which involved Fawzia, Sameena, Swati, their non-Muslim friend and classmate, and me
showed that young Muslim women’s outlook was poles apart from that of other Indian women. The event revealed that the way Muslim women internalized media’s construction of the new Indian woman and reacted to these images was different as compared to their non-Muslim classmates and friends. The young Muslim women’s perceptions about correct deportment, dress and mannerism for women not only set them apart from other Indian women, but also created a contest between their Indian identity and their Muslim identity.

Young Muslim Women and the Liberal Indian Society and Economy

Fawzia, Sameena, Swati and I were walking down the streets of Jamia Enclave, stopping at shops selling clothes and other knick-knacks. Our intention was to cross over into Friends Colony market where I was taking them for lunch. Fawzia had taken permission from her mother to go to Friends Colony, which is considered as outside her safe limits. The streets in Jamia Enclave were filled women and children as the schools had just closed and many mothers were out on the streets fetching their children from school buses and taking them back home. Swati, who is not a Muslim, was probably also looking, like me, at the women who were wearing full veil on that hot and humid summer afternoon. She must have observed the self-conscious manner in which Fawzia, Sameena, and I were conducting ourselves, and the way other Muslim women were making themselves as unobtrusive as possible on the streets. Most women were out of their homes only for urgent business—like picking up their children from bus stops or buying provisions for their home. Our leisurely amble down the street was attracting the attention of the residents. The scene so affected her, that suddenly, in the middle of the street, she turned around, and burst out to Sameena and Fawzia, “How can you live like this”
(author’s translation, original in Hindi, personal communication, August 23, 2007). She was obviously referring to the watchful gaze that follows Muslim women. She added that if someone ever asked her to convert to Islam, she would never do it. The vehemence in Swati’s outburst took me aback. However, what was more surprising was that both Sameena and Fawzia for once took offense. An argument broke out. Sameena insisted that Swati could not say that their lives were restricted. She said that they had as much freedom as Swati to do what they liked. Fawzia on the other hand did not deny that the norms in Muslim society were different. However, she was clear that the guidelines that her parents laid down were because they loved and cared for her. The squabble continued as we crossed over to the restaurant in Friends Colony market.

The overhead television sets in Nirula’s (an Indian fast-food chain of restaurants) were playing fashion television, FTV. Swati, who was still piqued with Sameena and Fawzia, pointed to the models and to the Western clothes that the models were wearing. She said that Sameena and Fawzia would never be able to dress like that in their life. She added that if Fawzia wanted to work in a multinational corporation, which was Fawzia’s ambition, then she would have to change the way she dressed, otherwise she would either not be hired or be thrown out. Fawzia disagreed with Swati and said that jobs were not about clothes but about competence. Fawzia said, “Sonia Gandhi [widow of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India] is Italian, but she always wears Indian clothes,” and Fawzia and Sameena said in unison, “no society is changing the way media showed it” (author’s translation, original in Urdu, personal communication, August 23, 2007). In this way, Fawzia and Sameena discarded the Westernized representation of womanhood and sought role models among Indian celebrities (like Sonia Gandhi) who epitomized the
traditional Indian woman. They also believed, like Sajida, that their religion and background did not hinder their prospects.

However, there is truth in Swati’s observations. Muslim girls of Jamia Enclave cannot opt for many career choices. For example, Soha could not get the job of an air-hostess because women in the service industry are expected to be confident, self-reliant and possess strong interpersonal skills. However, as my informants live a sheltered life, strictly monitored by their parents, they do not develop the essential skills needed for the service industry. Similarly, Sameena may admire the broadcast journalist Barkha Dutt, however when I asked her if she could ever see herself in Dutt’s shoes, Sameena had no answer. Instead, she turned around and asked me, “why didn’t you become like Dutt” (personal communication, July 31, 2007). She meant that since Dutt and I had graduated from the same communication program at Jamia University, why was my career path so different. I had to admit to Sameena that my upbringing within a Muslim family did not prepare me to exhibit such independence. I was just too inhibited. I could not go to the war front accompanied by an all male crew. Nor could I envisage sleeping in bunkers with soldiers and sharing my personal space with men. Such behavior would be considered as highly inappropriate by my parents and extended family. This admission brought us closer as they felt that I adhered to similar cultural norms. However, it also showed me that my informants not only deferred to authority of religion and culture but they also gave credence to those who appeared to be doing the same.

Therefore, are the bold assertions of my informants, that women have as much right to dream as men, or their unabashed desire to pursue wealth, mere rhetoric? I believe that the young women’s articulation of their dreams served a limited rhetorical
function. These statements were their way to introduce themselves as young women who were aware of the changes/developments that were taking place in India. But, their expressions were not mere rhetoric, because they made the young women feel that they had not been left out and that they too belonged in the larger picture of national growth. The desire of my informants to be included must be considered against the backdrop of changes that are taking place in the Indian economy.

*Consumerism and Aspirations of Muslim Women*

As mentioned earlier the ascendance of a market economy in the wake of liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy has lead to increased employment opportunities and to new career options. However, the dismantling of socialist state structures and increased privatization has also lead to increased job insecurity, and that too at a point of time when the phenomenal expansion of media is associated with rising consumerism in Indian society. The dreams and aspirations of young Muslims are taking shape within these complex conditions of hope and apprehensions. Muslim women were thinking of independence and self-reliance, although they had not internalized their own reasons, because, as Fawzia and Sameena finally admitted, “everything in life is so expensive now” (personal communication, August 20, 2007). Fawzia said “children want so many things today” (personal communication, August 20, 2007). She also added that children’s education has become so difficult and costly. Both Fawzia and Sameena felt that it was necessary for both husband and wife to work so as to be able to provide to their family all that the family needed and wanted. The concern for future generations reflected their deep insecurities about their future. It also indicated that they were deeply affected by the consumerist ethos promoted by media and advertising, even though none
of my female informants had showed any interest in acquiring or possessing material things. Nonetheless, the stress on commodities as markers of social inclusion created anxieties. They were afraid that their inability to afford commodities, which their children might desire, will further their experience of social marginalization. Their concern to provide good education to their children also showed their preoccupation with employment for the reason that education defines one’s ability to find employment. Education and employment were also the enabling conditions for becoming a part of the group of successful consumers.

Media have created new desires and aspirations for many. However, exposure to media had made these young women of Jamia conscious of their inability to possess certain commodities. They were moved by the need to overcome a lack. Therefore, pragmatic reasons rather than unbridled desires for independence or self-actualization motivated young Muslim women to join the work force.

Summary

The way of life in the segregated Muslim enclave is very different from the lifestyle of the globalized middle class non-Muslim Indian society, and especially the life of the women. Urban middle class non-Muslim Indian women enjoy new freedoms that were absent in the lives of my informants. The boldness that is ascribed to women in media narratives is far removed from their daily existence. However, the young women did not criticize media representations that flaunted the norms of their community. This is not because they were showing greater tolerance, but because criticizing the representations of new Indian womanhood would mean commenting on the freedom that they aspired to. Instead, my informants used several strategies to reconcile the differences
between Indian society and cultural norms of the exclusive Muslim enclave of Jamia. Firstly, my informants denied or underestimated the difference that existed between their world and the world outside. Secondly, they also looked for celebrity role models who held more conservative values in order to bolster their stance. Thirdly, my informants preferred to curtail their dreams rather than increase the dissension between what they wanted and what was possible. But most importantly, they were perceptive enough to realize that it was their weak educational and economic capabilities, which were the real barriers to attainment of their dreams rather than their religious ideology. Lastly, the theme of materialism that weaves through all media narratives, including media’s representation of the new Indian woman, subtly influenced my informants. Their reasons for thinking of a profession had more to do with the fact that today there is no job security. It is tied up with the changes in the economic structures, including the fact that life has become more expensive in India. Hence, young Muslim women of the Jamia area wished to find employment and have an independent income for economic reasons rather than to realign gender relationships or to restructure personal equations within the family or community.

Lastly, although Muslim women do not question the norms of Muslim society, women’s active participation in the workforce and their rising economic independence will inevitably change the dynamics of the Muslim families. The young Muslim men were already anxious about these changes and how their status in Muslim society would be affected as a result of these developments.
Footnotes

1. Satellite television channels in India do not practice overt censorship. As a result, images that are more suitable for adult viewing and in restricted viewing condition of cinema halls, bounce off television screens in bedrooms and living rooms (Bajaj, 2007).

2. Journalist Ravindran (2008), has investigated the lifestyle of a small but significant portion of financially independent urban women who are setting the trend for adoption of a more radical Western lifestyle. These women, called “Swinggin’ Janes” by Ravindran, challenge the patriarchal and traditional Indian conception of womanhood. They reject qualities of submissiveness and modesty and break taboos about women’s consumption of alcohol in public by patronizing bars. According to statistics quoted by Ravindran, these urban women are contributing a 25 per cent to the annual 15 per cent growth of alcohol industry in India.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research explored the everyday life of Muslim youth of the Jamia area in New Delhi to understand how their interactions with media, in a globalized Indian economy and society, were shaping their identity. The youth of Jamia were among the first generation to be born after economic liberalization, and in a society marked by a rapid expansion of media. The youth shared with the members of the older generation experiences of being physically removed and cut-off from the cosmopolitan Delhi. But, the youth’s sustained interactions with media technologies of satellite television, cell phones and Internet increased their connections to the world far beyond their discrete neighborhood. This research investigated how mediated experiences were woven into the identity of Muslim youth, and influenced their self-perceptions as members/residents of a distinct community, as citizens of India, and as gendered individuals.

Voices from the Field: Key Observations

The media interactions of my informants created a sensibility, which I describe as halting steps towards modernity, where the youth step out of their community, but not quite. The older generation of Jamia Enclave expressed their link to their community in emotive terms of *apna mahol*. They had chosen to live in an area, separated from the rest of Delhi, so that they could freely practice their way of life, including religious rituals, and preserve and perpetuate their *mahol* and traditions. However, the youth of the Jamia area had lost the ideological attachment to their community, which their parents and the early settlers of the Jamia area professed. These youngsters did not have the same anxieties about continuity of Muslim culture nor did they feel the need to preserve the unique Indian Muslim culture and heritage. Their increased repertoire of mediated
experiences with the world outside their community had diluted their attachment to Jamia. Even their conceptions of what constitutes Muslim *mahol* had become tenuous because Muslim youth were unable to read and write in Urdu. According to Hasan (2005), an extensive body of Urdu literature is devoted to clarifying the intricacies of *adab* and *akhlaq* (translated as good manners and righteous conduct) that were the core of Muslim *Sharif* (urbane and upper class) culture and *mahol*. *Adab* and *akhlaq* were the “lubricant of social relations,” which sweetened personal exchange and softened conflict (p. 2). Hasan says that nineteenth century writers like Nazir Ahmed were concerned about preserving Muslim community’s esprit de corps as British colonial rule rapidly established itself. The writings stressed and elaborated on values associated with *adab* and *akhlaq* that were central to Muslim cultural ethos. As Muslims were the ruling class, these values were the defining characteristics of urban north India, so much so that even British colonial officers had to be well-versed in them. But even as the Muslim high urbane culture steadily collapsed in the years following the end of the Mughal rule in 1857, these values and morality were preserved in myths, poetry, stories and other forms of literature. The Muslim youth of Jamia were far removed from Muslim ethos and other ideologies because of their inability to access Urdu literature. The decline of the Urdu press was a clear sign of the youth’s increasing disconnect with the myths, stories, and literatures that were a repository—of and which reverberated with—unique sensibilities of the Muslim *mahol*. In an age of unprecedented media growth in India, Muslim youth would be unable to recognize even Iqbal, the voice of the resurgent Muslim nationalists of the twenty century, let alone Mir or Ghalib, the raconteurs of the dying Mughal empire.
The Muslim youth of Jamia only desired to end their isolation and be part of the larger Indian society. Meyrowitz (1985) and Appadurai (1996) would argue that this is but an outcome of media’s ability to dislodge the sense of space and to create communities with no sense of place. However, the experiences of Muslim youth do not unequivocally support either of these arguments. If on the one hand media had increased their connections with Indian society, then conversely media had also generated a heightened awareness of the negative perceptions about Muslims as rigid, retrograde, and untrustworthy. The older generation had the option to retreat into their closed society in order to escape discrimination; but the youth had to confront it twenty-four hours daily and seven days a week via media’s open window.

However, despite their greater awareness of the factors that perpetuate isolation of Muslims, the youth of the Jamia area were reluctant to engage in conversations about the negative portrayal of Muslims or the lack of space accorded to Muslim culture in the Indian public sphere. The youth adopted a strategy of silence. Contrary to the commonly held belief that Muslims are defensive about their identity, the youth of Jamia avoided reference to their Islamic identity, and they did not emphasize their religious or cultural distinctiveness. In fact, the Muslim youth did not have a problem with emphasizing their national identity as opposed to their religious identity. They did not object to the problematic proposition in Chak De India’s narrative that the diverse Indian identities, based on different religions, languages, and/or ethnicity, must be subsumed under a singular definition of the Indian identity. The Muslim youth endorsed media’s nationalistic rhetoric captured in phrases of “Team India” and “India Shinning,” and professed a positive outlook towards liberalization and increasing privatization.
This is not to say that Muslim youth had been overwhelmed by Indian media’s nationalist fervor or that they had been coerced by the extreme nationalism of the radical Hindu right wing political parties which had given Muslims, according to Metcalf (1995), the choice to either assimilate or leave. Media’s constant reiteration of the Indian economy’s potential was able to convince Muslim youth only because the economy was expanding and there were enough jobs to accommodate Muslim youth’s dreams for prosperity and well-being. So also, the Muslim youth were desirous of joining the fold and to assimilate, because they wanted to be part of the rising prosperity of the Indian nation. The choice of Muslim youth of Jamia to foreground their national identity rather than their religious identity must be understood with reference to concrete changes in Indian economy following liberalization and globalization.

The development of Indian economy and society were also the reasons underlining Muslim youth’s silence on the contentious issue of the increasing invisibility of Muslim culture and identity in the media and the Indian public sphere. The complex interactions between media, society and an expanding economy have created in India an aggressive consumerist culture, and wealth has emerged as the most important marker of identity (Das, 2001; Varma, 1998). At the same time the expanding private sector and the multinational corporations in India are creating a work ethos based on meritocracy (Varma, 2004). These trends have made religious and caste affiliations unimportant in the professional work environment. In the former state controlled regime, caste and religion were critical for securing jobs. Muslims believed that as members of a religious minority population, they had been discriminated against. Hence, if in the globalized and materialist Indian society religious and cultural markers were being overlooked, Muslim
youth were reluctant to invoke these identities, as such a move would harm their prospects. The emerging identity of Muslim youth of Jamia was tied to evolving economic and social changes within Indian society. Muslim youth of Jamia were comfortable sublimating their identity in the pan-Indian identity as long as their aspirations for assimilation in the economy were fulfilled.

However, the aspirations of Muslim youth of Jamia to participate in Indian society as equal citizens were not to be as easily realized, as suggested by my respondents. After all, the values of globalized mediated urban Indian society and those of the Muslim community as expressed in the Muslim mahol were not always in consonance. For example, the conflicting standards were contested around perceptions of gender roles. Young men and women had different opinions about appropriate gender behavior. The young men were apprehensive that Muslim women might be inspired by the confident, assertive, and sexualized persona of the new Indian woman presented by media. The new Indian woman, according to Oza (2006), is represented in sharp relief against the earlier imagery of the oppressed, backward, and burdened Indian woman. Most of my informants, even those young women who came from the most conservative backgrounds, nurtured hopes of being gainfully employed and financially independent. But, the plans of my informants were only marginally inspired by the politics of women’s liberation.

The young Muslim women expressed their dissatisfaction with the Muslim men’s behavior (especially of their classmates). However most of my informants did not critically analyze or truly challenge the power relationships between Muslim men and women and within Muslim families. Feminist media scholarship has pointed out that the
construction of the new Indian woman undermines feminist rhetoric in favor of consumerism, and that the new Indian woman serves the interest of advertisers and manufacturers (Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2006; Sunder Rajan, 1993). Although young Muslim women of Jamia may not have been perceptive enough to deconstruct the underlying materialism in images of the new Indian woman, they were motivated to step out of their sequestered life and to find employment so that they could participate as consumers in materialistic Indian society. It was their fear of being left out from the middle class that propelled their plans. The young Muslim women wished to avoid the situation of being marginalized on three counts—of their gender, minority status and economic status, instead of only the first two noted by Muslim scholars such as Lateef (1983). Therefore, it was a rising consumerism that underlined the evolving identity of young Muslim women of Jamia.

This study highlighted that the relationship between media narratives and emerging identities can only be understood when larger structural forces—of economy, polity, and transnational flows of finance and technology have been taken into account. In addition, this research that focused on a select Indian Muslim youth population help address scholarship’s oversight of Indian Muslims. The experiences of Jamia’s youth counter arguments that Islamic identities are inert, impregnable and inherently opposed to modernization, liberalization, globalization and change (see Barber, 2004; Castells, 1997; Huntington, 1993; Rushdie, 2004). The research on Muslim youth of Jamia also shows that Islamic identities cannot be conceptualized in a generalized, amorphous mold, without reference to specific and the particular conditions of the different nations that Muslims inhabit.
The history of Muslims in north India can be traced back to the Afghan and Turk invasions starting in the 10th century leading up to the zenith of Muslim culture under the Mughal emperors (Spear, 1970). North Indian Muslims predominantly follow the Sunni denomination of Islam, though there is a concentration of Shia population in centers like Lucknow. However, the Sharif Muslim culture was a composite creation of both Shias and Sunnis (Hasan, 2005). After partition of the country both of these communities became isolated. The times when the Indian economy was growing at an extremely low rate were particularly harsh for minority populations. The Muslims, especially as loyalty to the nation was considered suspect after the creation of Pakistan, were sidelined in the processes of development and growth (Brass 2003; Hasan, 2002 & 2004). In response to their marginalization, the Muslims withdrew into themselves and they were seen as backward and isolationists (see “Education only way,” 2006). At the time of this study, when conditions in India were more conducive and Muslims had a chance to join in the march of progress, the Muslim youth of Jamia were willing to give less stress to their Islamic identity and privilege their Indian identity. Neither of these situations supports the view that Islamic identities are projects against modernization. Muslims were forced to take an isolationist position because it was difficult to participate in the modernization initiatives; but when the Muslim youth of Jamia saw hope for their participation, they expressed an enthusiasm for benefits of globalization. The findings of this research have highlighted the importance of material conditions in the construction of identities in mediated, globalized societies. The experiences of Muslim youth also contradict essentialist arguments that define identities as pure, inherited legacies, impregnable and fixed in time.
In the course of the fieldwork of this research, I was drawn towards scholarly inquiry positioned in opposition to narrow essentialist views of identity. Cultural studies and postcolonial scholarship discredit the rigid and fixed conceptions of identities, which have been invoked to describe Islamic identities. Cultural studies and postcolonial scholarship define identities as being in the state of constant evolution. Hence, they highlight the fluidity, flexibility and plurality of identities (see Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1996a, 1996b &1996c). Moreover, postcolonial scholarship has extensively explored emerging identities in globalized mediated societies and many authors have proposed that hybridity best describes the notion of identity in the globalized world-order (Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996a, 1996b &1996c; Garcia Canclini, 2005; Kraidy, 2005). I grappled with these empowering concepts proposed by postcolonial scholars during my fieldwork. The research findings showed that identity of Muslim youth was not being overwhelmingly defined by their inherited legacies of religion and culture that are considered important by scholars advocating the essentialist views of identity (for example Huntington, 1993). The question before me was, could I apply the enabling concepts proposed by postcolonial scholars to explain the experiences of minority Muslim youth of Jamia. However, I found that I could not do so. In the next section I elaborate on the key concepts of postcolonial scholarship and I would like to close this study with a discussion of why postcolonial scholarship proved unhelpful to me.

Postcolonial Scholarship and Identity

Hall (1992), the founder of British cultural studies and an important voice of postcolonial scholarship, says that the question of identity is being debated in social
sciences as a corollary of the process of social change. According to him, stable identities that have hitherto defined the world are giving way to fragmented identities that challenge the concept of the unified subject. Cultural studies and postcolonial scholarship predominantly argue that modern identities, which are being decentered and dislocated in the process of globalization and modernization, are subject to certain power equations (see Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1996a, 1996b &1996c). The question of power is important because it raises the issues of belonging and citizenship with reference to race, ethnicity, and/or religion. However, the charge against cultural studies and postcolonial scholars is that they stress the role of cultural factors alone in the creation of power equations. The inadequate attention to economic and structural factors by scholars interested in globalization and power inequalities leaves them open to criticism that postcolonial scholars have nothing worthwhile to say about identities (Dirlik, 1999; Eagleton, 1999; Grossberg, 1996). India has undergone some fundamental, social, and economic changes. The exploration of experiences of minority Muslim youth of Jamia provided me an opportunity to reflect on the role of structural changes in the construction of identities, and to evaluate whether cultural studies and postcolonial scholarship’s main concepts—cultural hybridity and hybrid identities—are relevant to 1) to our understanding of contemporary postcolonial realities, and 2) to the experiences of minority/marginalized populations in mediated and globalized societies.

Postcolonial Hybridity and Hybrid Identities

Hybridity and hybrid identities have emerged as powerful concepts within postcolonial scholarship because they invalidate tendencies to construct knowledge and project the world in wholistic spheres. They question such essentialist views which give
rise to a fetish for pure origins, fanning racist tendencies and a polarized world order.

Spivak (1995 & 1999a) and Homi Bhabha (1994) made significant contributions in the
development of the concept of hybridity. Their intention was to deflect criticism that even
postcolonial scholarship, following Said’s (1979) theory of Orientalism, was given to
seeing the world in binary opposition between the East and the West. Bhabha (1994)
elaborated on hybridity, translation, and mimicry to explain encounters between different
cultures in terms other than conflict and tension. He says,

> The borderline engagement of cultural difference may as often be consensual as
conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign
the customary boundaries between private and the public, high and low; and
challenge normative expectations of development and progress. (p. 2)

The concepts of hybrid identities and cultural hybridity are important also because
the hybrid is conceived as the creative third space and a site of resistance (Bhabha, 1994;
Turner, 1974). According to Bhabha, one of the ways that a hybrid construct is expressed
is via translation, which involves mimicry of the dominant culture by the
dominated/colonized culture. Translation displaces the power of the original by the very
fact that original/dominant can be mimicked, imitated and transformed (often playful and
mischievously) by those whom it challenges and attempts to dominate. Hence, “mimicry
is at once resemblance and menace,” as it borders on mockery when the “disciplinary
gaze” of the “disciplinary double” (meaning the colonized subject) threatens the
“civilizing mission” of the colonizer (p. 86). Therefore, Bhabha (1994) proposes that
hybrid identities are empowered identities as they are created in such acts of imitation
and appropriation, disavowing authority, and defying absolute boundaries between the
colonized and the colonizer. The practitioners in the creative third space are postcolonial writers like Rushdie, whom Bhabha presents as the ideal hybrid subject and a “man in translation,” existing in the “in-between” state, balancing his Muslim legacy and his immigrant status in the Western world (p. 223-229). He holds up Rushdie’s work, *The Satanic Verses*, as a challenge to tradition, authority, and the notion of pure origins, and as exemplifying the indeterminacy of the liminal spaces that hybrid identities, migrants, and diasporas occupy. Rushdie, according to Bhabha, practices the politics of hybridity because “hybridity is heresy” (p. 225).

However, critics like Aijaz Ahmed (2006) are not convinced. According to Ahmed, the basic idea of hybridity as a condition of a world where distances are collapsing is simple enough; but the problem with Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity is that it privileges the experiences of the migrant intellectual whose “ideological location” is that of the “male, bourgeois onlooker. . . . not only the lord of all he surveys but also enraptured by his own lordliness” (p. 287). According to Mongia (1996), “Bhabha’s celebration of hybridity has led to privileging of migrancy and exile which ostensibly confer a greater critical edge to the migrant intellectual” (p. 7). For example, when Bhabha (1994) proposes that immigrants like Rushdie embody his notion of hybridity, he fails to acknowledge Rushdie’s social or economic capital or his prowess of Western scholarship, which allows him to belong to and to move between two different cultures.

*Hybridity in Media Studies*

Despite its shortcomings, scholars studying media and globalization value the concept of hybridity as the creative third space that destabilizes hegemonic discourses.
Kraidy (2005), who explores hybridity in the sites of production and consumption of global media, argues that Tele Chobis, a copy of a BBC show produced by Mexican television, is the perfect hybrid text. He reasons that Tele Chobis subverts the copyright regime to create a new genre; and the act of appropriation reflects the indigenous (read Third World) producer’s agency, in the face of domination of media markets by multinational (read Western) corporations. But, Kraidy fails to see that the program produced at a point of time when Mexican companies were spending their energy and their monies in trying to enter the US markets, was not an expression of agency but the buckling under of Mexican producers to budget constraints. Mexican producers cut cost on original productions to funnel funds towards marketing operations in order to survive in the highly competitive Western media markets.

Parameswaran (2004a) has investigated media’s construction of hybrid Indian women’s identity in her study of global beauty contests. She describes the Indian contestants to the Miss World contest as displaying the perfect balance between Indian values of “respect and humility” and the “‘bold’ glamour of upper-class Western femininity” (p. 362). The process of achieving this ideal balance involved grueling language training sessions, to perfect English diction and pronunciation; a thorough body and face make-over; and also intrusive surgical procedures to attain the prescribed Western standards of beauty (p. 353). This example illustrates that there is nothing smooth about construction of hybridity and that “hybridity in contemporary urban India is inextricably linked to class-based cosmopolitanism of the urban middle classes” (Fernandes, 2000, p. 622). Postcolonial feminist media studies are of the view that the hybrid subject is shaped at the juncture of media consumption and media inspired
consumption of goods and services, and that the agency of the hybrid subject is often expressed through the acts of consumption (see Grewal, 1999; Fernandes, 2000; Mankekar, 2004; Munshi, 1998; Oza, 2006; Parameswaran, 2004a).

Therefore, the tendency in media reception studies is to focus on experiences of the middle class and highlight their appropriation of globalized media narratives (see Juluri, 2003; Kraidy, 2005; Mankekar, 1999b & 2002b). Another trend, in keeping with postcolonial scholarship’s focus on migrancy, is to analyze how diaspora populations read national media texts, like Bollywood films, to construct their hybrid identities (see Mankekar, 1999a; Punathambekar, 2005; Sharpe, 2005). According to Khair (2001), the assumption is that when people are confronted with new or alternate cultural orders through media or otherwise, their response is to mimic and appropriate or to practice nomadism that involves moving between different cultural sensibilities depending on the situation. Khair criticizes this approach because it neglects pertinent issues of “otherness, conflict, and alienation,” which often underlie formation of identities (p. 93). Khair’s argument is that the Indian academics did not focus on the concept of alienation because they did not want to draw attention to their own alienation in Western academia; and they preferred the idea of hybridity as it empowered their position. According to Ahmed (2006), the idea of hybridity has been reduced to “a carnivalesque collapse and play of identities” that does not illuminate distinctions of location or politics, gender, class or race and plunges into an undifferentiated state without explaining how education and class frame experiences (p. 286).

The arguments of the critics questioning the relevance of postcolonial scholarship rests on the fact that investment in postcolonial scholarship has been made by scholars,
who have left the postcolonial nations behind. I propose to examine the debate between
the postcolonial scholars and its critics by referring to the experiences of Muslim youth of
Jamia, a minority and financially less privileged population in globalized, consumerist,
mediated society.

Hybridity and Identity of Muslim Youth of Jamia

The Muslim youth of Jamia were eager and willing to join the cosmopolitan and
consumerist Indian society. But, does their enthusiasm warrant that they be described as
hybrid subjects even if it helps discount the stereotypes that Muslims are rigid and closed
to modernizing, globalizing impulses? The dominant and prevailing view of hybrid
identities is that they are able to appropriate, imitate, translate and access other worlds
mainly through acts of consumption. The youth of Jamia do not have the ability to
consume because of their lower middle class status, although they aspire to consume.
But, their aspirations do not qualify them to be hybrid citizens. They could only be
considered hybrid subjects if they could appropriate different cultures by accessing goods
and lifestyles of the other worlds. In addition to financial wherewithal, another condition
necessary for being part of a globalized urban Indian society is fluency in English
language. Muslim youth wanted to speak in English, and they reviewed English language
programming, (for example travel and lifestyle shows produced by both global and
Indian producers), to a greater extent than perhaps the older Muslims. They, thereby,
exposed themselves to a transnational world possibly without intending to do so.
Exposure to this world stoked their desire to gain greater competency in English and
stimulated their dreams to work for multinational enterprises.
However, the ability to be fluent in English is linked to education, which in turn depends on whether one has attended elite public schools where English is the medium of instruction. The youth of Jamia did not attend elite schools, as high school fees limit admission only to the wealthy. Hence, they did not speak English fluently, and were not the eligible hybrid subjects. The youth of Jamia were unable to translate, navigate, and move fluidly between cultures as Bhabha’s (1994) ideal hybrid subject Rushdie is able to. In fact, the Muslim youth, lacking in financial or cultural capital, will find it difficult to move out of their ghetto in spite of their hopes and the Indian economy’s growth potential. The experience of hybridity belongs to those who have language proficiency, education, employment and monetary capacity to choose one world or the other. My informants were drawn towards cultural values of the global Indian citizen, but they could not activate that identity or imitate the global citizen’s life-style because of their various personal shortcomings.

Moreover, can the attempts of Muslim youth to poach on, to use Certeau’s (1984) term, media and media personalities be considered as empowering experiences? For example, can I read in my informants’ tendencies to learn the English language by mimicking the presenters of English language programs as a challenge to the hegemony of the dominant class? Can their interactions with media be perceived as the creative third space of resistance? Because I ask these questions with reference to real events and experiences of a relatively impoverished population, it becomes clear that postcolonial scholarship’s delineation of hybridity is largely celebratory. It is hard to perceive the attempts of Muslim youth to get by in the highly competitive world and to survive in these grand terms. Their acts of translation are not subversion of the dominant order but a
more complete suppression of their own indigenous idiom. This is especially clear in my informants’ choice of foregrounding their national identity rather than their cultural or religious Muslim identity.

The findings of this research also showed that interactions with media constructed different experiences of hybridity for Muslim men and women. There were also differences in the articulation of resistance to global media narratives. The Muslim women viewed the options presented by media, especially those associated with the new Indian woman, more positively. They not only admired the personal characteristics of the new Indian woman, as reflected in their enthusiastic endorsement of Kareena Kapoor’s independence in the film *Jab We Met*, but they were enabled and even empowered by the role models of successful and strong Indian woman. They imitated their skills such as speaking in English fluently. The narratives of new Indian woman also influenced their dreams and provided them directions for shaping their future and exploring new career options.

The Muslim men, on the other hand, resisted the images of the new Indian woman. This construct of womanhood challenged their hegemony in Muslim society. Hence they resisted the appropriation of narratives of the new Indian woman by Muslim women. However, these very young men were not averse to watching bold and sexualized images of women on MTV and in late night movies on HBO. They also avidly consumed songs from many new Hindi films where representation of women was sexual and titillating. Ironically, men combined strategies of resistance to the disempowering hybrid images with a consumption of these very same images.
Moreover, how does one account for their silences and their withdrawal from open discussions about their Muslim identity? This is the one concern that renders accounts of hybridity in postcolonial scholarship completely irrelevant. I read my informants’ strategy to maintain a silence over contentious issues as a sign of their great desire to participate in Indian society and not upset the apple-cart by calling attention to their grievances. However, it could be a sign of their alienation from the larger Indian society, which they are themselves unable to comprehend, address or articulate. There are few references in postcolonial scholarship to instances of alienation, which could be of help in explaining the experiences of Muslim youth (Ahmed, 2006; Khair, 2001).

However, the hybrid is a powerful concept that resists the fixing of people and cultures in dominant frames. The concept could be revived by drawing upon other accounts of hybridity, so that it becomes pertinent to contemporary conditions, including the situations of neglected and isolated populations, in postcolonial nations and also in the First World.

*Alternative Accounts of Hybridity*

Bakhtin’s (1975/1986) analysis of the evolution of language in the stylist form of the novel is an alternate account of hybridity that offers important lessons. According to Bakhtin, when contending tendencies of two language systems come together as single hybrid utterances in a novel, it is not a smooth encounter or a fluid movement. His definition of a product of “an encounter . . . between two different linguistic consciousness, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” takes note of opposition, struggle, stratification, hierarchy, and
unequal conditions between two contending tendencies (p. 358). A hybrid construct, according to Bakhtin’s, involves both appropriation and resistance.

Another important description of hybridity is given by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969/1977 & 1974). According to Turner (1974), the hybrid inhabits “a liminal space if ever there was” that is disconnected from one state but is not yet connected to another (p. 87). Turner used the term “liminal space” to describe Becket’s site of refuge, the abbey, which was disconnected from the secular world but was not connected to paradise, which awaited Becket’s martyrdom. Hence, a liminal space is a highly uncertain situation marked with anxieties and tensions. Turner (1969/1977) developed the concept of liminality to describe rites of passage of Ndembu community of Zambia. Turner says that the characteristic of the subject in the intervening or “liminal” period is ambiguous because the subject is passing “through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming state” (1969/1977, p. 94). The attributes of “liminality,” “liminal personae” or “threshold people,” as he calls them, must necessarily be ambiguous as,

These persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. (p. 95)

Turner’s definition of hybridity comes closest to describing the conditions of Muslim youth of Jamia and their adventures of halting modernity. They have moved out of their mental ghettos because of their interactions with media, but they are yet to be assimilated into the new world of increasingly materialistic Indian society. The Muslim
society was once highly conscious of the fact that their cultural ethos, especially the
decorum for day-to-day deportment and not just literature, poetry or music, created an
aesthetic and fulfilled life for them. The youth’s detachment from their heritage was such
that they not only ignored their culture, as their disinterest in the Munni Begum concert
showed, but that they believed that their future lay in not embracing their heritage and
ethos, as their lack of regret at the demise of Urdu language expressed. The youth
inhabited a liminal space, because though they were ready to reject their culture, they
were hesitant about being fully immersed in the new globalized culture. The men were
especially apprehensive of its influence. On the other hand, it also remains extremely
uncertain whether the youth will be able to join the new Indian society. The experience of
their liminality can also be gauged from fact that though they chose to foreground a
nationalist identity, it did not mean that they had given up their Islamic identity. In fact,
as certain instances, such as my conversation with young women about the differences in
way men and women perform the *sijda*, revealed that they passionately held on to their
Islamic heritage. They shut off the conversation because they did not wish to question the
tenets of Islam. However, I believe that their reluctance to raise doubts about the values
of Islam was primarily because they feared censure from members of their community.
While on the other hand the young men absolutely refused to listen to any critique of
Islamic values or offer one on either own, because they did not gain anything by
proposing the alternative viewpoint. They would loose their privileged status and may
even be exposed for their hypocrisy. For example, while the young men vociferously
proclaimed that media was spoiling women, they had no comment to make on how it
might be influencing the men. Moreover, without a qualm they consumed the very media which they claimed was having detrimental affect on women.

However, the question that still remains to be answered is, did their silence hide their anxieties and their inability to resolve inner conflicts created by opposing ideologies of their culture and global media narratives? I would like to explore in future research whether the concept of liminal space can help explain the withdrawal of Muslim youth from discussions of their Islamic identity.

Thoughts for Future Research

It must be acknowledged that my informants’ decision to not discuss certain issues has not been fully accounted for within the time frame of this research, and it needs to be further examined. I foresee in future research projects a process of mutual growth, where my informants will not only learn to relate to me at a deeper level as Muslims, but also learn to relate to themselves and be able to articulate their personal concerns. The future projects will involve going back to the subject population and gaining their trust and confidence to a level where they are able to share their private and inner most conflicts. At this point I am making conjectures about the possible meanings of their preference to remain silent. I am guessing that it could be a strategy to hide their confusion and their inability to make sense of the emerging world. However, the aim of future research projects will be to find out how alienation is articulated and especially among minority Muslim women. The young women were especially careful not to openly challenge the cultural or religious norms that defined the place of women in society. I was greatly intrigued by the creative strategies of my informants to contain their dreams and to find their individual paths without questioning the establishment in any way. But,
can I assume that just because they did not speak they were in acquiescence with the norms of the Muslim society? Or is their silence a sign of their growing disconnect with their society, which they are trying not to reveal? I want to understand how, when the young women become able to fulfill their dreams as working women with independent incomes, they will express their relationship with the Muslim society. Will their silence then evolve and change?

This research has shown that postcolonial scholarship, despite its stress on identity and identity politics, has not illuminated the question of identity “beyond homilies of hybridity and in-betweenness” because its politics is diffuse and it is unable to speak with reference to specific details of financial constraints or facilities, educational status, and cultural capital of the subject population (Dirlik, 1999, p. 149). Hybridity as associated with globalization in popular culture and in scholarly discourses deflects attention away from injustices and alienation. The situation can be rescued, Dirlik says, if postcolonial studies stop fighting shy of their radical agendas and take on the established powers (p. 150).

I propose that as exemplified by the subaltern studies project, scholarship analyzing the postcolonial context can be reinvigorated by paying close attention to material and social conditions within postcolonial nations. A large body of postcolonial scholarship is devoted to countering and opposing the views of the East and of postcolonial nations held by Western scholars. The task is to take on a research agenda that is not in opposition to achievements of Western scholars (as is the case with the body of work associated with Orientalism) or a response to criticism from Western quarters (as is the case with ideas of hybridity proposed by postcolonial scholars). The aim is to look
at postcolonial conditions on their own terms and to illuminate them as has been the
achievement of the subaltern studies project started by left-wing and socialist Indian
historians.

Indian historians (including Ranjit Guha, Sumit Sarkar, Vinay Bahl, Gyan
Prakash) wanted to retell Indian history from the perspective of those who have been
ignored and dismissed—especially the *dalits* (or the lower caste Hindus) and the tribal
populations. These accounts have given agency to the voices of lower-caste Hindu,
peasant and tribal populations, as they oppose the metanarratives of the elites, which have
hitherto shaped Indian history. The subaltern methodology has also been applied to the
deconstruction of history of Latin American countries. Postcolonial scholars like Spivak
(1985, 1988, 1999b & 2000) have acknowledged the energy of this project and promoted
it in Western academia. However, the tendencies of postcolonial scholars to gloss over
concrete material conditions, has been criticized by historians like Sarkar (2002). The
project, according to Sarkar, has been hijacked from its original intention of writing
history from the perspective of the underprivileged to a rambling discourse that
conceptualizes domination in cultural terms, and it collapses radical Left-wing social
history into cultural studies’ critique of “colonial power-knowledge discourses” (p. 402).
Sarkar berates the project for becoming more discursive then investigative and he has
withdrawn his association from the subaltern studies project.

The key point that I have tried to make through this research project on minority
Muslim youth is that investigation of reality in postcolonial contexts cannot be within
frameworks of knowledge developed in vastly different contexts, as my critique of
postcolonial scholarship has indicated. I have concluded that postcolonial theories were
unable to explain the experiences of Muslims because the arguments of hybrid identities were developed without attention to material conditions and without reference to privileges of class, education, and wealth. The scholar’s aim, to quote historian Vinay Bahl (2002), ought to be to forego “a top-down approach and replace it with the study of the culture of the people” (p. 358). There is a need to analyze actual conditions in postcolonial nations and to explain, “how do the social order and social institutions articulate in the formation of the subject (individual),” and “how is the link between social and psychic reality to be spelled out” (p. 359). I support Bahl’s views that there is a need to invest in social research that accepts the role of both material culture and human agency. He proposes that the emphasis on textual analysis should be replaced by social analysis to show how material culture is shaped by human agency and to show the way material culture influences the creation of values and identities. This is not very different from the anthropologist Geertz’s (1973) view that there is a need to build theory from the ground up. Geertz argued that theoretical concepts must be developed through the study of actual social settings and should not be formulated on the basis of suppositions or without concrete findings of research. This research project has attempted to follow these prescriptions through the example of an Indian minority Muslim population.
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APPENDIX A: DETAILS OF KEY INFORMANTS

Key Informants: Young Men

1. Faisal: A 23-year-old student at the Travel and Tourism Diploma Program at the History Department of Jamia University. He worked part time in a travel agency and was actively involved in finding a full-time and well-paying job when I met him. He has lived in Jamia since age 14. He had also attended Jamia school, which is affiliated to Jamia University. His father was a soldier in the Indian army. The family belongs to Uttar Pradesh, but has preferred to settle down in the Jamia area. His father had expired and he lived with his uncle and grandparents in an extended family. He had a younger brother and sister. No one in his family had college education, except for Faisal and his younger brother, who was enrolled in the Engineering Department. The family can be defined as belonging to lower middle class Muslim society.

2. Fahim: A 27-year-old alumnus of Jamia University. He had been enrolled in the Bahelor’s program in Jamia University and had done his Masters in Computer Applications from a private institute (that was not very well-known). He has lived all his life in this area and he also has a large extended family settled in the neighborhoods of the Jamia area. Fahim worked for a courier company and also ran a small business that offered annual maintenance contracts for computers in offices and homes. He was a friend and a neighbor of Faisal. They were always hanging out together. Fahim shared a similar background as Faisal and few people in his family had college education. Fahim’s family’s status can be defined as
lower middle class more on account of the lack of education rather than monetary considerations.

3. Zain: An exceptionally bright 22-year-old student who had graduated from the Engineering College of Jamia University. Admissions to engineering and other professional courses at Jamia University are through entrance exams and students from all across India compete for a few hundred seats. When I met Zain, he was pursuing his Master’s degree at the Faculty of Management Studies at Delhi University. This program is even more sought after and hence criterions for admissions are very rigorous. Very few Muslims are enrolled in institutes of higher learning and Zain was among the chosen few. His father had a Master’s degree and was a teacher at a school. His mother had elementary education. He had an older brother and a younger sister. The family’s status can be described as middle class based on the fact that the father had college education, although the family had access to modest means. But, despite the financial constraints Zain and his siblings had good schooling, though they did not attend Delhi’s elite schools. The students of expensive and select institutions like Delhi Public School or Modern School enjoy relative advantages in securing admissions to highly competitive higher educational programs. Zain has had to overcome certain disadvantages and work very hard to succeed in the Indian education system. Zain had lived all his life in the Jamia area. He also had extended family settled in surrounding neighborhoods. Zain belongs to my extended family.

4. Rehman: A 23-year-old good friend of Zain, and the only other Muslim at the Faculty of Management Studies. Rehman is senior to Zain, but both became
friends because they sought each other’s company for Friday prayers. Rehman is from the city of Pune. He does not belong to Jamia area but visits the area as Zain’s friend. Rehman also represents the upper middle class Muslim society. Rehman has had better schooling than Zain and is better placed as compared to his friend. He has been to better schools. I met him with Zain and kept in touch with him over Google Talk mostly.

5. Zafar: A 23-year-old student at Jamia Polytechnic. He has been in the Jamia area for almost 5 years. Prior to joining the Polytechnic he was preparing for the All India Medical Exam to get admission to a medical college. However, he was not successful. He, then, joined the Jamia Polytechnic, where admissions are relatively easier as compared to medical school. He was preparing for the Engineering Exam. The test is difficult but he was working hard. Zafar hailed from a poor but respectable family in Bihar. His father was a school teacher. According to Zafar, he was also very religious. Zafar was shy and reserved, but very ambitious. He wanted to do original research in the field of engineering and make a name for himself. He tutored school students in Physics and Mathematics to support his education and also fund his sister. He had an older brother too and all three of them lived in rented apartment in the Jamia area. They never took me to their apartment.

6. Shahir: A 19-year-old student at Jamia Polytechnic who belonged to middle class family. He had lived all his life in Jamia. His father was college educated. He was an engineer and Shahir had gone to an English medium school. The school was once again not of the best schools of Delhi but nonetheless it was a good school
and many children from the Jamia area were enrolled there. Shahir had a good command of the English language. He was better educated and better groomed than other young men. He was also very well mannered. His mother was educated, though not college educated, but with good basic schooling. His family was middle class and Shahir was comfortably off and very close to his family. He had very conservative views despite the fact that he had been to a good mixed school.

7. Shakeel: A 20-year-old student at Jamia Polytechnic. He had come to Delhi from Bihar more than three years ago. He had been a student at Jamia High School for two years prior to joining the Polytechnic. His early schooling was at an English language school in Bihar and hence his English conversational skills were better than many other boys at Jamia Polytechnic. However, Shakeel did not come from an affluent background. His father had agricultural land and the family had modest means. Shakeel had been working to support himself by offering tuition in Physics and Mathematics to school students. There are many students in Jamia area who desire extra coaching in these subjects. These are difficult subjects and also because securing high marks in Mathematics and Physics improves their chances of admission to higher education institutes. It must be stated that though working and studying is the way of life for most undergraduate students in the United States. However, Indian students find it very hard to juggle the work and school, as they do not have the same facilities. They do not enough money to buy food, as food is expensive in India. They also have to face others stresses like
poor living conditions, including water and electricity shortages that curtail their study time.

8. Fateullah: A 22-year-old student at Jamia History Department. He was living in the Jamia dormitory for the past three years. He was from Bihar and he belonged to an influential and well-connected family. His friends said that he was able to live in the dormitory, which have good facilities, only because his contacts in the Ministry of Education were able to persuade the university authorities. The dormitories are not large enough to accommodate high demand from students who are coming from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Most of these students lived in rented apartments in the Jamia area. Fateullah was not a good student and he had indefinite plans for his future. He did not talk about his family, but his father was into politics. However, Fateullah had no plans of going back to Bihar.

Key Informants: Young Women

1. Fawzia: A 20-year-old student at Jamia Polytechnic studying Mechanical Engineering. Her family had moved to the Jamia area from Moradabad, a small town in Uttar Pradesh, four years ago, when her father transferred his job to Delhi. Fawzia’s father worked for a state controlled bank. This means that Fawzia’s father not only had a college degree, but he had also successfully competed in the bank recruitment exam conducted by the Government of India. Her mother had attended High School, though not university. Hence, both of Fawzia’s parents were fairly well educated. The family was solidly middle class. Moreover, as her father worked for the Government, Fawzia’s family exemplified that large section of the Indian middle class, whose lives were structured by one
of the largest bureaucracies in the world. Her father was entitled to housing that
the state provides for its employees. However, the family had chosen to live in the
Jamia area. Fawzia was enrolled for a year in Jamia High School prior to joining
the Polytechnic.

2. Sameena: A 19-year-old student at Jamia Polytechnic also studying Mechanical
Engineering. Sameena’s large extended family lived in the Jamia area, while her
parents lived in other predominantly Muslim neighborhood in Old Delhi (also
known as Delhi 6). She moved between Jamia and Old Delhi, often staying with
her uncles, grandparents depending on her class schedule. Sameena’s father was a
lawyer and her mother was a schoolteacher. Sameena had one younger sister and
her parents had sent both girls to a school where English was the medium of
instruction. Sameena’s family was also middle class and perhaps more so because
her mother was also employed. It is the norm among middle class Indians for both
husband and wife to be employed, while it is not so among the Muslims.

According to the report by the Sachar Committee (2006), Muslim women are
poorly represented in the organized employment sectors.

3. Sajida: A 20-year-old student in Computer Science at Jamia Polytechnic. She said
that her father’s profession was “business.” This is a euphemism used by people
who are self-employed. Her father was probably a carpenter, a painter, or a
mason. He could even have been a small time manufacturer of trader, but the
important fact was that he did not possess college education, which is necessary
for white-collar employment. The highly hierarchical Indian society is structured
on caste, class, and educational differences. These differences also define social
relationships among Muslims even though the spirit of Islam is largely egalitarian. Anyone who is lacking in any one of these defining qualifications is most reluctant to admit it. Hence, Sajida never talked about her parents much. I believe, her mother did not even have elementary education. Moreover, as there was no one even in her extended family who had college education, Sajida’s family can be defined as lower middle class. There were also in transition from their rural base to urban India. The family had moved to the Jamia area from Bihar/Bengal border when Sajida was a child. Hence, Sajid had attended Jamia School, which is in the vicinity but where the medium of instruction is not English. However, Sajida was very hard working. She was enrolled in a private institute to study advanced Mathematics. She was doing her best to join the degree program in Computer Sciences.

4. Nazneen: A 21-year-old student in Computer Science at Jamia Polytechnic. She lived in the Jamia area with her older sister who was working in a travel agency. They had been living here for past four years. Nazneen belonged to Bihar. It was difficult to understand from Nazneen’s account her family’s true status as she had many different stories to tell. Sometimes she said that her uncle worked in Delhi that is why she and her sister had come to Delhi. At other times she said she was living all by herself and knew no one in Delhi. Perhaps, she did not want to reveal her true status. It could be that her family was impoverished, but it was clear that Nazneen was an intrepid girl. It is not easy to live alone in Delhi and even if she lived with her sister, it is still a difficult live. Nazneen often complained that men in Jamia area passed comments and troubled her. Nazneen was good at her work
but not as good as her friend Sajida. whether she lived alone or with her was obvious that she belonged to lower middle class background. Moreover, if

5. Nabila: A 21-year-old student pursuing degree in Civil Engineering at Jamia University. Nabila had migrated to Delhi along with her two elder brothers from Bihar. All of them were students at Jamia. Nabila had just finished her Diploma in Civil Engineering when I met her and she was preparing for the entrance exam for the full-fledged degree program in Engineering. She successfully cleared this exam. Nabila was Zafar’s younger sister. She was very bright and alert and had a great sense of humor. Although, Nabila was fully veiled and adhered to the most conservative dress code for women, she was surprisingly assertive and forthright. She always stated what was on her mind. She was very mature in her view of the world, which is truly an accomplishment considering that Naila had lived all her life in a small town/village in Bihar.

6. Najma: A 29-year-old BBC Radio reporter and media critic. She had been living in the Jamia area for the past 17 years. She graduated from the media program in Jamia University. Najma’s family is upper middle class landed gentry from Uttar Pradesh. She has been to good boarding schools and did her graduation from one of the colleges affiliated with Delhi University. She did her Masters from the media program in Jamia.

7. Shabana: A 29-year-old filmmaker who has most of her life in the Jamia area. Her father teaches at Jamia University and her mother runs a beauty/aroma therapy saloon. The family is middle class and they are comfortable financially, especially as Shabana’s father worked in the Middle East for a few years. Even Shabana and
her younger brother lived with their parents in the Middle East with their parents for a brief period. Shabana got her Bachelor’s and Master’s degree from Jamia University. She was enrolled in media school for the Master’s in film making. Shabana had showcased one of her films at the London documentary film festival and she was married to her classmate from the media school.

8. Soha: A 19 year old student at the History Department’s certificate course in travel and tourism. She had been born in the Jamia area, her father worked in construction business. He had built many homes in the area. The family was fairly wealthy but no one had college education. Sana had attended a mixed school before shifting to Jamia School for her high school. She kept in touch with her former non-Muslim school mates and hung out with them, often without her mother’s permission.

Informants: Personal Acquaintances and Members of the Older Generations

1. Baig Saab: He was a neighbor and a friend of my family. He was among the earliest settlers of the Jamia area, but now he lived in Zakir Bagh, a housing society established by him. He had fought hard to secure a site for the housing society within the coveted neighborhood of Friends Colony. He had then gone on to establish a cooperative bank, which was also a success. Baig Saab had been a student at Jamia University and he later worked for one of the Government’s departments. He was very enterprising and active despite his 70 years of age.

2. Abrar Cha: A relative from my father’s side of the family. His son Zain would be my 4th cousin. He belonged to the landed gentry from Uttar Pradesh and his children were the first generation to be born in the city. He had a Master’s degree
in Biology and another in Education. He was a teacher in a school and he had a modest income, which he supplemented with income from his agricultural lands. His wife had elementary education and was able to read and write only in Urdu. He was in his late forties; and he had built his home in Jamia almost two decades ago, when he permanently moved to Delhi after finding employment. He had two other children besides Zain. His daughter had just finished school and was enrolled in the English Department at Jamia University.

3. Farhat: A PhD student and an instructor in the History Department at Jamia University. She had lived in Jamia for the past twelve years. She had graduated from the History department and was looking forward to settling down in an academic position within Jamia after completing her theses.

4. Nadeem: An engineer working in the media labs at the media program in Jamia University. He is in his mid to late thirties and three generations of his family have been associated with the university. His grandfather moved here in the 1940s and they have lived here since. Nadeem went to Jamia School and later to Jamia University where he secured his engineering degree. He is married and his children also attend Jamia School.

5. Asim Khan: He teaches at Jamia School and has been living in Jamia area for two decades. However, his children do not go to Jamia School but are studying in a school run by nuns belonging to the Carmelite order.

6. Rana Khan: A lecturer at Jamia Polytechnic. She teaches English. She has been associated with the university for past twenty five years but does not live in Jamia area.
7. Abdul Haq Khan: He has been associated with Jamia University for the past five decades and has lived in the universities’ housing for its faculty almost all his life. He is a reliable raconteur of Jamia’s history as Baig Saab.

8. Dr. Narayani Gupta: She is a renowned historian who is an expert on medieval Delhi. She has been with the university for past two decades, and has recently retired. She now consults on heritage and restoration projects. I have collaborated with her on many film projects when I was a producer of educational television in Jamia University.

Non-Muslim Students/Informants at Jamia University

1. Swati: A 21-year-old non-Muslim student at Jamia Polytechnic and a good friend of Fawzia and Sameena. She spent a lot of time with them and the three girls were very close. I say this because Fawzia and Sameena visited Swati’s home in Noida in east Delhi, a fair distance from the Jamia area. It could be possible for Muslim girls to do so only if their parents were comfortable with the friendship and if they had met Swati often. However, Swati was not very happy with her experiences at Jamia. She later dropped out of the program mid-way. Swati belonged to middle class Hindu family.

2. Priyanka: A 20-year-old non-Muslim student at Jamia Polytechnic and a very good friend of Sajida. I always met them together. I also noticed that Priyanka was extremely supportive of Sajida. The two girls studied together, ate together and worked together. The bonds of friendship were very strong. It could be that both of them came from a similar background. Priyanka had confided that she was the first person in her family, who was working to secure college education.
3. Raunaq: A 23-year-old non-Muslim student at Economics’ Department at Jamia University. He lived in south Delhi and belonged to upper middle class family. He had earlier studied at a college affiliated with Delhi University and had enrolled in the Master’s program in Jamia. He said his experiences were good, although he had been very apprehensive initially about joining a Muslim university.

4. Veenu: A 22-year-old non-Muslim student at the Economics’ Department. She had also been enrolled in a premier south Delhi college affiliated with Delhi University prior to joining the Master’s program in Economics at Jamia University. Her parents were academics and teaching at Delhi University. She said she was happy with her experiences at the Economics department; and especially with the efforts of the faculty to broaden the horizons of the students by organizing conferences and seminars, which were attended by important scholars and policy makers.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Present State of Affairs – Life in Jamia Nagar

1. Length of time in Jamia Nagar
2. Profession of their parents
   a. Attitude toward parents profession
3. Members in the household
   a. Relationship with parents
      i. Expectations of parents
      ii. Expectations of children from parents
   b. Relationship with other members in the household (grandparents, siblings)
      i. Whether Signs of frictions
      ii. Possible reasons for signs of friction
   c. Perceptions of themselves with reference to families
      i. If positive why
      ii. If negative why
4. Extended family
   a. Relationship with extended family
      i. Whether Signs of frictions
      ii. Possible reasons for signs of friction
5. Relationship with other Muslims in Jamia Nagar
   a. Attitude towards immediate neighbors
   b. Attitude towards other people living in the community
   c. Interaction with other people in community
      i. Nature of interaction – sustained or sporadic
      ii. Type of interaction – friends, support group, etc
6. Perceptions/reactions to segregated living
   a. Level of comfort in segregated living
      i. Reasons underlying positive reactions
ii. Reasons underlying negative reactions

b. Alternative to segregated living
   i. Feasibility of living outside
   ii. Possible fall outs of living outside

7. Islam in their daily life
   a. Practice of Islam
      i. Attendance at mosques – regular, sporadic, on Fridays etc
      ii. Balancing professional obligations and mandatory Friday prayers
      iii. Observance of prayers at home- regular
   b. Comprehension of key concepts of Islam
      i. How do they pray?
      ii. What do they ask in their prayers?
      iii. Do they fast?
      iv. Why do they fast?
      v. Do they give zakat?
      vi. Whom do they give zakat to?
      vii. What does zakat meant to them?
   c. Any ambivalence or confusion in appreciation of tenets of Islam?
      i. Rights of women
      ii. Role women
      iii. Appropriate behavior of Muslims
   d. Attitude towards Islam as practiced in Jamia area?
      i. Is that how they perceive their religion?
      ii. What is their vision?
      iii. At what point do they disagree?
   e. Participation in religious life of the Jamia Nagar community?
      i. During Ramadan do they go for “Tarabis” i.e. recitation of Quran after dinner till midnight.
      ii. Do they perform the ritual sacrifice at Eid?
      iii. Who are their partners in these events?
iv. What do they do during and after the religious functions

8. Issues of privacy and freedom of movement – if any
   a. Perception of control
      i. By whom
      ii. Why
      iii. In what fashion
   b. Tactics to establish private space
      i. How
      ii. To what extent

B. Professional or Scholastic Life
   1. Area of study
      a. Level of interest in area of study
         i. Reason for studying what they study
      b. Future application of area of study – Which Profession to join
         i. Why that profession?
         ii. Where did inspiration or idea to join profession come from?
      c. Dreams/Ambitions of the future
         i. What are their plans for accomplishing their dreams?
         ii. What do they think of the situation that they are in?
         iii. What are the possibilities, in their opinion, to fulfill their dreams?
   2. Profession
      a. Comfort level in the profession
         i. Possible causes for discomfort
      b. Duties at work
      c. Dress code at work
         i. What is their reaction to dress?
      d. Social life at work
         i. Do they participate?
         ii. What keeps them away?
iii. Why

3. Friends – Who are they
   a. How do the friends define them?
   b. How do they think of themselves with reference to friends?

4. Relationship with non-Muslims
   a. Who are the non-Muslim friends
   b. The length of the friendship
   c. Extent of interaction in the friendship
      i. How often they see each other?
      ii. Do they share their concerns with them?
      iii. Do they hang out with them and where do they go?
      iv. Do they visit their homes?
      v. Do they invite non-Muslims to their homes in Jamia Nagar?
      vi. If not why so and if yes why so?
      vii. What are their parents’ opinions about their non-Muslim friends?
      viii. Are their hindrances to their friendship?
      ix. What are these?
      x. Why do they exist?
   d. Nature of friendship
      i. What is the level of trust?
      ii. What do they friends think of them? What do they think is their friends’ impressions of them?
      iii. How important it is to them that they are respected and are liked by their friends?
      iv. How do they compare themselves to their non-Muslim friends and colleagues?
      v. How important is the opinion of their non-Muslim friends?
      vi. Can they think of romantic relationship with their non-Muslim friends?
      vii. Can they think of marriage with non-Muslims
viii. Do the girls have a different take on this than the boys?
ix. If yes, why are they different?

C. Interactions with Media

1. Television
   a. Number of televisions at home
      i. Whether access to their own TV
      ii. Why the need for own TV
   b. Pattern of watching television
      i. Watch with family
      ii. Watch alone
      iii. Who controls remote
      iv. What does the family watch
      v. What do they watch
   c. Differences in patterns of viewing
      i. With their parents
      ii. Their siblings
      iii. Their cousins
      iv. Their Muslim friends
      v. Their non-Muslim friends
   d. Involvement with media content
      i. How many hours they watch?
      ii. What programs – why?
      iii. Favorite programs- what are they, why do they watch them?
      iv. Do they follow any soap opera regularly?
      v. Which is their favorite genre?
      vi. Why does it engage them?
      vii. What do they find there?
      viii. Favorite celebrities - who and why?
      ix. Do they discuss their shows with others?
x. Who do they discuss them with – family, friends?
xi. What do their friends watch especially non-Muslim friends?
xi. How do they think of what they watch?

2. Cinema
   a. Do they visit multiplexes?
   b. With whom do they go for movies at the Cineplex?
      i. Is it a place for outing with their friends?
      ii. Which was the last movie that they saw in a Cineplex and with whom?
   c. How often they go?
   d. What do they think of the Cineplex?
      i. The plush settings.
      ii. New wave Hindi cinema.
   e. What do they think of the people who come to Cineplex?
      i. What is their lifestyle?
      ii. Do they approve of that lifestyle?
      iii. Do they want to emulate that?

3. Newspapers
   a. Which newspapers subscribed to their home?
   b. Which newspaper do they read?
      i. Which sections do they read?
      ii. Which sections they enjoy?
   c. Where do they have access to newspapers?
   d. Are newspapers important?
   e. Reaction to press coverage of events?
      i. In their opinion what does Indian press cover?
      ii. Why does it cover certain topics?

4. How are Muslims covered in media
   i. Positively or negatively.

265
5. Realization of Muslim Marginalization  
   a. Conscious of it or unconscious of it.

6. Media and Muslim Identity  
   a. What do they think of Islam as project on media?  
      b. Comparison between their religion and its projections on media.

7. Interpretation/reading of key media themes  
   a. What do they think are key media themes?  
      i. In their favorite television program or film.  
         ii. How do they respond to these key messages? (For example do they respond eagerly, enthusiastically, going in new direction, exploratory or negatively, in a sullen, and disillusioned fashion.)  
      iii. Are these messages relevant in the context of their lives? (For example can they follow what their favorite character does in their real life?)  
      iv. What are their plans for the future?  
      v. How did they come up with those ideas?  
      vi. What does their family think about their plans?