

Negotiating the silenced 'self'

Purdah, globalization and tradition: Resistance and agency among Muslim female University graduates in Bangladesh

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Acknowledgement

PhD can be a four years long lonely journey where me and my thesis went hand in hand. My journey has been a rocky one. Besides the hurdles of being an International student in an alien place constantly struggling with money and loneliness, there were also challenges where my life hit rock bottom and time when I felt I could never stand my ground again. Both my father and my step father (who I was very close to) were diagnosed with cancer and for three long years I had to move back and forth to Bangladesh and Australia every time there was an emergency. I was the only caregiver for both my fathers. In July 2015 just a few months before I am submitting my thesis, both my fathers passed away within a week. But my journey was not all about my falling apart to pieces. It is also about countless blessings of love and friendship and support from people who embraced me for who I am and believed in me.

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Lastly, Allah! I thank my Creator for keeping me safe and giving me the patience, steadfastness and strength to come this far and help me survive all the odds that I have been through.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

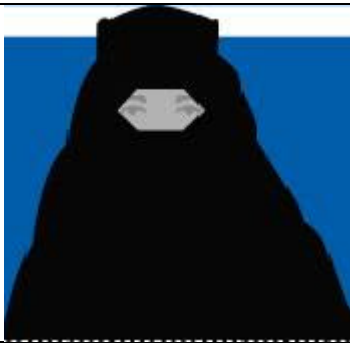



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Farzana Zebeen Khan

Date: 5 February 2016

Ethic approval for this research has been received from Monash University Standing Committee for Ethics in Research on Humans (Reference number: CF13/946 – 2013000457).

Glossary

<p>Borqa/Burka</p> <p>A long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women in many Muslim countries. Most concealing of Islamic veils. It covers the entire face and body, leaving just a mesh screen to see through. However, in Bangladesh sometimes the face cover is not used.</p>	
<p>Chador</p> <p>This is also an extra piece of clothing like hijab that is worn on top of the usual dress of choice. The chador, is a full-body cloak. But in Bangladesh, it is used more like a stole that is used to loosely wrap the upper portion of female body. The difference between a hijab and a chador is, hijab is tightly and neatly fastened with pins with the objective of not to move from the desired place. The word hijab is derived from the Arabic root hjb which means “to hide, guard or prevent” (Hamzeh, 2012, p. 1)</p>	
<p>Hijab or head scarf</p> <p>Comes from the Arabic word for veil. The type commonly worn in the west is a scarf that covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the head covering that some Muslim women wear when they are outside 2. the religious law that controls the clothes that Muslim women can wear (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2016) 	
<p>Niqab</p> <p>The niqab is a veil for the face that leaves the area around the eyes clear. Usually it is a part of Burqa/borka. According to Cambridge Dictionary, “a piece of cloth worn by some Muslim women to cover the whole face except the eyes.” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2016)</p>	

Shelwar-Kamiz and dupatta/orna	
<p>A shelwar-kamiz is traditional a three pieces dress. The lower part is called shelwar, the top is called kamiz. On top of kamiz a large unstitched piece of cloth is being worn. It is similar to a stole. Usually all of these comes in a set. The picture on the side demonstrates how it is traditionally and modestly worn.</p>	

Five pillars of Islam

“ (1) Faith or belief in the Oneness of God, Allah, and the finality of the prophethood of Mohammad (PBUH); (2) establishment of the five daily prayers; (3) self-purification through fasting during the month of Ramadan; (4) charity giving to the needy; and (5) the pilgrimage to the Mecca for those who are able” (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010, p. 171). Number 4 is zakat which like hajj is also dependent on a person’s ability.

Haram

The acts that are forbidden according to the Quran and hadith.

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Abstract

Education is seen as a gateway to women's emancipation where women can exercise their sense of agency to make the life choices that they themselves want for them. But in Bangladesh women are still the victims of inequality, abuse, suppression and exploitation both in the domestic sphere as well as the public sphere. There was a time when fighting for the rights to attend school and the university was one of the main concerns for women. With the rapid change of globalization this situation has improved as women are now less restrained from acquiring education. But does acquiring education really change the patriarchal structure or framework of women being the sole stake holder of family image? The family image that women are supposed to uphold is realized through the embodied shame or *haya* or modesty. Shame and modesty remains a complex cultural concept as they refer to both internal states and a repertoire of behaviours indicative of modest clothing, behaving culturally or in a more socially attuned way. Veiling or *purdah* transcends its literal meaning of spatial segregation in public sphere, or its visual embodiment of religious Islamic identity maker. The ways and norms become a metaphorical disciplinary agent to control women's sense of being and compartmentalizes their bodies as the bearer of that embodied shame that women keep on materializing that shame all through their lives. They are in a constant dilemma whether to pay attention to their agency and their dreams of doing what they want or to fit into the 'image' of a 'good girl', a good daughter/in-law or mother or wife; the way society expects them comply with.

In these complexities women's bodies become the locus and the outward behaviour of the body constitutes both the potentiality, as well as the means through which an interiority of self is realised. Women's mobility and sense of self becomes bound by shame and guilt impeding gender justice.

This study is a phenomenological multiple case study of educated Muslim women in Bangladesh. I have used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to analyse my data. The data was collected in four months via face to face interviews in my country, Bangladesh. I had fifteen participants and out of fifteen I chose six case studies that highlight the overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of all the fifteen participants. This study is an attempt to raise questions regarding women's agency and sense of entitlement to start a dialogue of the untold injustices of the home bound and silenced. My study looks at embodied shame and through the representation of embodied shame how identities are negotiated, appropriated and constructed within the given social milieu where the core understanding of religion is used as a locus of oppression or resistance or agency.

Chapter One

Introduction

“One is not born a woman, but becomes one” (Beauvoir, 1989, c1952).

This is the opening sentence of Book II of the phenomenal book by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. I am starting my thesis with this quote from Beauvoir who offers a construction of femininity that resonates strongly with my research. She does not see femininity as arising from the differences of biology, psychology, or intellect. Rather, according to Beauvoir it is a social construction of civilization, a reflection not of ‘essential’ differences between men and women but of differences in their social reality. Such differences will be explored in this current study that looks at the Bangladeshi society and educated women. My study is about giving voice to educated Muslim women in Bangladesh whose voices have never been heard before. This study reaches out to Muslim educated women and shares their stories of their lives against the back drop of purdah (veiling), religion, tradition and globalization. My research aims at problematizing the role of religious understanding and education in Bangladeshi society where women’s roles are constructed socially through the various roles that they have to play in their family and society. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, few research studies have been conducted to reveal the stories of educated Muslim women’s lives. I believe stories have transformative power. James (1996) points out that, “It appears people may come to act differently within their social worlds, both by telling their own stories, and by hearing or reading those of others” (p. 199). This research does not aim to change the current state of women dramatically but to generate discussions and create impetus for future research which might pave the way for greater change. This phenomenological case study will seek the unheard voices of women that have been absent from the public sphere and from research studies.

A central issue of the current study is the understanding of purdah. Purdah or veiling is a code of dressing required by Islam as instructed in the Quran and Hadith (Mernissi, 1991a). According to this religious code women are supposed to cover their heads and their bodies in such a way that they can be distinguished as Muslim women in the public sphere. The literal meaning of the term purdah, a borrowed Persian word in Bangla, means screen or veil or curtain (Ahmed, 1993; Mernissi, 1991b; Papanek, 1971, 1973; Siddiqi, 2008). Although there are various versions of physical observance of purdah (all of these will be discussed in Chapter Two), purdah in Bangladeshi society as in many Muslim societies, “is viewed as a system of ideas and actions of complex and highly variable social phenomenon. It is closely integrated with many other aspects of social system” (Ahmed, 1993, p. 46).

The cultural, social and religious underpinning of the word purdah is too complex an issue to be translated in one word in English such as veiling. For this reason I have used ‘purdah’ (not the translation of the word) in the title to signify the multi-faceted understanding of the word in the Bangladeshi context. The physical observance of purdah, according to Islam, works as female segregation in the public sphere (Mernissi, 1991b). Mernissi (1991a) analysed the three aspects of the meaning of purdah or veiling — visual, spatial and ethical. Drawing on the work of Mernissi (1991a), Hamzeh and Oliver (2010) contend that hijab or veiling “does not only mean a visual barrier between a body and the sight of the other, but it also means a spatial divider between places, and/or an ethical protector from forbidden practices” (p. 167). There are various embodiments of visual hijabs or veiling. These embodiments carry far deeper meanings than the visual covering of the head, rather there are multidimensional meanings “of interwoven subtle values and practices” (Hamzeh, 2011, p. 482). This study is not focused on the physical observance or the visual representation of purdah rather it is more concerned with the cultural underpinning of the word ‘purdah’ that is played out extensively in a woman’s upbringing and her ways of being.

The term ‘cultural veiling’ refers to, how the social and cultural understanding of veiling i.e. the do’s and don’ts that overshadow a woman’s life. Muslim feminist scholar Papanek (1982) argues that the social understanding of purdah or veiling is essentially patriarchal in nature and used as a tool to dominate women. Being an insider of this social system my experience is not different from Papanek’s (1982) observation. This domination starts from the time a girl is born. By the time she reaches puberty her family as well as the surrounding society contribute to her understanding of the expected roles that she should play in future. These teachings are vast in nature and encompass all facets of her life including how she should dress, which jobs she should pursue, and how she should behave with her family members, her husband and her in-laws. Hamzeh and Oliver (2010) termed this multifaceted meaning of hijab or veiling as “hijab discourse” that shapes women’s “material world, including bodies” (p. 166). This term was expanded to transcend the visual representation of female body rather “it is the gendering discourse using female Muslim’s bodies as sites through which their ways of thinking and acting have been deeply challenged over the centuries” (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012, p. 332). Drawing on the work of Muslim feminist Mernissi (1991a), Hamzeh and Oliver (2012) argue that the hijab discourse has three kinds of hijabs – visual, spatial and ethical or spiritual hijab. These concepts are unpacked in-depth in Chapter Two. Veiling or purdah works as a social control in Bangladeshi society (Kibria, 1995). It has become an umbrella term for how women are supposed to behave within their immediate and extended families and how they are required to guide their lives regardless of whether they are performing purdah or not (Amin, 1997; Islam & Sultana, 2006; Rozario, 2006). In other words it has become a cultural rather than a religious requirement. As Rozario (1992) states, “The ideologies, purity, honour, and parda determine and legitimize the hierarchical relationships between men and women and between different lineages, classes, and religious communities” (abstract).

The traditional expected role for women in Bangladeshi society is rearing children, maintaining the household, undertaking domestic chores and fulfilling family expectations according to cultural constraints (Jayaweera, 1997). As will be discussed in Chapter Two, there is a wealth of research in Bangladesh that focuses on the interplay of Islam/religion, purdah, and globalization in the lives of the rural women in Bangladesh (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983; Hossain & Kabir, 2001; Sultana, Jawan, & Hashim, 2009). These research studies also focus on reproduction and women's health both in rural and in urban contexts. Many of the findings of these studies argue that there is a growing awareness among the rural people about sending their girls to school; educated girls are viewed as income generating resources as opposed to burdens (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001); and educated girls have more control over decision making such as family planning and reproduction (Hossain & Kabir, 2001). Veiling is not seen as a hindrance for accessing education (Sultana et al., 2009); for women in the workforce such as the garments industry, their jobs give them a sense of economic independence (Kibria, 1995); and although veiling is considered to be a mark of backwardness, women wearing *burqa* have greater mobility than those who do not (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983). All these studies are situated in the rapidly changing social scenario with increasing violence against women (Islam & Sultana, 2006) as well as the persistent use of purdah as a major tool of oppression towards women (Amin, 1997; Kibria, 1995). Whether it is the cultural or the physical veiling that oppresses women is ambiguous. There is an absence of literature concerning the lives of educated women, their ways of being, and the influence of religion in their lives (Khan, 2014). As will be seen in the case studies in this thesis with the rapid demand of globalization this understanding is being challenged. More and more women are earning a living in the corporate work force (Rinaldo, 2011). But women in Bangladesh continue to lag behind men in the educational and economic fields (Jayaweera, 1997). The gender gap in education is even wider in rural areas but throughout Bangladesh

the gap is in large part due to the patriarchal Bangladeshi society where traditionally women are located within the private spheres of society and kept away from the public spheres. There still exist strong societal expectations about Bangladeshi women that encompass these perceived roles in the labor market, in biological unsuitability for science and mathematics, gender-based division of work in the household and so forth. All these factors continue to influence decisions about a girl's schooling (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001).

Both governmental and non-governmental agencies in Bangladesh are committed to reducing the gender gap. Various initiatives such as; Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the Secondary School Scholarship Program have been undertaken to eradicate the gender gap in the education sector and to increase the literacy rate (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Hoque & Zohora, 2014). It appears that now these initiatives are working very well (Rabbi, 2008). Today about 64 per cent of males and 57 per cent of women are attending primary and secondary school. At the post-secondary level, the participation rate is generally higher among girls than boys. In Bangladesh, women are 48.9 per cent of the total population. Of these nearly 86 per cent live in rural areas and only about 16 per cent women are literate compared to a 30 per cent literacy rate in men (Islam & Sultana, 2006). This gap is even higher at the tertiary education level. Even in the government job sectors women till date could not fill the 10 per cent of the gazetted and 15 per cent of non-gazetted government service positions fixed for them. The following table summarizes the current situation of women enrolled in different education levels and percentage of female teachers in comparison with men:

Types of Education	Female students %	Female teacher %
Primary	50.1	36.3
Secondary	52.3	20.3
Higher secondary	41.6	19.2
Tertiary	24.0	17.7
Vocational	25.9	17.6
Professional	35.0	17.7

Table 1: Types of education and proportions of female students and teachers (NARI-2009)

The table demonstrates that women's potential in the work force is not yet fully maximized. Islam and Sultana (2006) identified "Social customs, and traditions, literacy and employment opportunities" all of these as reasons behind the stratification of women in the education and job sectors (p. 64). In Bangladesh, despite both the Prime Minister and the opposition leader being women, educated Bangladeshi women are far behind in gaining equal opportunities in the government sectors. The following table is a demonstration of women in national parliaments in some of the Asian countries. The table has been cited from a study conducted

by UNDP (United Nations Development Program).

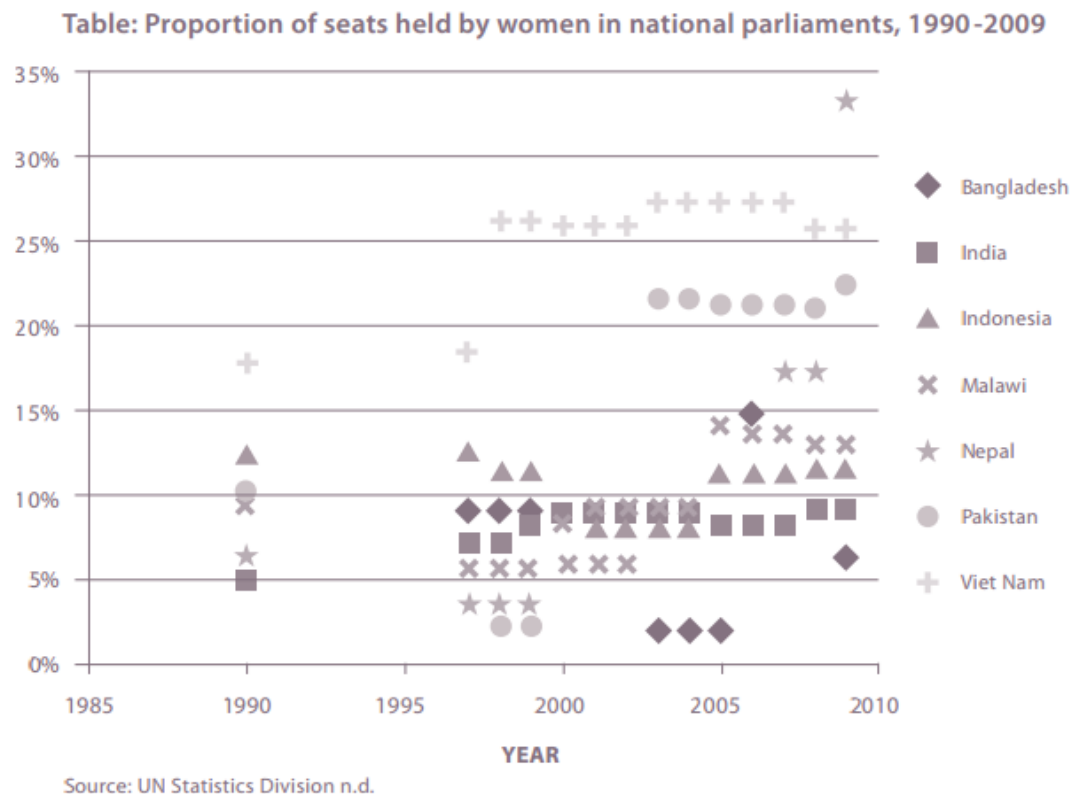


Table 2: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, 1990-2009 (UNDP, 2011, p. 12).

From the table it becomes evident that in 2010 only 5 per cent of seats were held by women in Bangladesh. This is low compared to women's representation in the decision-making levels.

Table: Breakdown by sex of male and female officers at middle and senior levels, 1999-2011

	2011		2006		1999	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
SECRETARY	96.1	3.9	98.4	1.6	98.0	2.0
ADDITIONAL SECRETARY	94.8	5.2	100.0	0.0	98.2	1.8
JOINT SECRETARY	90.2	9.8	93.2	6.8	98.5	1.5
DEPUTY SECRETARY	88.1	11.9	88.3	11.7	98.6	1.1
SENIOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY	79.8	20.2	84.3	15.7	91.0	9.0
ASSISTANT SECRETARY	79.8	25.9	77.3	22.7	85.7	14.3
TOTAL	79	21	85.0	15.0	91.5	8.5

Source: Ministry of Public Administration, Public Administration Computer Cell, 5 September 2011, and Human Development report in Facts and Figures of Gender Compendium of Bangladesh 2009, BBS.

Table 3: Breakdown by sex of male and female officers at middle and senior levels, 1990-2011. (UNDP, 2011, p. 14)

The data clearly establishes that although women's participation is gradually increasing, it is at a very slow rate. Men are demonstrably being prioritized in the decision-making positions.

The total number of women working as Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) officers is very small considering that half of the population in Bangladesh is female. The following table is a breakdown by class of women in the BCS.

Table: Number of female officers and employees per class in 2009

SERVICE CATEGORY	WOMEN	WOMEN AS % OF TOTAL
CLASS I	13,595	14.2
CLASS II	6,062	12.5
CLASS III	182,375	26.1
CLASS IV	21,604	10.6
ALL CATEGORIES	223,636	21.3

Source: Ministry of Establishment December 2009 in BBS 2010.

Table 4: Number of female officers and employee per class in 2009 (UNDP, 2011, p. 15)

Class I is the top level of decision-making positions of which the above table revealed.

Women only constitute 14 per cent of these decision-making positions. In the same report in the Annex sections reports by various organizations working for women were attached. In Annex 7 it was stressed by Mr. Ashraf Hossain, Director General of Department of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs that Bangladesh aims at moving towards gender parity. Various initiatives are undertaken by the government to create an inclusive workforce where gender parity may be achieved. But Hossain emphasized that patriarchy runs deep in the society. In order to reach gender parity initiatives should be taken to change the traditional views and create a harassment (sexual, psychological, mental, and verbal) free working environment. In the same Annex, the observation of the Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, has been included. She listed various initiatives that have been carried out by the government to improve gender balance in institutions. These initiatives included maternity leave, leave without pay, day care centres to support working mothers, and good commuting arrangements to ensure safe travel at night from work places.

All these changes have now caused what is now termed as the ‘feminization of workforce’ (Sultan, 2010). Women in Bangladesh were/are not only pushed into the labour market because of the worsening economic conditions, but also they are responding to new economic opportunities (Kabeer, 2001; Sultan, 2010). Women’s participation in politics has also increased in local sectors over recent years. While women are not excluded from the public spaces, the negotiations of these spaces involve dealing with and often remaining within dominant cultural norms of femininity, sexuality and class. Bangladesh now has laws against acid violence, dowry victims and domestic violence. These various Acts and legal frameworks are very progressive in character but the implementation of these laws is very questionable. The constitution guarantees equality to women in the public sphere, but it controls the private lives with Personal Laws that are religion specific, and as Mohsin (2010) correctly points out, “it is the private sphere which regulates the lives of the majority of women” (p. 15). Restrictions on marriage, sexuality, child custody and so forth, through discriminating Personal Laws, can and do restrict women’s capacity for income, resource accrual and empowerment thus shaping the gender dynamics in Bangladeshi society.

Muslim scholars and sociologists who research women and Islam (Mernissi, 1991a; Papanek, 1973; Zine, 2002) argue that a woman’s body has been constructed as the bearer of the image of the family, society and nation. There is the masculine patriarchal understanding and interpretation of women in Islam in Muslim societies (Mernissi, 1991a) including Bangladesh. There are studies to indicate that women use Muslim forms of dressing in different ways - at times for religious reasons and at times for cultural reasons (Galadhari, 2012; Rinaldo, 2008) but whatever the reason - it is deeply related to constructing women’s identity (Galadhari, 2012), women’s decision making capability and mobility (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001) and access to education (Jayaweera, 1997). In this the observance

or non-observance of veiling has extensive cultural meanings that go beyond the physical and become a major agency of women's identity formation.

The dominance of the patriarchy in Bangladeshi society is supported by religious arguments and interpretations. Islamic religious doctrines have always been highly valued in Bangladesh and Islam has always been a tool to exercise patriarchy in the social system. Before proceeding further a very brief overview of how Bangladesh came into being will contextualize the discussion of women in this society. This will be expanded in Chapter Five. Bangladesh is a South Asian developing country of 147,600 square km with a population of about 40 million, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The majority (about 88 per cent) of the people are Muslim. The culture is very influenced by Islamic belief. Before Bangladesh came into being the greater part of Bengal was under the rules of Gupta empires from 320-720 century, followed by the Pala Empire (the first independent Buddhist dynasty of Bengal) that lasted for four centuries (750 -1120 AD) and ushered in a period of stability and prosperity. The Palas were followed by the Sena dynasty who brought Bengal under one ruler during the twelfth Century. Ballal Sena introduced the caste system in Bengal and the dynasty brought a revival of Hinduism and cultivated Sanskrit literature in India. Islam made its first appearance in Bengal during the twelfth century when Sufi missionaries arrived. Later, occasional Muslim raiders reinforced the process of conversion by building mosques, madrassas and Sufi Khanqah. There was Ilyas Shahi dynasty (1342-1487) which was later followed by Hussain Shahi dynasty (1494-1538) and then by the Mughal emperors (1534-1690).

British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent started in 1757 ended in 1948 with the division of India and Pakistan in 1947. The British ruled over the Indian subcontinent with their 'divide and rule' policy that was generally responsible for sowing the seeds of racial,

religious and ethnic discord and mistrust which led to many instances of inter-racial and inter-religious conflict. This in turn helped justify the presence of the colonial powers in the colonies as a foreign policing agent which kept the unstable situation in check by keeping the different groupings forcibly apart (Sandhu, 2009).

The British manipulated the pre-existing ethno-religious divisions in society “to prevent subject people’s unified challenge to rule by outsiders” (Sandhu, 2009, p. 61). It worked to keep Muslims and Hindus apart in the colony, and introduced a system of deliberate racial discrimination which favored Muslims over Hindus in some areas and the opposite in others. The British employed this mechanism not only to stratify different religious communities from each other but also to create divisions within the same religious community. For example, the British created the Zemindari (the class of tax collector) system that enforced further alienation and antagonism between the Zemindars themselves and among the rural Indian tax-farmers. Next was the Ryotwari system with which the British made the Indian peasants (the ryots) tenants of their own land creating a class of itinerant peasants and a new class of rural homeless poor. These policies were perpetuated and intensified well into the twentieth century. It culminated with the fragmentation of the Indian nationalist movement along class, ethnic, ideological and religious lines and the emergence of Muslim League of India in 1906. The net result of nearly a century of racial division and social engineering was the eventual partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 (Hall, 1981).

Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan after two hundred years of colonial rule in 1947. There were two wings of Pakistan, namely the East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) and the West Pakistan. With vast differences in language, culture and geographical location, the only unifying force between the two wings of Pakistan shared was their ‘Muslimness’ (Naher, 2005). On June 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the first democratically

elected President later the Prime Minister. He is the founder leader of Bangladesh and also the leader of Awami League (the current ruling party).

Groups like Jammāt-i-Islāmī and Muslim League that opposed the foundation of Bangladesh were barred immediately with the enactment of secularism. The Mujib government had also taken some major steps to secularize the polity. During this period the Mujib government changed Islamic names, logos, and motifs of various institutions initiated by Pakistan government. For example, the Islamic Intermediate College of Dhaka was renamed as Nazrul Islam College, after the national poet of Bangladesh who was a champion of secularism and humanism, and the Quranic inscription, 'Read the name of your Lord' was replaced with 'Knowledge is Light' on the logo of the University of Dhaka (Hashmi, 1994; Kabeer, 2011).

There are several factors behind the growth of 'religious fundamentalism' in Bangladesh. The most important one was the advent of military rule in 1975 (Jahangir, 1986; Kabeer, 2011; Sobhan, 1994). The next two successive military regimes (1975-1990) saw the uprising of national identity as well as state policies stemming from the ideals. Although the military rulers were not necessarily ideologically committed towards pursuing a policy of Islamization, they turned towards Islam; in search of legitimacy for their rule. During the regime of Ziaur Rahman (1977-81), Islam emerged as a significant marker of the political and every day discourse. Zia made systematic changes in different areas of state authority (for example, constitutional, administrative, symbolic) during his four years tenure. This context will be more elaborately discussed in Chapter Four with the particular aim to locate women's position in Bangladeshi context

This Research and My Personal Motivation

This research provides a contribution to the literature of educated Muslim women and women's agency and resistances. This study addresses the voices that have been missing by describing each of my six participants individually and contextually. As such "stories have the power to direct and change our lives" (Noddings, 1991, p. 157). Stories can allow readers to vicariously walk in another's shoes and to be exposed to others' lives. This study will explore the complexities of the cultural and religious politics through which Muslim university graduate females negotiate their being in terms of religion, tradition, and globalization by bringing in their stories about their lived experiences. I look at the ways in which Bangladeshi female university Graduates negotiate their identities within their families, community and broader society. These women have a university degree and I am interested in understanding how their education (against the backdrop of Islam, tradition and globalization) is shaping their choices and pathways in relation to their careers, marriage and sense of identity as young women. In my study I want to explore both the religious and cultural meanings of purdah that is understood and practiced by my participants in their daily lives. I am interested in understanding how the different meanings of purdah (as constructed by these young women in my study as well as the broader Bangladeshi society) empower or disempower them in different contexts. Ahmed (2011) similarly chose to explore her own experiences of veiling and that of other women.

I am a Muslim Bangladeshi woman. I work as an Assistant Professor at a public university in Bangladesh. I very often have to deal with problems that my female students are facing while they are pursuing their degrees. I constantly observe how the cultural tradition of purdah is being played out in these young women's lives. In most cases the parents marry off

their daughters before they finish their degree. When asked these women answered that their parents feel that it will be too late to find a good husband after they have finished their studies, rather they should get married first and then seek their husband's permission to continue their education or simply that 'too much education will make them disobedient', 'too much education will make them overqualified to get husbands', 'it is better to get married than pursuing higher education'. Being a woman myself, my journey until now has not been any different.

These issues are faced not only by me and my students but also by my female friends and colleagues. Women who are educated and married or want to pursue higher education, in most cases succumb to the demands of their surroundings. Married women in the workforce are not allowed to participate in the decision-making processes of their household and painfully some of these women are prey to domestic violence. Clearly, gender roles are highly regulated within public and private spheres of influence in Bangladesh (Sultana et, al. 2009; Feldman, 2010; Hussain, 2010; Rozario & Samuel, 2010). I have come across many of my students as well as acquaintances who veil or used to veil. Some of these women wear purdah for other than religious purposes. They wear it to serve different purposes such as: to protect themselves from being ogled, taunted, harassed, humiliated, sexually molested, and assaulted. Some of them veil because their families want them to, or because they want to hide their identity while they are on a date or to save their hair and skin from dust and pollution or, just to go along with the fashion.

My research is motivated by my own experiences as a Bangladeshi Muslim woman and an educator, and also to further understand the experiences of my female university students and colleagues as they negotiate purdah, tradition and globalization. I also want to

draw on my experiences in understanding how educated women in Bangladeshi context negotiate their ways of being young Bangladeshi women in a globalized context.

I have two research questions that drive my study,

1. What are the identity practices of young university female graduates in Bangladesh against the backdrop of *purdah*, Islam and globalization?
2. How do these young women negotiate power dynamics within various social relationships and institutions?

In exploring this power dynamics I have used resistance as an ‘analytical tool’.

Resistance has been defined as the “action of an individual or individuals opposing something that they disapprove of” (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 164). The first reason is related to my personal journey as an educated Muslim woman. It is related to how far I went with my struggle to pursue what I want from life. Without resisting society’s expectations from me as a woman, it would not have been possible for me to follow my dreams for higher education in a different country on a field that is very much neglected in my country. The second reason is related to the theoretical need in literature regarding resistance. It has been mentioned earlier that I have been counseling women for a considerable period of time. The most recurrent issue that overshadowed many others during counseling is their struggle with their surroundings. Wanting to use the concept of resistance as a part of my research led me to the theoretical need of this issue. There is hardly any work done on women’s construction of ‘self’ where resistance plays a significant part. The theories concerning resistance will be dealt with in the Chapter Three. During the analysis of my data, resistance emerged as a major theme that appears to be shaping these women’s lives.

The following figure is the conceptual framework of how I see my research now.

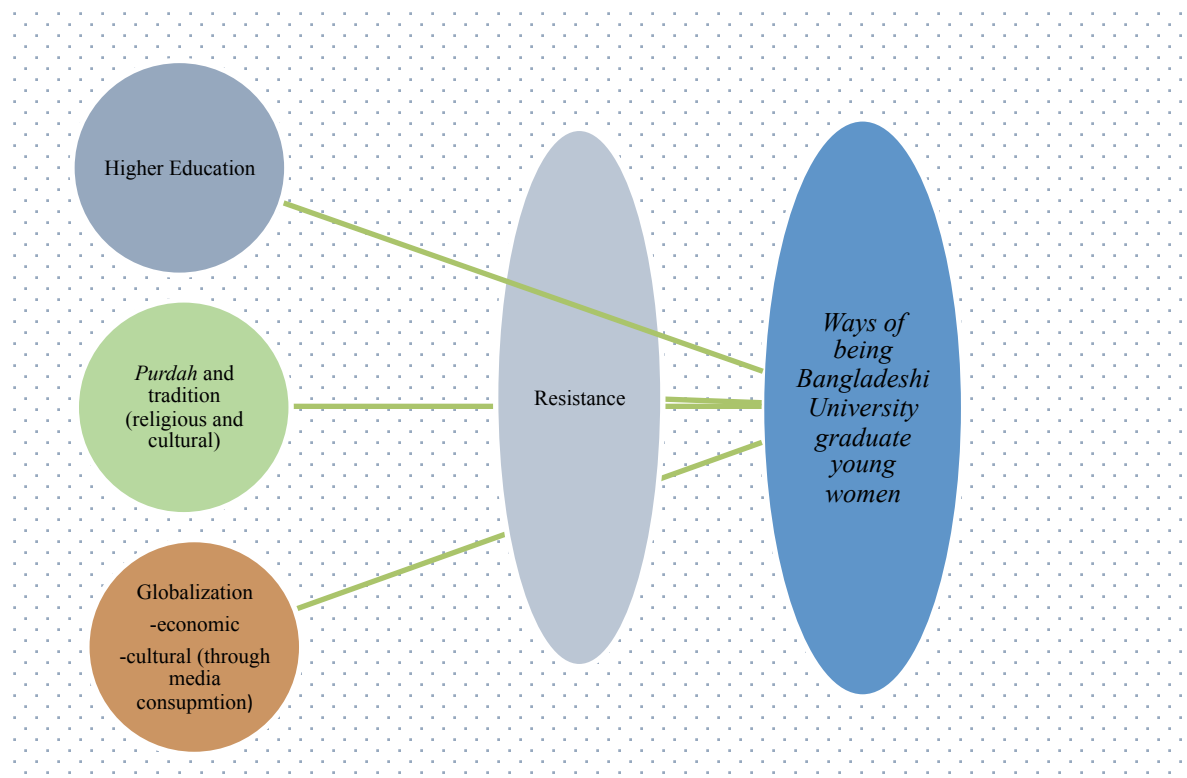


Figure 1 A flow diagram of how the agencies like higher education, purdah and tradition and globalization help to form educated women's sense of being.

I am using the theory of resistance because of my personal journey as a Muslim woman where I struggled my way to where I am now. I resisted the impositions done on me by my family and society. Agreeing with Hamzeh (2011), I also think there is a need to use “insider’s methodologies” to explore the “multiple and fluid embodiment” of purdah or hijab or veiling (p. 503). In my study, I have used phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of my participants and in doing so I have used my insider’s knowledge of culture and religion as resource for analysis.

Structure of the Chapters

Chapter One: The Research Defined

Chapter one began with a broad overview of how women's roles are perceived in different societies gradually bringing in the focus to Bangladeshi women. This chapter gave a

brief outline of the thesis with the motivation for this research, why it is important, the approach taken to data collection and analysis. The research aims and objectives were stated. There was a contextualizing introduction to Bangladeshi society and an introduction to the researcher and her reasons for undertaking this study.

Chapter Two: The Research Literature review

In this chapter I look into the definitions and social, cultural and religious understandings of veiling or purdah as discussed in the research literature since the 1970s. Purdah is discussed as symbolic shelter and as a carrier of various meanings and implications. For example, purdah can be understood as class distinction, external evidence of ‘good’ behavior and as a disguise. The observance of purdah is embedded in social and cultural understandings. The participants in this study are young women so there is a particular focus on education, purdah and marriage.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I discuss the theories that have influenced my field work and my analysis. I am positioning this chapter between the literature review and the methodology chapters as it forms a bridge between the writings of others on my topic and how I will undertake the research. I offer a succinct analysis of the theories that will help understand my data and later on my discussion chapter. In doing so, I focus on the complexities of identity formation and the overlapping intricacies of power, resistance, agency and empowerment (self-entitlement). I also consider studies on power, agency, resistance and globalization as these underpin my understandings of the enactment of purdah. While doing so I identify the gaps in literature which provides me with a rationale for the importance of my research. These studies support the theorization of my arguments in the discussion chapter (Chapter Nine).

Chapter Four: Methodology

In this part of my thesis I discuss the method of my data collection. As my study seeks an in-depth understanding of the life worlds of my participants I will undertake a phenomenological case study with fifteen interviewees, six of which will be presented as individual case studies. In this chapter I discuss phenomenology *per se*, case study research design, participant selection, recruitment and ethical issues, and tools and techniques of data collection. This study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. My data are analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is hermeneutic, idiographic and phenomenological and ideally suited for small homogeneous participant groups. There is a discussion of the issues of authenticity in qualitative research which involves the notions of credibility, trustworthiness, reliability and fairness. I explore the challenges that I have faced during the time of interview and what insight I have gained in terms of my research. I also discuss my position as an insider and outsider from my researcher's stance.

Chapter Five: Contextualizing Bangladesh

This chapter includes a brief history of how Bangladesh came into being after the British colonization and following the Independence war in 1971 with Pakistan (then West Pakistan). Throughout emphasis is given to women's position in Bangladeshi history and the gradual emergence of the notion of educating women. The later part of this chapter focuses on the growth of fundamentalism in independent Bangladesh. This chapter also explores the existing inequalities in education and the professional sector in Bangladesh along with how *purdah* (veiling), power, shame and honour is being perceived in Bangladeshi society in general. The concluding part of this chapter chiefly deals with women and education in globalized Bangladesh so that my following data chapters have a relevant background. This chapter is intentionally placed before the data chapters so that the readers can relate to the experiences shared by my participants.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight: Data Presentation

In these three chapters, six particular participants' individual profiles, understandings and experiences are presented based on the interview data. These six are selected as representative of all fifteen participants whose data does appear in the Chapter Nine (Discussion) but not in the same detail as the focus six. Two individuals will be presented in Chapter Six (Nayma, and Tajrian), two in Chapter Seven (Nusrat and Renu), and the last two in Chapter Eight (Tanya and Moly). The individuals have been loosely grouped together because they acquiesce to their cultural stereotypes (Chapter Six) although with considerable resentment at times or they rebel to some degree (Chapter Seven). In the latter chapter the influences of modernization and globalization are particularly apparent. In each chapter, following the initial introduction of the participants, data are discussed under broad overarching themes that include understandings of purdah, cultural stereotypes of 'good girl', the roles and expectations of women, domestic and social oppression and the participants' notions of resisting oppression and their practice of agency as educated individuals.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

This chapter will first address the tensions that arose from my data and then gradually focus on the other themes that emerged from my participants' understandings of their life worlds. The tensions that arose from the interviews with all fifteen participants are complex in nature. The ways they form their lives' choices are full of paradoxes, contradictions, confusions, conveniences, resentment and judgment which attest to the overlapping complexities of the tensions that they negotiate within their life-worlds. One recurrent theme that is evident in all the interviews is how the participants see veiling. Both inward and external veiling were discussed. The former was more emphasized by all the participants but no one seemed to be clear on what they actually meant by inward veiling. They each referred to one or more attributes of inward veiling as they thought befitting but no one appeared to

have a fully developed understanding. The tensions were also between what the participants think is right and what they practice in real life; between their understanding of culture and religion; and between how they understand modernism and globalization.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This chapter returns to the initial research questions and summarizes the findings. The implications of the study are discussed. Interestingly there were implications for the participants themselves as well as for the researcher. The findings of this study offer insight into an unconsidered group of educated Bangladeshi Muslim women and their contested and often fraught life-worlds. Like most studies, this study raises more questions than it provides answers.

Limitations

It is acknowledged that this study has several limitations in terms of scope, data collection limitations, and generalizability. The study is limited in its scope as it is only dealing with fifteen participants including six in-depth accounts of lived experiences. The participants are not representative of the total population of Muslim educated women in Bangladesh. The six cases that are presented in Chapter Six, Seven and Eight are carefully chosen as the representative of the overarching themes that emerged from the data (Mirza, 2012). In any given context individuals act differently according to their coping mechanisms. In that sense, the cultural issues might remain the same but an individual's response may vary depending on context. In that way the data presented here cannot be representative of the entire educated Muslim women's experience across Bangladesh.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literal meaning of the term purdah means screen or veil or curtain (Ahmed, 1993; Mernissi, 1991a; Papanek, 1971, 1973; Siddiqi, 2008). Some texts indicate that the origin of the word ‘purdah’ is from Hindi, Urdu and Persian language. But the concept can be traced back in the Assyrian civilization from 2500-605 BC, “It originated from ancient Indo-European cultures, such as the Hittites, Greeks, Romans and Persians. It was also practiced by the Assyrians” (Dashu, 2006). According to Dashu (2006), the main purpose of purdah during that time was to mark “the class rank as well as an urban/peasant split”. Purdah is a practice that includes the seclusion of women from the public sphere. A special kind/s of cloth/clothes is/are used in order to fulfil the objective of this screening process. Purdah is observed by both Muslim and Hindu women in the Indian Sub-continent (Ahmed, 1993; Papanek, 1973; Siddiqi, 2008). It is perceived as a variety of covers for the face as well as the body which might include niqab, borqa/burka, headscarf, hijab, chador and dupatta (an extra piece of cloth to cover the bosom). Papanek (1971) observed that all of these pieces of clothes are to accentuate female modesty in the South Asian region. It is important to mention that the degrees of modesty can be and is expressed with the specific use of the garments such as Burka, chador, hijab and dupatta (Abu-Laguhod, 2006). These garments are subject to change depending on the shifting financial and social situation of the family within the wider society depending on their class.

The concept of veiling has and continues to exist in many other religions as a mark of social status, reverence and modesty (Ahmed, 1993; Siddiqi, 2008). Veiling has never been an exclusive notion to the Muslims but was practised by the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine empires where veiling was primarily a signifier of elite cultural

practice. Historically in many cultures at different times veiling was not necessarily derived from religious beliefs. For example the emergence of Victorian ideologies of femininity and morality in Europe, eventually converge women both in colonized and colonizing societies as the “authentic symbol of cultural identity” (Siddiqi, 2008, p. 52). Women’s status in the society and their bodies became metaphorical signs of civility and modernity at the same time (Abu-Laguhod, 2006). For the convenience of the research, this study will only focus on the observance of purdah by Muslim women. While tracing the changes in gender roles in Muslim societies, Leila Ahmed (1992) contends that, “Throughout Islamic history the constructs, institutions, and modes of thought devised by early Muslim societies that form the core discourses of Islam have played a central roles in definig women’s place in Muslim societies” (p. 1).

Understanding Purdah

The understanding of veiling is a complex issue that needs to be addressed both from religious and socio-cultural perspectives. It is significant that in most cases these two understandings are often over-lapping. Purdah among Muslims is related to the Quranic prescriptions on how men and women are expected to behave with each other in public and in private. Contrary to the popular belief that it is only women who should veil, in reality the Quran dictates that both men and women should practice veiling and modesty. Very interestingly, in the Quran it is men who are ordered to observe veiling and modesty before women. There are several verses in the Quran that are relevant to modesty and purdah, but the most obvious one occurs in Sura An-Nur:

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts.

That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do.

(Sura An-Nur: 30)

In this verse men are instructed to lower their gaze from women with whom they are not related in blood or not married to. The next verse after this elaborately instructs women to practice modesty and veiling.

And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornments except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons., their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those make attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known that they conceal of their adornment. (Sura An-Nur: 31)

This verse stipulates the limitations of the group with whom a woman may have proper social relations, thus it sets the boundaries of the kin group within which purdah is not observed.

This verse describes veiling but does not restrict women's mobility in any fashion. Another verse exhorts the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) to wrap their cloaks tightly around their bodies, so that they can be recognized but not bothered or harassed in public (Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59). As far as modesty is concerned it is intertwined with the concept of veiling and both men and women are instructed to observe it. The connection between veiling and modesty is at the core of understanding of Islam. For a Muslim, saying prayers five times a day does not make a person a Muslim if s/he violates that core understanding which is violating others' rights, telling lies, being dishonest or being rude to family members or to any other human beings or even dressing provocatively. All of these are reiterated through various Quranic ayats (verses) and hadiths (preaching of Messenger PBUH). As this research is not an analysis of how to be a proper Muslim or whether to observe veiling or not, the

discussion on this will not be extended further than this. It is the participants' understanding of purdah and Islam that is the focus of this research.

Purdah as a Symbolic Shelter

It has been mentioned earlier that one of the functions of purdah is to provide symbolic shelter to Muslim women. Papanek (1973) observes that the perception of 'symbolic shelter' is inextricably interlinked with the division of gender roles within a family. This refers back to the interdependence of male and female in a given context. In this case, the distribution of gender roles work as a significant factor which eventually leads to the mechanism of social control among specific groups of people. Here dominance and dependency work as a key factor to carry out the notion of 'symbolic shelter'. For women within a family segregation works in two ways; first, it is the physical segregation of living space and then the covering of female face and body which is a major signifier of cultural schema. Although Papanek's (1973) context was Pakistan there were frequent references to Bangladesh (East Pakistan). The examples of social portrayals that she provided remain similar today. As an example of the segregation of living space in Bangladesh during any festival or ceremony where men and women are invited for food, still the dominant culture is to have separate arrangements for both sexes and anything otherwise is considered to be improper. But this notion of social segregation is much dependent on context, class (based on rich and poor) and place (urban/rural).

The argument concerning the covering of the female body as a signifier of culture and family is founded on the understanding of 'shelter'. The idea of providing shelter to somebody automatically raises the crucial question — what are these women being sheltered from? In answering this question, consideration must be given to the underlying assumption

of the nature of men and women. Symbolic shelter is needed to counter a sense of real danger in the actual world. These dangers may include sexual impulses and aggression which if enacted can destabilise society. To a large degree symbolic shelter refers to the impulse control of both men and women. A lack of ability to control behaviour may be linked to notions of shame and honour that are inextricably intertwined with the idea of symbolic shelter. As Khan (2012) contends that the key concept in understanding the masculinity and femininity in the social context is the understanding of the interconnectedness of *pardah* (veil) and *izzat* (honour). As she further added, “‘Honour’ is a powerful construct within South Asia as a whole; it determines the respectability and status of a family within society” (p. 83). In Bangladesh a family’s honour and status in society was and continues to be much dependent on the daughter’s chastity which is considered an important marker of the girl’s family’s honour (Khan, 2012).. Any incident related to sex before marriage or extramarital affairs is considered unacceptable and may result in the girl and her family being ostracised. Women wearing the veil is seen to be guarding personal and religious purity and hence becomes a cultural and social symbol of a ‘good woman’ adhering to social customs. It is also argued that veiling has become a fashion statement among urban women in Bangladesh (Rozario, 2006). *Pardah* works as an agent of social control to keep track of socialization among young girls (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983). Thus, women, who are sheltered become bearers and important demonstrators of the status of their protectors. As a result, women’s behaviours work as a symbolic representation of honour and family pride. In this sense, the protection of honour and avoidance of shame become crucial for a family in order to find suitable suitors for the daughters of the house.

Function of *Pardah*

Questions arise regarding the function of *pardah* in general. Why is it required and what purpose does it serve within the family or the society? The first question has already

been answered. Purdah is required to be worn by Muslim women in order to reinforce female separateness and seclusion from the male domain or public sphere. Besides this reason, for many researchers purdah is multifunctional in a society. Along with the religious requirement purdah is also worn as a social and cultural need as it denotes class (Sultana et al., 2009), ensures security (Rozario, 2006), restraints free sexual mixing (Papanek, 1971, 1973) and establishes family background as it is related to honour and shame (Sultana et al., 2009).

Cultural Understanding of Veiling

Interpretations of purdah or veiling are the focus of this study. This section will discuss the cultural underpinnings of purdah in Muslim societies. This discussion considers research studies on purdah and Muslim women most of which are ethnographic.

The literal meaning of purdah refers to veiling and these two words have sometimes been used synonymously and sometimes separately by researchers. Siddiqi identifies some essential differences between purdah and veiling (2008). She argues purdah stands for female seclusion according to the preaching of Islam (as mentioned above) where the core idea denotes that while a woman reaches her puberty she is no longer allowed to come in front of men other than a few blood relations. As dictated in the Quranic ayat mentioned earlier Papanek (1973) refers to this idea as 'kin unit'. Siddiqi (2008) argues that purdah refers to the spatial distance meaning the physical difference between men and women using the Islamic way of dressing. Nonetheless, if purdah means screening, in that sense, any clothes that are used to cover the female body carry out the function of segregating male and female in a given context which means this act will be considered as the observance of purdah. Mernissi (1991a) unpacked the understanding of veiling in three ways. According to her there are three

kinds of veiling –visual, spatial and spiritual or ethical (Mernissi, 1991a). The visual veiling incorporates covering the female body with a headscarf or a burqa to carry the visual understanding of modesty and Islamic identity. The spatial one is the one that denotes the male-female segregation in public sphere and the spiritual one includes the do's and don't's according to the Quran and Hadith.

In the essay “Purdah: An Analysis of Ideal vs Contextual Reality” Ahmed (1993) used purdah and veiling interchangeably. For him, there are no differences between the two. He understood the concept from Muslim ideology and attached it to the social reality of purdah in Bangladesh. His research shows that, in rural areas purdah is practised by the wealthy families, especially those families that do not need the women of the house to go out of their domestic territory in order to economically support the family. According to Feldman and McCarthy (1983), the nature of women's work “was essentially household, i.e., compound bound” (p. 951). But for the families that require the wives to work outside the household, for them, the notion of purdah has undergone some changes. For these families, purdah no longer adheres to the covering up of the body and not being allowed to come in front of unknown men as purdah cannot be maintained while working with men in the fields. Rather purdah has taken a new dimension along with the social attributions of do's and don'ts demanding special gender roles to be carried out by women. These roles include behaviour that exhibits modesty, honour, and ‘proper’ dressing. As Papanek (1973) puts it:

In the broadest sense, purdah is related to status, the division of labour, interpersonal dependency, social distance and the maintenance of moral standards as specified by the society. These different factors acting various social and psychological levels, can be conceptualized in terms of two interacting and closely related principles which may be called ‘separate worlds’ and ‘provision of symbolic shelter’. (p. 292)

Beyond the scriptural references to the actual requirement of modesty, a central problem is the relationship between hijab and the social processes of veiling. It is a long debated issue whether observing the veil is demanded by an absolute religious obligation or is it a social one. Debate within Islam emphasises a lack of consensus on the precise code of dress stipulated by the requirement of modest conduct. Ahmed (1992) makes a general point that “Islam is specific about modesty in both men and women. A dress that looks best when skin tight and intended to indicate the contours of the torso violates this injunction” (pp. 192-193). However, apart from the problem of distinguishing intention or motive from style of dress, modesty remains a complex cultural concept in that it refers to both internal state and a repertoire of behaviours indicative of that state. In that sense, the veil is the literal expression of both the states. A recent mixed method study conducted by Sultana et al. (2009) suggests that 53.8 per cent women in Bangladesh believe that ‘purdah’ is a social custom and that it is a religious belief but it is also a symbol of the “family status and its strictest adherents are confined to their homes. This ‘protects’ the woman’s modesty and, while also protecting her husband’s family’s izzat (honour/respectability)” (p. 275). This study also argues that by veiling most women understand covering their hair only. In Islam veiling does not only mean covering hair rather it refers to modest clothing as well as restraint in behaviour with others. The Islamic doctrine of modest clothing or clothing that is not sexually provocative is absent from the argument presented by Sultana et al. As an insider of Bangladeshi society, my understanding is similar. It is important to mention ethical or spiritual hijab in this context. Besides the visual and spatial hijab, the ethical hijab is the code of conduct that completes the Islamic understanding of veiling. As Hamzeh and Oliver (2012) argued, “The ethical hijab represents the protector that shelters Muslim girls from forbidden things, or *harams*, such as meeting men alone without the presence of an immediate adult family member, preferably a male” (p. 332) or to have sex before marriage.

A complicating factor is the representation of veil or purdah. Commentators who identify themselves as both Muslims and feminists such as Papanek, Kabeer, Abu-Laghood, Mernissi, focus on the potential emancipation of women by Islam stressing that the true message of the Quran has been distorted through interpretation in order to dominate and polarize women in the society. Mernissi contended that the manipulation of the scriptures “is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power from the seventeenth century on was legitimated by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions” (Mernissi, 1991b, p. 9). These political forces are interrelated with the patriarchal top-down power structure in Muslim societies. As Mernissi notes:

Islam does not advance the thesis of women’s inherent inferiority...On the contrary, the whole system is based on the assumption that women are powerful and dangerous beings. All sexual institutions (polygamy, repudiation, sexual segregation etc.) can be perceived as a strategy for containing power.

(Mernissi, 1987, p. 19)

Some critics see purdah as an evil influence that has only restricted the rights of women and perpetuated male chauvinism (Kabeer, 2011; Papanek, 1973). They point towards the Muslim women who are covered top to toe and are kept ignorant of the practicalities of life. To them purdah has deprived women of economic independence and forces women to produce chauvinistic boys and submissive girls. In order to keep females submissive, women know only their fathers, husbands, and sons. Such women have no voice or free will rather have internalized the patriarchy and become a bearer of the traditional practices and norms. Scholars such as Fadil (2011) examined a more nuanced perspective of the functionality of veiling and other religious conduct such as praying and other religious code of conduct and agency as opposed to the stereotypical representation of headscarfs as the marker of “docility, oppression or segregation” (p. 85).

Others, mostly believers in Islam, see purdah as a very positive and respectful practice that actually liberates women. It is viewed as liberating because it brings about an aura of respect. Women are looked as individuals who are judged not by their physical beauty but by their inner beauty and mind. By covering themselves, women are not looked at as sex objects that can be dominated according to the stereotypical male gaze of how men actually want to see women as a commodity. For the Muslims, purdah is an act of faith that entails the act of honor, respect, and dignity. Islam exalts the status of women by commanding that women should enjoy equal rights with men and remain on the same footing as them. When a woman covers herself she places herself on a higher level and allows men to see and respect her for her intellect and personality. The physical beauty of the person is to play no role in the given social interaction (Mernissi, 1991a).

Purdah as a Mark of Class Distinction

Purdah is observed by the elite class women to differentiate between the classes. The concept of purdah propagates female modesty and shame which is inextricably linked with family background i.e. as a mark of good family and bad family. Observing purdah by a young woman thus eventually refers back to the family that has a good tradition of upbringing a 'good' girl who adheres to the religious values and social norms and thus is in great demand for other families belonging to a similar class seeking arranged marriages (Ahmed, 1993; Feldman & McCarthy, 1983). The class is usually determined in terms of rich and poor as well as educational background. In this respect purdah works not only as a religious agent but also as social and cultural agency.

As stated, purdah is observed by the elite class or wealthy women specially those who do not need to work outside their house. Women's body and psychology have been viewed as a significant demarcation of prosperity and family status (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983).

Feldman and MaCarthy (1983) observed that along with the house bound role of women in a South Asian society, women's behaviour works also as a factor in social status. In rural Bangladesh, the general trend is that men do the field work and women are kept indoors to carry on with the domestic responsibilities i.e. to cook, clean, fetch water and rear children. Sometimes they are also engaged in craft work as a side business. Families having land, require women to be engaged in the post-harvest time for production. For women, thus, the responsibilities become two fold — household and production (Ahmed, 1993; Papanek, 1973). For some purdah ensures security both in the rural and in the urban areas. As purdah works as a 'portable seclusion', it is believed to be protecting women from eve-teasing (a colloquial term for men verbally and physically harassing women in public, this is a dangerous term as it appears to make light of an illegal practice that can have serious consequence such as committing suicide) which is a burning question in Bangladesh. This notion is inter-related with the concept of honour and modesty.

Purdah and Marriage

The core idea of purdah or veiling in Islam is to mark the public separation between male and female. The women are only allowed to come in front of the male members of the family with whom they cannot establish a sexual relationship with. Thus, it propagates that if women come in front of the other male members there might be a deviation in the social code by having illicit sexual relationship. Hence, marriage by choice becomes remote as women do not have enough opportunities to choose their partners. This leads to the concept of arranged marriages which is generally guided by the parents and within the families. In this women are expected to leave their natal home and go and live with the bridegroom's family. This act puts women in a dependent position to their male counterparts (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983; Papanek, 1973). The fact purdah is the major agent to demonstrate female modesty, shame and honour, eventually dissolves to the fact that where girls do not have the

freedom to choose their husbands but are subject to arranged marriages. The whole concept of arranged marriages delivers a special message regarding romantic and sexual love. In this scenario the idea of emotional attachment gets very little or no importance at all as it is expected to develop gradually after marriage. Haddon and Kolenda (1972) note that the greatest love stories of the subcontinent celebrate love in tragedy where lovers cannot consummate their love. A key factor of male patriarchy is that marriage partners for women are chosen by the parents (Kabeer, 2011; Papanek, 1971; Siddiqi, 2008). The pre-conceived notion of marriage influences women's mobility, their decision making capacity in the household and in the reproductive system, their decision to work outside, and their decision to spend the money that they earn (Hossain & Kabir, 2001).

In Bangladesh the structure of family and kinship system plays a key role in mapping women's mobility, their negotiation for property, and their decision making process in a family. The patrilocal marital practice in Bangladesh requires women to leave their natal home on marriage to live with their husband's family and become a part of his family. Women are required to be 'shy and have shame' by maintaining the dress code while talking to the elderly male family members of the 'kin unit' as well as talking to men as a whole (Werbner, 2007). They are also required to be subservient (i.e. not to question or challenge) to their mother-in-laws. The chain of being a respectable member of the family and society is thus maintained by the older female members within the family both from the women's side as well as from the in-laws' side when the woman is married (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983; Papanek, 1971).

Within a Bangladeshi family women become highly dependent on patriarchal guidance and decision making. In rural areas, a woman's position is defined by her ability to produce sons who will perpetuate the family name and inherit property. If the offspring are daughters then the distribution of property is automatically hindered. Girls are entitled to the

father's property but that is very small in comparison to sons. This questions and excludes girls' inheritance of family property (Kabeer, 2011).

The patriarchal hegemony also includes purdah or female seclusion which restricts women's mobility in the public sphere. All these agents put men into a superior position "While men have power and authority over women, they are also obligated to provide them with food, clothing and shelter" (Cain, Khanam, & Nahar, 1979, p. 407). As a result women's accessibility to wealth and decision making is restrained by male dominance. Women remain most of their lives dependent on the male family members of the family which enhances the likelihood of losing social status in case of their losing the male guidance. This situation has been termed as 'patriarchal risk' by Cain et al. (1979).

Purdah, Power, Shame and Honour

Purdah is also deeply embedded in cultural schema concerning a woman's shame and honour, the stereotypes of good/bad woman, and the notion of women being the bearers of family honour (Papanek, 1971; Pastner, 1974). It is through the observance of purdah within the family the male ego is asserted (Siddiqi, 2008). Veiling carries different connotations depending on context. It may be an empowering agent that permits some independence, it may constitute resistance to male aggression and violence (for example 'eve-teasing' and acid throwing), and it may serve as a marker of class identity and family status (Ahmed, 1999; Mernissi, 1987; Siddiqi, 2008). Veiling is associated with the deep embedded concept of 'shame and honour' of a woman (Feldman, 2010; Werbner, 2007). For Ahmed (1993) the concept of purdah generates the ideological belief of shame and honour which has the extended meaning of the behavioural patterns of women emphasising the code of conduct regarding the register of the voice, the clothing whether or not a woman should come in front of a non-family member including the greeting norms of the older members (men) of the

family, all of these constructs the idea of proper behaviour. Thus, veiling and purdah are perceived “as public symbols of female modesty and familial honour” (Werbner, 2007, p. 162).

Along with the umbrella of shame and honour comes the traditional notion of attitude towards sex. Preserving female virginity until marriage is stressed in Bangladeshi society. If a girl is known to have pre-marital sex the honour of the whole family is affected and the family is dishonoured. This attitude is the same with women who are believed to have extra marital affairs (Caldwell, Caldwell, Caldwell, & Pieris, 1998; Rashid & Michaud, 2000). The cultural schema of purdah goes beyond its literal meaning of screen or veil and becomes a particular image bearer of the notion of a ‘good woman’ brought up in a good family with a good education (not necessarily institutional education). Eventually this unacceptance by the family of the women believed to have lost their purity paves the way towards prostitution.

It is very difficult to separate the complex social, political and religious networks that surround women in Bangladesh and are enacted through purdah. There are ethnographic studies on women in Bangladesh from the 1970s to the mid-1990s (Blanchet, 1984; Kotalova, 1996; Rozario, 1992) that discuss religion as grounded in patriarchy, embodied in purdah and elaborated through philosophical and religious texts. While there is an increasing participation of women into global capitalist modernity (development), there is still control and surveillance of women in terms of women’s ‘outside’ employment’ and income and (control of) fertility. Purdah, in addition to religious fundamentalism still shapes women’s roles and participation in the public spheres. There are tensions between the development discourse that advocates for women’s active role in the economy and the religious and cultural discourse of purdah (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003; Hussain, 2010; White, 2010).

Through the 1990s, researchers turned their attention more directly to the politics of religion within society. Rozario (1992) examined the ways in which gender values influence community and class based domination in a mixed Muslim, Hindu, and Christian village in Bangladesh. A series of ‘fundamentalist’ attacks on NGOs and *fatwas* issued against women provided the major impetus for subsequent studies through the 1990s and into the new millennium. There have also been studies looking at the relationship between concepts of ‘shame and honour’ and forced marriage, honour killings, and dowry deaths (Hajjar, 2004). In what Koğacioğlu (2004) refers to as the “tradition effect”, forced marriage, honour killings, and dowry deaths are violence against women who are subjected to patriarchal ideologies embedded within the family, community, or state. Women who are subjected to such injustices also lack access to civil or legal recourse to adjudicate their claims.

As men assert their supremacy by maintaining the ‘shame and honour’ of their women, failing to maintain this honour is seen as a grave sin or crime. As a result violence against women is a recurrent phenomenon in Bangladesh society. Feldman’s (2010) investigation as to why women commit suicide in Bangladeshi society reveals motives that are associated with the concept of shame and honour. The study also focuses on how a woman internalizes this concept and responds to an adverse situation within her family. There are generally two reasons why a woman decides to end her life; first, because of the fear of shaming or dishonouring the family within the society and second, the fear of how the family might respond to the event and how they might be ostracised by the community.

The critical question whether purdah works as a restraining agent or liberating agent has been addressed by both Asian and Western critics. Hossain and Kabir (2001), Feldman and MaCarthy (1983) have identified veiling or purdah to be an empowering agent in the rural women’s lives that enables engagement with outside work often supported by micro credit program that helps them to run small business on their own. In this way they are

working as the important earning source of the family hence they can influence decision-making processes within the household.

Stereotyping Purdah

The above discussion attempted to unpack the complex understanding of veiling or purdah within the society. In doing so, the discussion primarily engaged with the socio-cultural understanding of veiling and its association with upholding family status, honour and the idea of ‘proper’ behaviour with proper clothing that will outwardly determine who is considered to be a good woman and who is not. It has also been discussed that veiling is seen as a mark of backwardness, or ‘women who veils are not smart or modern’. This attitude is embedded within the society itself. Besides this, there is another crucial stereotyping that the researcher considers is pivotal to mention in this section which is how Muslims and veiling is perceived by the West. Hoodfar (1989) explains that, “The Veil, which since nineteenth century has symbolized for the West the inferiority of Muslim cultures, remains a powerful symbol both for the West and for Muslim societies” (p. 5).

In the West, veiling signifies the patriarchal oppression and cultural inferiority of Islam in comparison to the rest of the world. Hoodfar (1989) contends that veiling has become an important symbol for Muslims that can reflect cultural identity and/or religious purity and authenticity. Conversely for many Muslims veiling is a sign of cultural inferiority and anti-secularism (Siddiqi, 2008). For Western missionaries who came as reformers to the Indian subcontinent, purdah was a confirmation of the lowly state of the heathen from which men and women needed to be saved (Zwemer, 1915). Reformers of indigenous people saw purdah as a legitimization of widow marriage, childhood betrothal, early marriage and the lack of education for women (Karve, 1963). Veiling or purdah is considered a black-and-white issue by western critics who automatically place western culture and the Muslim world

in an 'us' versus 'them' situation. The argument can be there that with the advancement of science and especially globalisation, views will change.

The rise of Islamophobia and 'war on terror' in the recent years has brought considerable focus on hijab discourse. As Zine (2006) argues, "Muslim women's bodies continue to be disciplined and regulated both oppressive laws mandating veiling under authoritarian theocratic regims of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan as well as by the laws denying their freedom to wear headscarves in Western societies like France, Germany and Turkey" (p. 11). Recent events in France offer perspective on whether or not this situation has changed. In 2004, the French Parliament passed a law prohibiting "ostentatious signs of religious belonging" in state run primary and secondary schools (Ruet, 2004). The law forbids Sikh turbans and Jewish yamaka in the classroom but the general acknowledgement is the law is aimed at specifically the Muslim headscarfs. The reason given for this law is that wearing headscarf is disrupting the secular atmosphere in the school as the school is a fundamental part of the public sphere the state must preserve the stance as secular. The headscarfs discourage secularism by differentiating between the Muslims with the non-Muslims. Nevertheless, there is also another strong argument working behind the law. Wearing headscarfs is seen as the assertion of patriarchy hence the girls wearing headscarfs are subject to the forced family norms which establishes the violation of human rights of the Muslim girls. Interestingly, many Muslim women are believed to have started to wear headscarf after the law was passed as a resistance of the government's incursion into private territory. As the headscarf is an integral part of Muslim identity, for many women its banning has demanded social and political response in the form of resistance against the government's actions (Siddiqi, 2008; Werbner, 2007).

Globalization, modernizing and education

The impact of globalization on women has had a critical effect in women's lives particularly through education and media consumption (Raju, 2010). Globalization has been a problematic term to define. Among the numerous definitions, one of the earliest is "rapid developments in communications technology, transport and information which bring the remotest parts of the world within easy reach (Ahmed & Donnan, 1994, p. 1). Globalization has also been defined as "a complex economic, political, cultural and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken a global or transnational form" (Moghadam, 1999, p. 367). Globalization has been seen as "a process of expanding trade and commerce creating borderless market" (Hussain, 2011, p. 1). Globalization is understood as rapid and all engulfing process of "economic restructuring, take-over and control over production resources by transnational corporations associated with neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation and liberalization" (Barkat & Maksud, 2001, p. 3). In that sense, not only the industrial sector but also the overall lifestyle of people has been impacted by globalization. Castells (1996) termed this age of informationaization and globalization in which

a technological revolution, centred around information, transformed the way we think, we produce, we consume, we trade, we manage, we communicate, we live, we die, we make war, we make love...Space and time, the material foundations of human experience , have been transformed. (I)

Some view globalization as beneficial for the world in trade, economy and social system and also as a potential remedy to global problems (Callaghy, 1993; Petras, 2001). The objective of globalization can be to expose "injustices, makes visible problems invisible, and reveals pressure points in the system" (Robinson, 2006, p. 29). Globalization can be perceived as a negative or a positive influence. It can create gaps between nations, classes and genders but on the other hand, the free flow of media and information may bring the

world to the door-step or to a computer screen. There are contradictions and complexities in discussions of globalization which may be understood as both a problem and a solution (Robinson, 2006). The debates around globalization are as huge as the topic itself. This study will only partially focus on the socio-cultural aspect of globalization with regard to women specially in developing nations.

The impact of globalization on women is a mixed one. For many women globalization has rendered the opportunity of breaking free from their traditional housebound roles of women to a greater economic freedom. On the other hand, women's labour is considered to be cheap in comparison with men. Many of the women who are engaged in workforce in an increasing range of job opportunities are ill paid and/or have no assurance of job security (Hussain, 2011; Moghadam, 1999). Studies envisage globalization as something that empowered women by creating job opportunities (Barkat & Masud, 2001; Hussain, 2011). They argued about the changes that are happening in the lives of the rural women and also how women's education is being promoted both by government and families. But women have become doubly marginalized because of globalization. On one hand, it is creating job opportunities (where there are often very few rights of women in work places) and on the other, they continue to be burdened with domestic responsibilities inside their homes. Studies here focused on the lives of rural women and even if they talk about urban women, it is only those who came from rural areas. My research allows me a unique opportunity to probe into the lives of young women who already have a university degree. I explore these women's experiences and their stories to have a better understanding of their struggles and how they deal with the rapid change of globalization and the age old traditional values at home. In their research on Cape Verdean women, Carter and Aulette (2009) sought the connections between globalization, oppression, resistance, gender and culture. They argued that understanding these issues is important as it will impact social movements "that are rooted in the social

context of real people's lives and reflect not only the political and economic features of globalization but also is gendered in character and the role of culture in promoting social change" (Carter & Aulette, 2009, p. 169). Hartsock (2001) argued that comprehending women's situation is a significant strategic move in embracing the dynamics of capitalism in a global context. She noted that theorizing from women's lives and experiences of work and oppression will help to identify fundamental dynamics that support global capitalism. In the Bangladeshi context, globalization is understood as modernization which principally means adjusting to current trends. Pursuing higher education can be considered as a trend that is followed by all classes (lower middle, middles and higher).

Higher education has been perceived as preserving family's izzat (honour) in the wider community, which can be termed as 'status achievement' which means that sending women to universities is seen as a status symbol in the society (Bagguley & Hussain, 2007). The most logical explanation of women (or anyone) pursuing higher education would be because they would want to find work in future and put their education into practice. But that is not the case in most of the developing nations. Besides being a status symbol women are sent to universities so that they can have a better future with good husbands. As Jayaweera (1997) observes, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, not all women graduates "seek employment, because paid work outside home is socially disapproved as a reflection on the economic status of the husband who is perceived to be the exclusive 'breadwinner'" (p. 252).

As the term 'modern' will occur in this study during data analysis and discussion, it is important to mention how this term is being understood. The term 'modern' is often associated with higher education. Jayaweera (1997) identified higher education as an integral part of the understanding of 'modernization'. The perception of modernization was understood in terms of eliteness or class hierarchy in the society. But since the advance of the free flow of information, pursuing higher education has become the benchmark of being

modern. Education is seen as an empowering agent that helps women “to be aware of gender inequality and to resist oppressive social and economic structures, ideologies and practices” (p. 245).

Globalization has given women greater autonomy over their feelings of independence, modification of traditional gender roles, greater decision making in the household and also often becoming the sole bread winner of the family but at the same time women are also discriminated against in the male work force in the work place (Bacchus, 2005). Although apparently, globalization creates greater job opportunity and thus ensures greater economic freedom for women, in reality it only creates more gender gaps in the society by performing a gender bias towards men. Globalization generates consumerism where women are marginalized the most in the developing nations such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia (Bacchus, 2005; Lukose, 2009; Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002). In the wake of globalization women have to negotiate with their circumstances in number of ways. Barkat and Maksud (2001) pointed out that rapid industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization have impacted the lives of urban as well as rural women who sought to migrate to the capital Dhaka to keep pace with the rapid change as well as to work in the garment industry and in other sectors. This rapid change is seen as development and it rearranges the entire economy of the country. This should be viewed as something good as it theoretically renders greater autonomy to women but the reality is different.

Barkat and Masud (2001) assert that women are now burdened with more responsibility than before. Now they not only have to bear the economic responsibility of the family but also they have to comply with the traditional gender role in the family as well as in the society of cooking, cleaning and rearing children (Moser, 1989). In the workplace women are paid less than men thus women are preferred as cheap labour (Bacchus, 2005; Hussain, 2011). Verbal and physical abuse, sexual advances from superiors are some of the issues that

women have to deal with while working in a garment factory or in other industries (Bacchus, 2005) and almost in all cases they give in in order to keep their jobs (Masud & Barkat, 2001). In these confusing debates on who is more affected by globalization, Ahmed and Donnan (1994) observe that, “Muslim women in particular seem to be squeezed between Islamic fundamentalism and modernity, and between modernity and postmodernity” (p. 14). It has also been argued that the practice of veiling has become a politicized phenomenon whose meaning shifts depending on the articulation of the local with the global in any particular setting (Baykan, 1990).

This shifting meaning is caught between the overlapping cultural flows of the impact of media and internet. It has been argued that media propagates the image of lifestyles, of standards of living, of code of behaviour, and of appearance. A direct impact of globalization is the growing contacts between cultures “leading partly to a greater understanding and cooperation and partly to the emergence of transactional communities and hybrid identities” (Moghadam, 1999, p. 368). According to Moghadam (1999) cultural globalization is the overall cultural standardization such as “Coca Colonization” or “McDonaldization” as well as the westernization of clothing and people’s life style. Media is selling a certain living standard among people which perhaps was alien before, a kind of western centric view of life (p. 368). A woman’s body has always been the centre of objectification in media whether it is in an Islamic country or a western one. Through the objectification of her body, the shine of shampooed hair, the importance of being younger using various anti-aging creams, serving on the family dining table and so forth, within all these pictures there is embedded a fundamentalist view of the secondary status of women, “the implicit assumption of her inferior and unstable moral being” (Othman, 2006, p. 343). One can easily view this as a positive impact that accelerates growth hence making able citizens compete with other nations. But in reality, the increase of domestic (dowry for husband, acid throwing for failing

to meet dowry demands) and social (fatwa, rape, acid throwing, trafficking of women and children, prostitution, pornography) violence on women have been identified as the results of globalization (Barkat & Maksud, 2001). Women are still the victims of inequality, abuse, suppression and exploitation both in the domestic sphere as well as the public sphere. Globalization affected women's lives in number of ways one of which is it made women more open to westernized dresses which may result in rejection by their families. Globalization seems to have provided women with greater mobility and economic freedom and yet women are marginalised in corporate jobs while providing them with a hybrid identity which is somewhere in between an image that the media projects and the traditional/cultural/religious/societal expectations and what the self wants.

The next chapter will present the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

This section will elaborate the theories that have helped to analyse the data provided as narratives by my participants. I find these theories pertinent to my research in bringing the absent voices of my participants into the literature. I used some of these theories as I prepared myself for my fieldwork and some of these theories were later incorporated while analysing my data and writing my discussion chapter. As my research is about the negotiation of self by my participants, I will start this section with a general discussion on theories on identity formation. This section will show how identity formation is performative while gradually theorizing power, agency and resistance. All these concepts are very broad, complex and overlapping on their own accord. Their interconnectedness helped me gain a deeper understanding of my society's norms which I, myself grew up in never in true sense fathoming how things worked or for whom things were working or more importantly whether things were working at all.

The question of identity in a contemporary world where culture clashes are a fact of life for many people has been one of the important topics of investigation in current cultural studies and a number of theories about identity have evolved in recent years. The exploration of negotiation of women's identity is one of the key areas in this thesis. Studies show how women's bodies, their 'proper behaviour' and 'proper clothing' have signified the collective boundaries in many societies (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Zine, 2002) and "how women's bodies become contested sites of power, politics, and ideology" (Badran, 2009, p. 168). For this study women's sense of self and their perception of their behaviour by themselves and by the society is at the core of their self-narratives and their negotiation of 'self' or identity. Identity

“is generally used to define and described an individual’s sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses” (Peek, 2005, pp. 216-217).

A notion of identity that sees it as unified and fixed is no longer tenable, and identity now is conceived as “becoming” rather than “being”, evolving, and always in a state of being re-constructed (Dillon, 1999, p. 250). According to Gayatri Spivak, identity is not predetermined but is multifaceted and variable. In Spivak’s words, “There are many subject positions that one must inhabit; one is not just one thing” (Spivak, 1990, p. 60). Hall is also against the essential model and argues for a discursive model of identity formation, in which discourses have a significant role in the construction of identity. As he puts it, “identities are never unified and in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). According to him, “identities are... constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Identity is both the result of internal process, such as self-reflection, subjective perception, and external circumstances such as the social environment (Peek, 2005).

Identity formation is affected by the outer world and our social locations. This is in line with Erickson’s definition of identity as a “psycho-social phenomenon, where the sense of me and myself is formed in relation to others and their responses” (Erickson, 1980, pp. 20-21). The self can be understood as “fluid, fragmented, and multiple” (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 339). Our identity is continuously formed and transformed in relation to the ways we represent ourselves or we are expected to represent ourselves within a given cultural milieu. As this research deals with Muslim women, their understanding of Islam or religion became an indispensable issue of their being. On that note, religious identity can be located as a part of the repertoire of identities that individuals inhabit alongside their national, sexual, racial, class and ethnic identities (Zine, 2007). The saliency of religious identity differs from

individual to individual and also can change different stages of an individual's life. As has been discussed in the earlier chapter veiling/purdah is intertwined with modesty and having shame. Shame is understood in different ways in different cultures. In cultures that have an Islamic background having shame, being modest and safe guarding family honour is shaped by Islamic ideology and carried through by women. The understanding of shame impacts women's being and becoming both as an individual and as a cultural being.

Women are situated differently than men within the ensemble of social relations. Brown (2006) defines shame as “an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging” (p. 45). It is “manifested in a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy that, like the shame of embodiment, is profoundly disempowering” (Bartky, 1990, p. 85). While theorizing shame Bartky (1990) argues that “shame is by nature recognition” meaning that the self is perceived and valued by “Other's judgement” (p. 85). Shame seeks audience, individual's craving to be recognized and valued by others and failure to do so reduces “us to being an object only for other's jurisdiction. Sentence without trial, shame judges, ridicules, terrorises” (Biddle, 1997, p. 227). Shame is physical and imposed upon the skin as individuals tend to turn away physically from acute and intense sensation (Ahmed, 2004). Bartky (1990) argues that women are more shame prone than men and it affects women profoundly by shaping their self while subduing them in a patriarchal social relation. According to Ahmed (2004) the way shame works is through bodies which “means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces” (p. 103). In that sense shame is sustained and carried out through individual's disposition with respect to power in the society. It is the potential shame or the threat of shame that makes individual behave in certain way in order to fit in. As Allan, Eatough and Ungar (2016) argued, “The adoptive purpose of shame is to maintain the acceptance of others and preserve the self while maintaining social standards” (p. 3). This justification of to what

degree an individual is accepted in the society depends on to what extent an individual is able to perform, to fit in or in women's case to what extent she is malleable to her feminine/gendered self.

In order to make this discussion unambiguous it is necessary to provide a brief account of Butler's conception of performativity. Butler's theory of performativity challenged the theory that gender differences are rooted in biological and/or culturally symbolic systems of meanings. She maintained that "gender is not an inner core of static essence, but a reiterated enactment of norms, one that produce, retroactively, the appearance of gender as an abiding interior depth" (1997, p. 14). What is required for the hegemony of heteronormativity standards to maintain power is our persistent reiteration of such gender acts through the mundane daily activities (the way we talk, walk and conduct ourselves). There is a possibility that the reiteration may fail or be readjusted and that can bring shame causing extreme harm to women's sense of self.

This study is inspired by my own story as a woman who has been negotiating the pathways to fulfill the dream of attaining higher education and in doing so how I have negotiated what I am 'allowed to do' and what I 'want to do'. The phrase "what I am allowed to do" unavoidably refers to existing power dynamics within the social periphery. The veil in its cultural underpinning evolved as a disciplinary symbol for me as well as for my participants. An idea that is best explained by Michel Foucault's panopticon. Foucault theorized this idea of general discipline as a Panopticon which supervises the society as a whole. The Panopticon is a type of institutional building designed by an English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late Eighteenth century that has a circular structure and permitted no inmate to see one another as all were segregated in individual boxes which were focused on the centre of the room. It is best understood in his design of a Panopticon prison. This structure was later on theorized and used by Foucault to describe power (1975). Out of few,

one of the roles of this metaphorical cage is to strengthen social forces. Foucault elaborates the function of discipline as an apparatus of power. He analyses the network of power that spread throughout the society which is controlled by rules of strategy alone. Foucault develops the panopticon as a metaphor of modern 'disciplinary' societies and their pervasive inclination to observe and normalise. For women in Bangladesh the walls of the panopticon are the hierarchical gendered norms that are practiced not only in the top down process (men being in the superior position) but also as a relational force. This is enacted within the set boundaries that discipline women's bodies and behaviours.

Foucault theorized power not as something to be possessed rather as a relation. It is not something to be held, but "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). Foucault understands power in relation to productivity, through the flowing language that we use, the way we organize time and space and so on. It is not necessarily a top-down process rather people from different stages possess and exercise some form of power within the social context. Foucault has been hugely influential in shaping the understanding of power from a top down process where previously it was being viewed as an instrument for restraint or intimidation. He led the idea of power as a coercive force to "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93).

As Gaventa (2003) argues, Foucault did not see power always as a coercive and negative force that makes us to do things against our wills. Rather as it is everywhere and can be practiced by everyone, it can be a positive, productive and necessary force to bring in change in the society. Foucault approaches power as something that transcends politics and sees it as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. As a result of this, not always can revolution bring in social change in a state-centric power struggles because power does not always work in a linear way rather it is much more complex than that. Foucault also

argues that, “where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96). If power is everywhere and comes from everywhere then there are multiple and heterogeneous forms of power that flow from everywhere generating multiple points of resistance within the social milieu (Medina, 2011). Resistance and agency are intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. Whoever is exercising power is using the agency to practice power and whoever is resisting the power is also practicing agency.

Kabeer (1999) uses Foucault’s theory of power to explicate the dimensions of empowerment, an inevitable outcome of power, agency and resistance which in itself is power that provides individual the capacity to make autonomous choices. She understands empowerment in the following three dimensions

Resources (pre-conditions) **Agency** (process) **Achievements** (outcomes)

In general terms resources refer to material resources. I would like to argue in a broader sense that resources include various human and social elements, interactions, different scopes that give one the ability to situate one’s self in a social context. This allocates women to have a social position to exercise future expectations and claims in various social domains perhaps including one’s own family (Kabeer, 1999). Resource can refer to a number of things. In material sense it can refer to land inheritance or property inheritance or having a job i.e. earning a living. It can also refer to having education, skills, choices, or knowing English in a developing country where it can lead to attaining a better job.

The second dimension of power is related to agency. Agency had been defined by Kincheloe (2008) as “a person’s ability to shape and control his or her own life by freeing self from the oppression of power” (p. 42). Saba Mahmood in her phenomenal book *Politics of Piety* (2005) talked about women’s agency and resistance in a middle-eastern patriarchal

society. According to Mahmood (2005), “Agency, in this form, is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (p. 8). The sense of agency provides one with the sense of choice or “decision making” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). Kabeer (1999) observes, “It can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception, and manipulation, subversion and resistance” (p. 438). Thus, agency can be defined to have the power to have the ability to make choices, because ‘choice’ necessarily entails the possibility of having alternatives i.e. the opportunity of choosing otherwise.

Agency can be associated with both positive and negative meaning in relation to power. It can be associated with people’s aptitude to the sense of ‘power to’ define themselves in terms of their own life-choices in the face of obstacles/challenges. The negative association could be the people’s practice of agency as ‘power over’ other people’s agency through violence or other unfair means (Kabeer, 1999). This brings us to the conscious understanding of agency within self to exercise power through positive or negative agency. It is not always important for power to work with agency. Power can act without it. In social context, some of the norms are so internalized that it is taken for granted and obeyed without question. For example, in most Asian cultures marriages are arranged by parents as they are thought to have better understanding in making life decision for their children. This is not perceived as power unless this authority is questioned or confronted (Kabeer, 1999).

In social science, agency and social norms are inseparable. Butler (1997) conceptualizes norms as the behaviors that are reiterated in the social context. This repeated performance of behavior is then accepted as a legitimate code of conduct and based on this it becomes ‘ways of doing things’. Butler theorizes agency as, “the iterability of performativity is the theory of agency” (1997, p. xxiv). Agency is grounded in the acceptance of the

repeated enactment of the social norms. It is also grounded in the re-appropriation or non-conformity of what is understood to be standard behavior. Which means that agency is a fluid concept that is adjusted and re-appropriated according to the claim of the enactors of social norms.

According to Sen (1985), resources and agency together constitute capabilities: the prospective of what people want and how people want it in other words their sense of being and doing. Kabeer (2011) examines women's empowerment as "multidimensional processes of change" (p. 499) which is dependent on each individual woman's reaction to the context rather than some generalized outcome of set rules. Women's empowerment is much dependent on how they are negotiating with the situations within their territory which consequently results in reshaping their identity and their perception of "gender justice" and communal transformation. Hence, their negotiation of taking control of their lives is very much embedded in their social realities. As the method of empowerment essentially results in social change, women bear a certain impression of the societies in which they occur. This social reality takes place within the framework of "the gendered structures of constraint" in a society (Kabeer, 2011, p. 500).

Empowerment of a person then could be understood as a successful representation or materialization of a person's sense of choice and capability to achieve that sense of choice. Anything that makes a person fail to achieve could be understood as disempowerment. I understand power and agency as inseparable and overlapping concepts. It has already been mentioned at the beginning that the concept of power is broad and controversial. Power and dominance can operate "through consent and complicity as well as through coercion and conflict" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441).

The idea of false consciousness or double standard-ness is critical for this study because of the paradoxical perceptions of the participants. I find, it necessary to link power and ‘false-consciousness’ at this stage. To have a better perception of the deeper reality, I would like to introduce Bourdieu’s (1977) idea of ‘doxa’. Although for Bourdieu the argument is set on a different context, I on the other hand will use the concept doxa to explain the process of internalization of cultural norms. Doxa refers to the internalization of traditional and cultural norm to the extent that it is beyond any discourse or argument. A simplified version of this idea will be, I will understand something as ‘I don’t have’ with the perception of the knowledge of that something could be had. But if I do not have that perception in the first place, I will take what I have as the only way/thing of having. It is at this stage education can impact one’s preconceived ideas and challenges them. Ideally, it is through education one might have the ability to distinguish of what could be had even if one does not have ‘that’ to begin with. The question then arises, in this internalization of tradition and culture beyond argumentation, my sense of adjusting ‘self’: could this be called false consciousness or it is just adaptation and reiteration? From this perspective agency is the potential ability to choose differently which can pave the way to critical consciousness that creates a climate where change could be a possibility by making meaningful choices. In that way, social change is unpredictable as it is dependent on the diversity of circumstances under which it is exercised. Any kind of social change is then dependent on the individual’s reaction to the power in a negative or positive way. This brings us to the notion of resistance.

The question arises, whether sense of agency or resistance provides the power or how the power is being attained. In all these relations Foucault finds resistance as a fundamental component of power relations and at the same time observes, resistance is not against power but positioned within it (Foucault, 1978). In that sense, power and resistance are ‘twins’, embedded in each other not as negative forces but as ‘interwoven’ agencies to understand the

traditional structure (Johansson & Lalander, 2012). A person's sense of autonomy over his/her own space is not possible without resistance to the hegemonic power. Especially when this power is practiced in a top down process bearing already the implied understanding that men are superior to women in a society such as Bangladesh. This study aims at locating women's sense of agency and their everyday resistance in assertion of their self.

The term resistance has been used by scholars to cover a wide variety of behaviors and actions in all strata of human life starting from the individual level to the institutional and then to the collective or the national level in different contexts as well as political settings, art, entertainment, literature and in professional periphery (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). There is a wealth of literature looking at resistance issues in reproductive theory and secondary youth in schools (Giroux, 1983; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Shain, 2003; Willis, 1977). From adopting a different hairstyle by the African youths to create a collective identity (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998) then to youth's 'deviant' responses through various symbols and behaviors to deal with their problems in the social structure they live in (Leong, 1992; Willis, 1977), all have been described as resistance. Hence, it is not surprising that there is little consensus among critics regarding the definition of resistance. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) have cited various definitions of resistance, for example, "— acting autonomously, in [one's] own interests (Gregg, 1993, p. 172), "active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to — abusive behaviour and — control" (Profitt, 1996, p. 25): engaging in behaviour despite opposition (Carr, 1998, p. 543); or simply "questioning and objecting" (Modigliani & Rochat, 1995, p. 112).

Giroux (1983) understood the notion of resistance as a complex way in which individuals mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint. Resistance has been defined as the "action of an

individual or individuals opposing something that they disapprove of” (Carter & Aulette, 2009). This disapproval could be against state, society or individuals and in this particular case perhaps globalization. According to Carter and Aulette (2009) when we refer to the phrase resistance against globalization,

We think of international protests at the G20 meetings, of Bolivian peasants joining together to stop the privatization of water, French farmers revolting against trade politics harming small farms, and the Mayan people in Mexico organizing to defend the rights of indigenous people. (p. 165)

In addition to this they observed in their research on Cape Verde women resisting globalization in their own unique way. They referred to the women in Africa who have been fighting against issues such as land rights, employment, health care, rights of worker and violence. Women are often excluded from the main stream power structure in the organizations both in national and in international level. For women in Cape Verde thus resistance takes a new form. They resist through their cultural behaviour namely through *Batuku* dance and Creole language which they use to discuss about their issues with each other which they are not allowed to discuss in their everyday language. This unique way of communicating with each other gives them a sense of liberation (Carter & Aulette, 2009).

Resistance is often understood as a ‘transformational force’ that leads to social and cultural changes challenging the power structure in a progressive manner (Johansson & Lalander, 2012). This change might not be a rapid one resulting in a revolution rather it may be a temporary challenge to the hegemonic culture. Hence, the relationship between resistance and power is an ongoing process. Placing women in this dichotomy is an even more complex issue as women’s positions are dependent on the social, racial and religious

contexts. Women's resistance could be in the form of creole language and dancing (Carter & Aulette, 2009), or it could be conformity to the traditional norms (Raby, 2005), or could be the struggle to negotiate marriage rights or could be in the form of poetry and folk stories or jokes regarding the opposite sex (Abu-Lughod, 1990) or could be by using 'popular culture and esthetic artifacts' to transgress 'gender roles' (Johansson & Lalander, 2012).

Being a woman is a complex process as women have to constantly negotiate with the interplay between what is being expected and what they want from their lives. I chose resistance as an analytical tool for my research for two reasons. Firstly, few studies have focused on women and resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Khan, 2014)), and secondly, looking back at my personal struggle, it is resistance that gave the shape of who I am today. That is why I want to use resistance as the analytical tool to understand the ways of being young educated woman in Bangladesh.

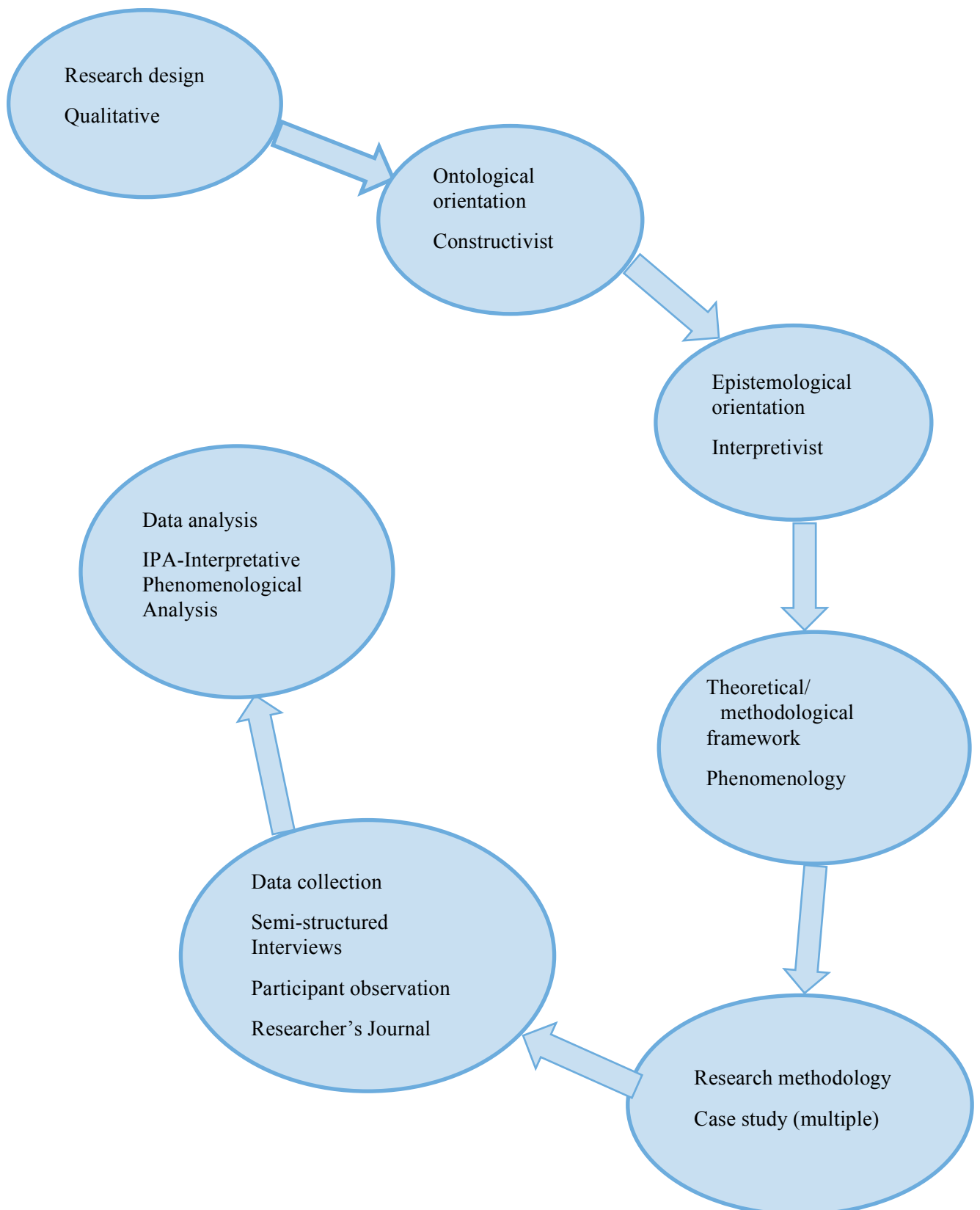
This section started with the dimensions of power. It tried to focus on the pre requisite of power to be understood in terms of resources, and agency. The sense of 'being and doing' or capacity may make a considerable change for a person to see his/her achievements and capabilities. This sense of agency helps women to resist the oppression. Apparently, this may seem insignificant or small to an observer. But for them it is liberating and gives them a sense of independence.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

In this study I seek an in-depth understanding of how Muslim young university graduate women experience their life events in a globalized context. It looks at their personal journey as individuals in a society where the religious and cultural concept of purdah plays an important role in shaping their femininities. To explore the nuances of experiences and feelings a phenomenological qualitative research approach was considered most appropriate. A case study was undertaken because this allows an investigation to retain the characteristics of participants' understandings and experiences, within their societal context (Punch, 1998). Data were gathered via individual semi-structured interviews. My research examines the identity practices of young Muslim female graduates in Bangladesh against the backdrop of purdah, Islam and globalization. I am also interested in understanding the ways in which these women negotiate power dynamics within the various social relationships and institutions.

A rationale for the ontology, epistemology and theoretical perspective will be explored in this chapter along with the chosen research methodology selected and focused on the research process. Specifically case study research design, rationale, selection of participants, tools and techniques of data collection will be explored. The strategy used in the five case studies is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This will be used to analyse the qualitative data. Following this discussion, the issue of authenticity of the research including validity, dependability and generalizability of findings are included along with the ethical consideration of the study. The following figure attempts a graphic representation of the research project.



Research Design – Qualitative research

Wiersma and Jurs (2009) state that research methodology is the development of research design – a plan or strategy for conducting research. The terms qualitative and quantitative are often used in two distinct research paradigms. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the difference between qualitative and quantitative as distinctions made by the researcher about the nature of knowledge; specifically how one understands the world and the ultimate purpose of the research. These distinctions are enacted in how data are collected, analysed and interpreted. Quantitative research “focuses on the deductive component of the scientific method because the focus is generally on hypothesis testing and theory testing” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 30). As Flinders and Richardson (2002) puts it, qualitative research “revolve around large issues, as researchers rethink the questions of what counts as a rigorous, worthwhile, and useful study” of “foreshadowed problems” (p. 1159). This research concerns understanding the meaning of human action by describing the inherent or essential characteristics of social objects or human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and is thus using a qualitative approach. Merriam (2009) explains that, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Simply put, qualitative research describes phenomena in words while quantitative research describes phenomena in numbers.

Theoretical Framework of the Research Design

Knowledge framework

The ontological orientation for this study is constructivist. The term ontology refers to the “nature of reality or of a phenomenon” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 33) which is constructed within social realities. In constructionism the view of the knowledge held by

the researcher is that it is socially constructed with no true single meaning but, rather a multiplicity of meanings being “constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). This ontological stance is supported by my epistemological position as an insider of Bangladeshi society. Epistemology is the “ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 3). The interpretative nature of epistemological paradigm identifies and interprets the social realities as experienced by individuals. This approach to the study harmonizes with the theoretical/methodological framework — phenomenology.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology began as a philosophical protest around a hundred years ago by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) amidst a scientific revolution (Cammarata, 2013). Phenomenology is concerned with the “world as it is experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times” (Willig, 2013, p. 84). It aims at unveiling, explaining, or depicting the reality as it is experienced by human beings as closely as possible (Cammarata, 2013). Willig (2001) describes phenomenology as “ways in which human beings gain knowledge of the world around them” (p. 49).

Husserl (1964) explained that phenomenological research seeks understanding through description of lived experience using the lenses of history, culture and society, identifying the true nature or ‘essence’ of the human experiences. The value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides a way to examine and comprehend lived experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith (2008) defines phenomenology as a study of ‘phenomena’, or the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience. Phenomenology is a mode of philosophical inquiry that seeks meaning in questions and questioning (Bowman, 1998). According to Van Manen (2007), “the

phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations — and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect” (p. 11). As a branch of qualitative research and a mode of philosophical inquiry, phenomenology attempts to describe the phenomenon in question with as much richness of detail as possible to retain the essence of the phenomenon as understood by the research participants (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen, 1990).

Phillips-Pula, Strunk, and Pickler (2011) have identified three broad types of phenomenology: transcendental, existential and hermeneutic. Transcendental phenomenology seeks after the essential meanings of individual knowledge. Existential phenomenology is understood through the nature of reality. Hermeneutic or interpretative phenomenology attempts to interpret the phenomena as understood by those who experience it. In this last approach the phenomenological researcher attempts to interpret the participants’ understandings of their lived experience. This current study employs hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology has had an impact on qualitative research approaches not only because of its rigorous descriptive approach but also as it provides a method for accessing the difficult phenomena of human experience (Giorgi, 1997). The development of phenomenology formulated by Merleau-Ponty has influenced both anthropology and ethnology: on one hand as an emphasis on ‘action before cognition’, on the other hand as an emphasis on ‘meaning of action’ and ‘experienced meaning’ as constituted by the cultural context. A phenomenological approach attempts to understand the meaning of events to ordinary people in particular situations. The researcher is supposed to bracket herself with her prior presuppositions regarding the issue at hand and bring a fresh perspective through writing, the conveyance of “the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). The issue of bracketing is dealt with elaborately later in this chapter.

Phenomenological research has as its goal to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). On the contrary, quantitative research emphasises the opposite, it tries to reduce a phenomenon to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the context in which the phenomenon will be studied (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). It is the life-world and the lived experiences of the participant within this world that interests phenomenologists. The most important perspective is the individual and how they make meaning of their own experiences. The researcher's job is to record and interpret the personal lived experience of the research subjects (Radnor, 2001). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) describe in phenomenological study,

One obtains concrete description of a phenomenon as lived through by a person, either directly described or by interview, and before analysing the description, the researcher assumes the phenomenological attitude, a psychological perspective towards the data, and one is mindfully sensitive to the type of phenomenon being researched. (p. 170)

This study is deeply related to the events that the university graduate Muslim women go through in their everyday life. It is concerned with their individual perspective on veiling and religion and how that affects their experience as women in Bangladeshi society. This study also concerns the impact of being educated on their life and their belief system. I have found this methodology valuable for the current study as the issue at hand has not previously been examined in-depth. I do not set out to deliver an "objective record of culture" or religion, rather I seek to "make sense of a local setting through the process of writing" (Randles, 2012, p. 16) through the collection, analysis and interpretation of deep, detailed data. I venture to present my cases in the form of stories which aligns with Randles (2012) observation, "Storytelling is one of the techniques that phenomenological researchers employ in their work" (p. 3). The most common form of phenomenological enquiry is a case study.

Case Study

A case is defined by Simons (2009) as an “in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context” (p. 21). Yin (2003) stresses that a case study is an empirical inquiry that: “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Stake (2005) makes a valid point that not everything about the case can be understood or relevant. Therefore, I must decide on relevance for the particular study otherwise the data may come too extensive and lose significance in relation to the original intent of the research. Bell (1993) endorses case studies by stating that a successful study provides for a full picture in relation to the “illustration of relationships, political issues and patterns of influence” (p. 9).

Case study methodology, as used in this research, can be defined, explained and justified in terms of its suitability in addressing ‘how’ questions posed with regards to “a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (Burns, 2000, p. 460). When such questions need to be addressed within specific context, case study is advocated. The single most defining characteristic of case study lies in delimiting the object of study (Merriam, 1998). Data in case study method are collected by multiple techniques such as interviews, document analysis, different types of observations including auto ethnographical and anthropological strategies (Yin, 2009). As a means of data collection, one on one interviews were thought to be the best way as this allowed me to have a ‘conversation with a purpose’ with the participants (Simons, 2009, p. 48). The advantages and disadvantages of case study method have been well documented in the literature (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Case study methodology can provide, “an intense, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). Yin (2009) notes that case study provides

unique examples of real people in actual situation recognizing and accepting that there can be many variables operating within case study. Case study is known to provide rich and vivid description with chronological narratives of the events (Cohen et al., 2011). This methodology has the potential to concentrate in detail on contextual realities in a particular setting or social background which links to a phenomenological principles and processes that underpin this research. This is a major advantage for this study to understand the realities of these Muslim female university graduates and their ways of being. The participants for this study come from different classes and backgrounds. With their common grounds of being Muslim and gender they bring in their own journeys where each of them is unique in nature. A case study allows as investigation to retain the characteristics of participants' viewpoint and experiences. Stake (1994) argues that the purpose of the case study is "not to represent the world, but to represent the case" which is in line with the phenomenological stance adopted in this research (p, 246). Punch (2014) stated that case study aims to understand the case using deep-angle lens with recognition of its context. As will be evident both insider and outsider lenses were employed in this current study.

This study considered fifteen university graduate Muslim women out of which six cases were being considered individually, representing a specific cultural context, belonging to specific religious context, each of which is considered as one case, thus constructing a multiple case study research design (Stake, 2000). The six cases studied here are similar in terms that, all these women are Muslim and educated. Nonetheless, they are inherently unique in terms of their perception and understanding of purdah and their journeys till now. Echoing the decision made by Mirza (2013) in selecting her participants in her research on "professional transnational Muslim women" (abstract), the reason for choosing six cases out of fifteen is because each of these cases are representative of the overarching themes discussed and analysed in the data chapters and in the discussion chapter. Besides, all fifteen

cases are referred to in the discussion chapter in terms of making a reference to the similarities or the dissimilarities or the uniqueness of the situation.

Each participant brought their unique experience of being a Muslim woman in Bangladeshi society along with a unique ‘integrated system’ for case study research. Case study approaches have been categorised as: descriptive, interpretative and evaluative (Merriam, 1998); intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2000); and exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Yin, 2003). These classifications are overlapping, have much in common and are at best viewed as a continuum of possible models for me to draw upon. The six case studies are often descriptive in nature but transcend to be interpretative as it is necessary to set the cases into the cultural and religious context of Bangladeshi society. It is collective case study as it has six cases and the phenomenon is attempted to be understood within the context (Goddard, 2010). This study is also instrumental as it aims at getting a “thick description” of the cases involved (Grandy, 2010, p. 474).

Participant Selection and the Frame of the Study

Morrow (2005) observes that sampling in qualitative study is always “purposeful — that is, participants are deliberately selected to provide the most information-rich data possible” (p. 255). Van Manen (1997) argued that participant selection in phenomenological research has sought to engage participants who have relevant experiences to that of the focus of the study. The sample size in IPA is selected purposively because phenomenology focuses more on perspective than population. IPA is an idiographic approach that aims at understanding particular phenomena in a particular context. In that way the aim becomes to analyse the cases individually and in detail (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers also look at the homogeneity in their sample

by making the groups as uniform as possible according to obvious social factors or other theoretical factors relevant to the study, one can then examine in detail psychological variability within the group, by analysing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 50)

The main objective of this research is to investigate young educated Muslim women and their sense of being against the backdrop of Islam, tradition and globalization in Bangladeshi society. This research aims to explore their lived experiences which I intend to refer to as ‘stories’ in future. The research considered participants who were within ten years of graduating from university and despite diverse backgrounds and experiences they all share a common phenomenon. Snowball or chain sampling was used as a means of selecting participants for this research. According to Bryman (2012) snowball sampling is a form of convenience sampling where “the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses them to establish contacts with others” (p. 202). Snowball sampling is purposeful and designed to identify good prototypes of the phenomenon under study (Morrow, 2005). I established primary contact with the women I was already informally counselling. This research used fifteen Muslim young graduate females. The participants expressed their interest to be a part of this research project via phone. In the phone conversation, I explained more about my research project and answered relevant questions. I also explained the form Exploratory Statement that required signing prior to interview. Then a time and place was negotiated with individual participants. It was made very clear from the very beginning that I was willing to travel any distance in order to carry out the interview according to the place agreed by the participants. Most of the participants requested the interview occur at my house, to ensure the greater level of privacy available. The participants thought that they will be more comfortable in my house as they will not have their family members around them at the time of the interview. Most of the

interviews occurred as planned but there were some incidents of cancellation of the interview as the participant could not manage time to come. Prior to each interview I spent a considerable amount of time making the participants comfortable. Explanatory statements were given to the participants and consent forms were signed before commencing the interview.

Interviews

The specific ‘phenomena’ focused on in this study is how Bangladeshi Muslim educated women negotiate their ‘self’ against the backdrop of Islam, tradition and globalization. Punch (1998) stated that the interview is one of the most important sources of case study information as it “is a good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality” (p. 174). In a phenomenological study the researcher must allow the data to emerge because it is essential to capture rich descriptions of phenomena and their contents (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Kensit, 2000). According to Bailey (1996) the informal interview is a conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person, therefore the interview is reciprocal: both the researcher and the research participant are engaged in a dialogue. At the root of phenomenology, “the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms – to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96) and allowing the essence to emerge, “essences unify apparent diversity and describe a core of meaning” (Cameron, Schaffer, & Park, 2001). To do this research questions were semi-structured and were “directed to the participant’s experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196).

The semi-structured interview, being unstandardized, individual, open and focused by an interview schedule on specific issues, allowed maximum interpersonal contact and symbolic communication between me and participants (Sarantakos, 1998). The semi-structured interviews produced an open discussion of participants' experiences, and their interpretation of their perspectives and understandings (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are conducted in an informal and relaxed way to ensure that the participants present more intimate and sociable bonding with me. The time of the interview was discussed with the participants prior to each interview.

The proposed time for the interview was forty to fifty minutes. I intended to complete the interviews in two phases with one to two months gap between the first and second. This was proposed in light of my own personal experience that in Bangladesh it takes time for women to open up and talk about their lives. As a cultural insider I thought it would take longer for the participants to be comfortable with the interview questions. This assumption was challenged from the outset as all the fifteen participants were very eager to share their stories. Their eagerness was manifested in the length of the interviews. Initially I anticipated forty to fifty minutes but for most of the participants the interview went for more than one and a half hours. The longest was a little over two hours. I felt that it was in the best interest of the research not to stop the participants while they were talking. In few cases, I had to spend longer time with the participants as they shared their problems with me and became very emotional while giving the account of their lives. In these cases, I had to wait till the participants were emotionally stable prior to commencing or resuming the interview. That is why, although the initial thought was to have the interview conducted in two phases, it was not necessary. This contradicted standard interview protocols as only one long interview occurred for each participants because the women were not reluctant to share their experiences but in reality just the opposite.

Significantly for all participants the interview was the first time they were asked questions by anyone about themselves. Prior to this no one had taken an interest in their lives. Their interview offered them the opportunity to reflect on many of their issues in lives. Further the women felt that the interview encouraged them and offered them hope that they are human beings and if they want to they also can achieve goals in life. In addition, the interview often led to the realization that they had achieved some goals already. Their presence became a source of encouragement in my life and work. For example, one of the participants who is a divorced single mother asked me in tears, “Please write about us! We are so helpless. Maybe talking about us will bring more attention to the fact that we are human beings and we too have rights.” I have also used this quote during my analysis of her case. Moments like these were very emotional moments for me and the sense of urgency in the appeal is a constant reminder how important it is to tell the stories of these young educated women.

The semi-structured interview questions used to facilitate this research were:

1. What do you think of purdah? What does purdah mean to you?
2. Is Purdah important to you as a young woman? How and why? Can you give some examples?
3. Do you think purdah is important to your family? Why?
4. Do you think purdah is important to society in Bangladesh? Why? How?
5. Can you give me some examples of what it is for you to be a Muslim Bangladeshi woman? In your home and family? In the university? In your workplace?
6. Do you think women in Bangladesh have opportunities to develop their education to pursue further education? Why?

Depending on the initial response, each question generated secondary questions to explore the lived experience. For example, one of the answers for question 6 was – “No, women do not have access to higher education because we are secondary citizens.” The follow up question for this response was, “Would you please explain what you meant by ‘secondary citizen’ and how does that concept stop women from having access to higher education?”

The purpose of the interview questions was to allow open responses describing concrete details of the educated women’s lived experiences in Bangladeshi society. As mentioned above there were fifteen participants out of which seven were analysed in depth for the research. From these seven I present six participants as individual cases. The reason for this is rooted in the validity of the data which will be discussed below.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a relatively new qualitative research tool, evolving from the philosophical branch of thought known as phenomenology. IPA to date, has primarily been used more extensively in health sciences and psychology but there is increasing use in fields such as sociology, education and cultural studies.

Phenomenology, the theoretical framework for this study, is primarily interested in the world as it is experienced by human beings in particular contexts, at particular times (Willig, 2001). In IPA researchers place importance on an individual’s experience and specifically how the world appears to that individual (Eatough & Smith, 2006).

Participants experience their social and personal world and more, how these experiences are given meaning by the individual (Smith et al., 2009). Joseph and Southcott (2015) state that, “IPA offers researchers the opportunity to engage with the data at an idiographic level” (p. 338). Research data is not generalized, by employing a close in-depth analysis of the perspective of a research subject, the researcher can learn about that

individual's unique experience. This in turn recognises the importance of the researcher's positioning in the interpretation of another individual's experience. IPA acknowledges the importance of the researcher in the interpretation of the subject's experience, noting that understanding requires interpretation. Smith and Osborn (2008) note, "Participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (p. 53).

In IPA studies researchers do not generalise about the actual event but adopt an empathetic position towards the participants' perception and account. It asks the researcher not to generalise about the actual event, experience or object itself. IPA provides a more detailed analysis of the insider's perspective, whereby the researcher attempts to understand the participant as she/he attempts to make sense of their world, this is what connects IPA to its phenomenological roots. IPA research is about "hearing the voices of participants from across the sociocultural spectrum" (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, p. 21). IPA as an analytic tool, is concerned with cognitions, that is, the understanding of what a particular respondent thinks or believes about the topic or issue under discussion (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

In line with IPA the phenomenological underpinning of this study was chosen for its relevance to the focus of the 'lived experiences' of the fifteen women interviewed. It is the researcher's personal engagement with the experience recorded and transcribed, that leads to the interpretative functions of IPA. IPA acknowledges that the researcher's own thoughts, assumptions and conceptions may influence the interpretation of the participant's experience, but these are not seen as biases, rather as an important step in the understanding of another person's experience. In this process IPA works with any text that is generated by the participant. In this study IPA is used for analysing transcriptions from all the semi-structured interviews. There is no single definitive way to do IPA (Smith et al., 2009, p. 54), the method for analysis is flexible and can be applied in varying ways. This is dependent on both the

researcher and nature of the research undertaken. It is the sustained engagement of the text and the different stages of interpretation suggested by IPA that allows for its flexibility.

It has already been mentioned that the interviews were conducted in my first language, Bangla. It was proposed that I would transcribe the interviews first in Bangla and then translate them to English. But a major change was made in the original plan as it took me one month to transcribe one interview in Bangla. With the permission of the supervisors I decided to transliterate the interviews straight into English from the recording. The major challenge faced by me while carrying this out is to be able to find the words in English that carry the same cultural and emotional underpinnings as they do in Bangla. In some cases this was hard to do and I explained them in few sentences in English while retaining the original word(s) in Bangla. A good example of these challenging words and emotions is ‘purdah’ which carries multiple layers of meanings which is much broader than the English literal meaning of the word ‘screening’ or ‘veiling’. This has been dealt with in Chapter One.

Guided by the work on IPA by Smith et al. (2009), it is suggested that each case be analysed in detail before moving to other cases. In phenomenological research, Holloway (1997) and Hycnre (1999) recommend that the researcher listen repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewee in order to develop holistic sense. This process for analysis involved detailed reading and re-reading the texts as recommended by Smith et al. (2009). Margins were created on the left-hand-side of each page that allowed me to write my comments and observations.

While reading and re-reading the transcript comments are made on “similarities, differences, echoes, amplifications and contradictions in what a person is saying” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 67). Once complete, the researcher turned to the beginning of the text for the second stage of analysis, using the right margin to make comments on the emerging themes.

The third stage involved the identification of connections between the emergent themes found in the second stage of analysis. The fourth stage of analysis involved the creation of a summary table of themes and quotations from the text that illustrates each one. The most important focus of IPA is the participant's perception of the experience, as IPA allows participants "to think, talk and be heard" therefore each summary table reflects the text no, not the researcher's expectations. In this study each text was analysed separately (Reid et al., 2005, p. 25). The analysis was written in the form of a story maintaining the chronology and coherence of themes and events described by the participants.

Issues of Bracketing

Carpenter (2007) and Finlay (2008) observe, in phenomenological inquiry bracketing is used as a methodological device that requires careful putting aside of one's own belief about the phenomenon under enquiry or what one already knows about the issue prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation. The notion of bracketing is there to minimize any biases from researcher's part into the ongoing investigation (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). It has been argued by Koch (1995) that complete bracketing is not possible in phenomenological research as there are no set of rules that provide a method of bracketing the researcher out of the study (Giorgi, 2011). However, Chan et al. (2013) identified four strategies to achieve bracketing. Firstly, "reflexivity" can be used as a tool to ensure bracketing where the researcher will write down her thoughts and reflections as she goes on analysing the data (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). In phenomenology the term reflexivity is used to understand the researcher's radical approach to the study where the researcher "reflexively" restraints any "pre-understandings" (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). For this study, I kept a journal where I wrote down my thoughts as I went through the transcripts. Later on this researcher's journal was used as a useful set of data for the analysis. The journal served two purposes, one, it helped me to be reflexive and two, I then used this journal as an instrument by consciously

incorporating my observations into the analysis for this study to add perspective to my understanding.

According to Chan et al. (2013), the second strategy is that the literature review should be written after the analysis is finished. This will provide the researcher ample opportunity not to be biased by the literature available and to have an open-minded view of the participant's life worlds. I want to argue that reading literature, at the commencement of the research is necessary to have a better understating of the questions. And reading literature is a continuous process throughout the entire writing period as the research proceeds because this will help the researcher to form her arguments and reflect on her writing in a more informed and constructive way. Thirdly, use face-to-face interview for data collection and to have open-ended questions that will allow the participants to express their views in a more candid manner. Lastly, IPA needs to be the means of analysing the data in order to provide 'rich description' of the data. In this study, all the four strategies have been applied in order to ensure bracketing. However, as this study is concerned with my own culture, I used the insider's knowledge to analyse the cultural underpinnings from the data. In this case, I have the emic (insider) understanding that investigates "how local people think" (Kottak, 2006, p. 47). This encompasses how insiders perceive and categorize the world, their rules for behaviour, what has meaning for them, and how they imagine and explain things. I also assume an etic (outsider) position from which it is realized that members of a culture often are too involved in what they are doing to interpret their cultures impartially. When using the etic approach, the researcher as outsider, emphasizes what he or she considers important (Kottak, 2006). I position myself as a researcher from both as an emic and etic perspective.

It was not always possible to discount my own perspective of cultural understanding from the study. I used 'Reflexivity' constantly throughout the writing process. As Finlay (2003) notes reflexivity is a "process of continually reflecting upon our experience and the

phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes” (p. 108). I do not see this element as a limitation rather I acknowledge this to be strength for my study. I believe that my personal experience as a Muslim educated woman and as an informal counsellor of educated women have helped me to interpret the lived experiences of the women in this research. For this reason, I was cautious to mark the distinction between the voices of the participants and my own voice (Morrow, 2005). Each data chapter has a section namely ‘researcher’s reflection’ to mark the clear distinction between my voice and my participants’ voice. However, there were few challenges during the data analysis that I faced which resulted in discarding two sets of data after analysing them. I am viewed as a source of inspiration and counsellor by my participants who have remained in touch with me for the past few years. They share their personal details with me via email and telephone. This gave me an opportunity to know and observe the participants outside the allocated interview time which I spent during the data collection process. For the two sets of data that have been discarded, I could not find a match between what was being said during interview and what they practice in my understanding of what they told me about their lives. It seemed that they said some of the things in order to save face and tried to ‘fit’ themselves into the frame of ‘good daughter/girl’, so that their intentions were not representative of their understanding of their lived experience. They seemed more concerned with pursuing an image of how they thought they should behave. This distrust of the interview data occurred because of my emic understandings of the Bangladeshi society.

The Issues of Authenticity

Authenticity and quality in research can be reviewed by the procedures that are used to address the issues of trustworthiness, triangulation, reliability and generalizability (Bush,

2007). The concern of authenticity is needed for two reasons; firstly, authenticity helps to assess the quality of the study undertaken by future researchers and secondly, it helps to define the research approach and methodology (Bush, 2007).

The following discussion extensively focuses on the aforementioned issues in detail to explain how the possible bias was being handled by the researcher in the current study.

Trustworthiness

There are always issues of rigor in qualitative research that need to be dealt with by the researcher (Morse, Barret, Maya, Olson, & Spiers, 2000). This rigor is understood in terms of credibility and trustworthiness. In the seminal work in the 1980's, Guba and Lincoln substituted reliability and validity with the parallel concept of "trustworthiness" which contains four features: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Morse et. al. (2000) observe that within these four characteristics there are methodological tactics for establishing, "qualitative rigor, such as audit trail, member checks when coding, categorizing, or confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration, and referential material adequacy" (p. 14) and "reflexive journal" (Janesick, 1999, p. 506). The following few paragraphs will discuss this study with regard to these four criteria propounded by Guba and Lincoln (1981).

Credibility

Credibility or 'internal validity' in quantitative research refers to the degree to which explanations of phenomena match with the realities of the world (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005). In qualitative research, this means "the degree to which interpretations and concepts have mutual meaning between the participants and researcher" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 391). The claim for high internal credibility or consistency in this study rests on the data collection and analysis techniques. Credibility in a study can be attained by long

engagement with the participants, persistent observation in the field, the use of peer debriefs, researcher reflexivity and co-analysis (Greetz, 1973, 1983). My engagements with the participants and field observation have been discussed in detail in the previous section. I have presented the cases in front of my peers in various international conferences and gained feedbacks. For co-analysis of the cases, my supervisor Associate Professor Jane Southcott analysed three out of six cases considered for this study. This helped me to have a broader spectrum of the cases and made it clear that I needed to explain various cultural underpinning during co-analysis with my supervisor. This also enabled me to see the need to explain cultural implications that were too obvious given my shared background with the participants. Self-reflexivity is discussed at the later part of this section. Approaches that were employed to increase credibility of the findings were the use of semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and researcher's journal that were noted during and after the time of the interview i.e. different lenses on the phenomenon being researched. Creswell (2002) argues that the substantiation of evidence from multiple sources increases the chances of accuracy and uniformity, which makes the study not only trustworthy but also dependable.

Reliability

Dependability refers to “reliability or stability of data over time across a range of conditions, including the number of researchers involved” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). In this study dependability is ensured by the fact that there is a single researcher controlling the selection of participants, data collection procedure and data analysis. Shenton (2004) also argues that one effective way of ensuring dependability in a research is to report the study in detail, which will enable “a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (p. 71). Even if I were to repeat my own work in ten years' time the results would be entirely different. Much effort has been put in the detailed description of the life events of each participant involved in this study along with my own interpretation which is

generated from my cultural and religious understanding of Bangladeshi society. It has been mentioned in the previous section (purpose of the study) that very little research has been done on the experiences of educated Muslim women in Bangladesh as well as in the international arena. The aim of this research is to create a platform for future studies which might have significant impact in bringing in social changes. Aligned with credibility is the concept of confirmability or objectivity (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004) the effects of possible researcher bias in qualitative study of this nature are acknowledged. In this study my own experience as an educated Muslim woman is brought in as a useful resource to interpret and analyse the data. The notion of perspective or view that seeks to understand the deeper meaning of individual experiences and how these experiences are articulated is in line with the broader tradition of phenomenology. My position in this study is disclosed to the participants in this study. The role of the researcher is acknowledged appreciated by the participants through their enthusiasm to participate in the project, gratitude to the researcher for taking the initiative to giving voice to them. The surprise that someone came to them to listen and tell their stories were palpable every time.

Further assurances of ‘reliable’ data are also attempted using ‘member checks’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This included taking the transcription back to the participants to check whether their words match with what they actually intended during the time of the recording (Shenton, 2004). This was not possible with all the participants. Efforts were there from my part to send the transcripts to all the informants but in many cases the contributors wrote back to me expressing their incapability to make time to go through the transcripts because of their overwhelming household responsibilities. Nevertheless, in many cases of confusion, I had phone conversations with those unable participants to cross check their statements. For the participants whom I could reach showed their satisfaction with the dialogues. In some places a few changes were made with the help of the informants.

Whatever the method used for a phenomenological analysis the goal of the researcher is the reconstruction of the inner world of experience of the subject. Each individual has her own way of experiencing the same phenomena differently. In this study I conducted a validity check by returning to the participant to determine if the essence of the interview has been correctly ‘captured’ (Hycner, 1999).

Transferability

Shenton (2004) defines transferability as “provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made” (p. 73). In other words, although each case is unique the result of that unique situation can be applied in a broader spectrum. Given the small sample sizes and absence of statistics, qualitative data cannot be said to be generalizable in the traditional sense (Dornyei, 2007; Morrow, 2005). For phenomenological research generalizability is never the goal of the study (Randles, 2012). To facilitate this, the study uses detailed description for readers to determine how closely their situations match to the research context. It is hoped that evaluations of findings in this study could be allocated to other contexts.

Ethical Practice

The researcher must carefully consider the ethical consequences or the probable cost of the study while conducting the research. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) and Smith et al. (2009) included shame, injury, anxiety and loss of self-esteem in the list of ethical issues. This research carefully considered all of these issues with regard to the participants involved. As the nature of the questions was personal, I made it very clear and open from the very beginning about the background and the purpose of the study. This process was carried out firstly, over phone through the initial conversation and then prior to each interview I spent time with the participants to answer any questions or concerns that they might have with

regard to the study. All the participants confirmed their voluntary participation in the study. It was also made clear to them that if they were uncomfortable at any time during the interview they could stop and quit. No such occurrences took place while conducting any of the interviews.

The participants were also informed that anonymity will be maintained for the study by using pseudonyms as well as their stories will be written in such a way so that the events cannot be related to their individual lives. Out of the fifteen participants, one participant requested me not to disclose her identity in any circumstances. She feared that if her husband could trace it back in any way he would kill her. I offered the option that if she is too afraid she can withdraw from the study. But she insisted that she wants her story to be told to the world. She wants to expose the inhumanity that she has to put up with every day of her life. She said, “It is all I can do to help the other women such as myself.”

Summary

This chapter has discussed the participants, the method of data collection, the process of interview, data analysis and various ethical issues that are concerned with this study. It is my expectation that this chapter will provide the readers with a better understanding of this study and its participants. The next chapter will discuss the historical background of women, education and Bangladesh in the hope of offering a contextual background of this research.

Chapter Five

Contextualizing Bangladesh

Introduction

Bangladesh came into being in 1971 after a liberation war against East Pakistan that lasted nine months. Bangladesh has a long historical association with the British Raj that ruled the Indian subcontinent for more than a hundred years. Bangladesh was incorporated with India, Pakistan, upper Burma, and lower Burma which was then known as India. This introduction will attempt to briefly discuss the colonial historical legacy that impacted the political, socio-cultural, educational and religious changes in Bangladesh. This will focus on women's status in past and current scenarios. The latter part of this chapter will consider the colonial past of Bangladesh with reliance on the works of Sonia Nishat Amin and Partha Chatterjee. Amin in her multidisciplinary work *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939* (1996) attempted to capture the socio-political and religious history of the colonized India. In doing so she identified the status of women and the gradual social change involving 'women's awakening' that placed them in the history. There will be an overview of the history of East Pakistan until its independence in 1971 when it became Bangladesh. The final part will focus on post war Bangladesh amidst the emergence of military rule and then democracy involving politics and the rise of fundamentalist political groups to the present date. This discussion will focus on women and their position in the social (private and public), political and cultural sphere in Bangladesh.

British Rule (1700-1947)

The British started to trade in India (India, Pakistan, Lower Burma, Upper Burma and Bangladesh) in the eighteenth century. Officially the British began their reign of India after the battle of Palashi in 1757. This reign ended in 1948 with the division of India and Pakistan

in 1947. During the British Raj Bangladesh was known as Bengal. After the division of India and Pakistan, Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. The following map clearly shows the vast region of the Indian subcontinent that was colonized by the British.



Map 1: (Bartholomew, 1909)

The map exhibits the vast region of the Indian subcontinent that was colonized by the British Raj.

Little is known about the status of women during the British reign as this history is conspicuous with the absence of women who were invisible in a country that was itself oppressed by the colonial authority. In *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939* (1996), Amin focused on the place of women and their gradual emergence from total darkness of nonexistence to the public sphere by first taking their place as gentle women

(*Bhadra mohila*) then taking gradual steps towards education and finally entering the public sphere.

The emergence of the Muslim gentle-woman in colonial Bengal is one of the most problematic issues considering the Bengali Muslim identity (Amin, 1996). Muslim societies exist across the globe and the laws of Islam and tradition are frequently evoked to account for the gender relations in respective societies. For a practicing Muslim Islam is not only a set of beliefs and practices rather it is “a complete ideological and behavioural system expressed in the Koran and the *Sharia* (the codified canons of Islam), enveloping men and women in all their relations” (Amin, 1996, p. 2). In particular, Islamic legislation has been maintained on women more precisely. The domain of interpretation of *Sharia* has been changing since the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). With the influence of colonial power in economy, politics and social life, the strict adherence to *Sharia* has undergone changes as well. As Mernissi (1987) argues, during the colonial encounter most Muslim societies underwent transformation in order to cope with the changing economic, social and political changes. In this respect, the private/personal became increasingly public.

Educating women faced strong opposition from orthodox Hindus for a long period of time. For five and a half centuries Bengali traditions remained unchanged under Muslim rule. Under the British rule, the Bengalis embraced new ideas introduced by the British colonizers. One of these ideas was their attitude towards the “middle class educated elite or the *Bhadralok*” (Amin, 1996, p. 29). Bengali women occupied a very inferior position in society upheld by the popular belief that a woman is inferior to a man. Even now, from my personal experience as a woman, working side by side with men and as a woman academic teaching male students, I believe this attitude has not changed much. Despite the reality that more women are educated and more women are in the work force, the attitude about women as intellectually less capable is still a pervasive belief. While commenting on women’s position

during the twentieth century, Murshid (1983) observes, “A woman was considered to be no more than a useful creature who would be at once a cook, a sexual partner and a faithful housekeeper” (p. 21).

To understand the changes in the personal sphere of Muslim families it is important to understand how the concept of *bhadralok* (gentleman) arose. Despite traditional understandings, under colonial rule change eventually started taking place to accommodate an increasing need to reform (Amin, 1996). Mukherjee (1977), in his reputed study on Calcutta and its *bhadralok* culture in the nineteenth century, describes them as the new social group in Bengal who held “a common position along with some continuum of the economy, enjoyed a style of life in common and conscious of its existence as a class organized to further its ends (p. 26)”. The term *bhadralok* and the feminine *bhadramahila* refer to a particular social class who are predominantly middle class Bengali speaking Hindu and Muslims (Mukharjee, 1977; Murshid, 1983). They were a marginalised middle class group featured in contemporary journals and fictional literature (Amin, 1996). The acceptance of the term *bhadralok* in the Muslim context logically legitimizes the term *bhadramahila* as used by Ghulam Murshid (1983) and also Meredith Borthwick (1984), author of the book *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*. According to Borthwick (1984), the *bhadramahila* were “in broad terms, the mothers, wives and daughters of the many school-masters, lawyers, doctors and government servants who made up the English-educated professional Bengali ‘middle class’ or *bhadralok*” (preface, p. xii). It is evident that until the nineteenth century there was no separate voice of women as they existed in terms of their male family members. But the *bhadramahila* were new social entities as Borthwick (1984) points out,

By the end of the century (19th) there was an articulate group of women able to make their voices heard through public institutional channels hitherto

confined to men. This type of modern woman became known as the *bhadramahila*...*bhadramahila* was...used to describe female members of *bhadralok* families, but it crystallized into term for an ideal-type, embodying a specific set of qualities and denoting a certain lifestyle...The model of the *bhadramahila* was created by the Brahmo reformers...they were consciously welded into a body with a progressive image, and seen as pioneers of a new way of life to be adopted by other non-Brahmo women. (p.54)

Amin (1996) observes, *bhadromahila* in Hindu and Brahmo is the societal component of the Brahmo religion which is mainly practiced today as the *Adi Dharm*. Brahmo was one of the most influential religious movements responsible for the making of modern India. It was conceived at Kolkata (Calcutta) in 1830 by Debendranath Tagore and Ram Mohan Ray as reformation of the prevailing Brahmanism of the time at its elite level and began the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century pioneering all religious, social and educational advance of the Hindu community. Literature, freedom of speech through political pamphlets, the amendment of the bill for banning of 'sati daho' tradition (the burning of the widow in the funeral pyre with the husband) and women's emancipation are a few of the examples of the impact of the Bengal Renaissance (Samanta, 2008). The term women's emancipation remained a much debated term. Murshid (1983) has argued that the term 'emancipation' is less applicable, "because whatever meaning it originally carried, it now refers to a kind of modernization of women" that Bengali women did not have before (p. 14). Modernization is more likely to be associated with women being exposed to education rather than the radical change in their life styles that might be connoted with the word 'emancipation'.

Brahmo communities have received considerable attention from scholars but to date very little has been known or done on the process of 'modernization' among Muslim women. The two Muslim women believed to have contributed in educating women are Rokeya Sakhawat Hossien and Shamsun Nahar Mahmud. They are notable for their contribution in

the social change of women's awakening that started (*nari jagoron*) in the early twentieth century little is known about their lives. As a part of the religious and cultural practice women were supposed to be kept indoors. This was a mark of respectability and along with came some social acceptance and expectations. As Amin (1996) notes, "In nineteenth century Bengal, the separation of the private and public sphere among respectable Muslim families was spatially manifest in the division of the place of residence into an inner part (*andar*) and the outer part (*sadar*)" (p. 38).

The separation was well defined in the houses of both the rural and in the urban families. As this was a significant marker of a well-to-do *Sharif* families, even if the household was less well-to-do this mark used to be carried out with a thin wall or fence or even by a piece of furniture (Amin, 1996). This emphasises the Islamic tradition of *purdah* (veiling) which denotes to the spatial segregation of male and female pervasive in Islamic society (Papanek, 1971). The ideology of *Purdah* was even emphasized through the architecture of the buildings. In this respect the work of Shaista Ikramullah, a member of the Calcutta (Kolkata) based Muslim aristocracy, is very relevant as she draws on more on the *andarmahal* (inner mansion) of Muslim families. In her book *Behind the Veil* (1953), she opens the first chapter with the following words:

Lift up the veil and let us enter the interior of a Muslim home! This would have been literally true decades ago, for women's apartments were completely separate from men's. A long passage connected the two, and a heavy curtain hung at the end which gave entrance to the *zenana*...The passage opened onto a courtyard flanked by rooms on all sides...the largest was called the *sadar dalan* and was the equivalent of a drawing room; the ones leading from it were known as...*dar dalans*. Then there were the small rooms known as *taha khana*s, used for storing essentials. But one does not see houses of these styles nowadays except in the older parts of the city in Lahore, Peshawar and Dhaka. (pp. 3-4)

In the household, it is commonly the men who have total control and the women, both in Hindu and in Muslim families were in charge of cooking, rearing children and looking after husband along with running the household with the help of many female servants. Parents were the decision makers of marriages and romantic love was never encouraged. Chastity and honour were highly valued and was considered an integral part of family pride and a mark of nobility (Amin, 1996). With a common expectancy for girls to get an education in the Quran and Hadith, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein is the first name to appear in respect of women's emancipation through education. For this reason, she is worthy of mention.

Rokeya was born into an upper class Muslim family in Rangpur, a district of North Bengal. She dedicated her life to Muslim women's rights. Rokeya identified the lack of education as one of the main causes of female subordination. In order to educate women, she established the Rokeya Sakhawat Memorial School in Calcutta in 1911. She was a Muslim pioneer feminist writer and wrote a number of books on patriarchy and the oppression of women in the society. Although she never came out of purdah, nonetheless she repeatedly criticized the orthodox religious leaders saying, "Using religion as an excuse, men have tried to dominate women. Thus I obliged to enter into the fray" (Sobhan, n.d.). Rokeya also founded the *Anjuman-i-Khawateen-i-Islam*, a small service association for Muslim women in 1916. As an exemplar feminist, Rokeya did not see national liberation as an answer to the question of 'women's emancipation' (*nari mukti*). Muslim nationalists in their turn did not pay much attention to calls for social reform with respect to women's position (Naher, 2005).

In Rokeya's biography by Shamsunnahar, Rokeya was drawn as a successful wife who was married at the age of sixteen to a widowed man who was twenty-four years older than her. Their marriage was a successful one because of Rokeya's 'good qualities' i.e. she was skilful in cooking, knitting, entertaining and orderliness (Amin, 1996). But in her writings Rokeya questioned the notions of traditional conformity and voiced the necessity of

the equal contribution of man and woman in a marriage. In her fantasy *Sultana's Dream* (written in English) she gave free rein to her imagination with her 'Ladyland' where the traditional gender roles of women in the household is changed into actual educated human beings taking charge of their lives as well as running a country by guarding it with scientific and technical know-how along with cultivating martial arts. Her visionary mind ventured in making the country an ideal one where women are free from all social and religious constraints. It is with this vision Rokeya talked and wrote for the emancipation of women.

Background of Bangladesh

Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan after two hundred years of colonial rule in 1947. The following map demonstrates the present day geographical location of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan).



Map 2: East and West Pakistan (Hubpages, 2015)

There were two wings of Pakistan, namely East Pakistan and West Pakistan. With vast differences in language, culture and geographical location, the only unifying force that they

shared was being Muslim (Hussain, 2010). It is important to note here that Pakistan was not conceived as an Islamic state rather it was formed as a state for the Muslims (Alavi, 1988). Pakistani sociologist Hamza Alavi (1988) argues that, while some people are under the impression that Pakistan was formed on the basis of religious ideology, “the fact that every group and organization in the subcontinent of India that was specifically religious, was hostile to Jinnah and the Muslim League and had strongly opposed the Pakistan movement” (p. 66). Further this “movement was neither a millenarian ideological movement devoted to the realization of an Islamic state nor was it a movement of feudal landlords nor yet again a movement of an emergent Muslim national bourgeoisie” (Alavi, 1988, p. 66-67). Rather it was a movement led by a class that Alavi terms *salariat*, which means the urban salaried classes of government and civil servants and other professionals (middle classes). The Muslims belonging to this class felt threatened by their Hindu counterparts, and this fear led them to aspire to a separate country for Muslims.

Once East Pakistan and West Pakistan came into being, the Muslim identity that served as the reason of the formation of the state began to lose its appeal to the people of East Pakistan because of the discriminatory behaviour by the government in West Pakistan. From the start the ruling elite of West Pakistan attempted to establish supremacy over East Pakistan. Although sixty per cent of the population lived in the East Pakistan, the economic development plan and projects initiated by the Pakistani government systematically discriminated against the East Pakistanis. Public appointments, the distribution of domestic investment, allocation of foreign aid and expansion of infrastructure all favoured West Pakistanis. Discrimination was prevalent in the sphere of public appointments (Alavi, 1988).

Bengali resentment built as Muslim nationalists, attempted to demolish the language and culture of Bengalis who retained many ‘Hindu’ cultural elements. Urdu was imposed as the official language of East Pakistan ignoring the fact that only three per cent of the total

population spoke Urdu. Resistance to these impositions generated growing political awareness and cultural awakening (Naher, 2005) that eventually led to “the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh is regarded as one of the bloodiest wars in the history of humankind” (Mohsin, 2010, p. 14).

The Position of Women

Debates over the position of women in Islam were not an essential part of the Muslim nationalist discourse. Although the ‘women’s question’ was a “central issue in the most controversial debate over social reform in early and mid-nineteenth century” (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 116), these debates were almost exclusively concerned with women belonged to the Hindu *Bhadromahila*, and the Bengali Muslim community remained largely untouched by them. This did not mean that the conditions of Muslim and Hindu women were very different. But under circumstances in which the Hindu/Muslim dichotomy began to have political significance under colonial rule, Muslim reformers as well as the British stayed relatively neutral on the need for legislative reform of women’s rights in Islam. Thus, Naher (2005) states,

The prominence given to the position of women is one of the most significant differences between trajectories of Muslim and Hindu/Indian nationalisms. As it happened, debates on the place of women in Islam did take place at the turn of the century, but, unlike the Hindu discourse, these were not instrumental in shaping Muslim Nationalist dialogue with the British. (p. 39)

While no significant active involvement of women or the politicization of women’s issues accompanied the creation of Pakistan, with the growth of Bengali nationalism, women in former East Pakistan came to play an active role in the political sphere. There were many ways in which Bengali women were involved in the reassertion of Bengali identity. For example, Bengali women were very active in the language movement. When Prime Minister

Khawja Nazimuddin declared on 26 January 1952 that Urdu alone should be the state language of Pakistan a student strike was called on 30 January in protest. A procession took place despite opposition from the student wing of the East Pakistan Muslim League. The Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Prishad (National Language Action Committee) called for a strike throughout Dhaka on 4 February in which about 10,000 people participated, including about 2,000 women (Murshid, 1996). Bengali women were actively involved in the cultural resistance against the assimilationist approach of the (West) Pakistani ruling elite pursued towards the Bengalis. Women sang Tagore songs (banned by Pakistani state), put on *tip* (a decorative spot on the forehead traditionally worn by Hindu women to denote marital status), wore flowers in their hair, sent their daughters to music and dance schools, allowed them to perform on stage, all of these were identified as belonging to Hindu culture. While these were previously uncontroversial aspects of middle-class Bengali culture, they became acts of political defiance as the Pakistani state branded them as “Hindu aberrations” (Ahmed, 1985, p. 47). In addition, women expressed their symbolic protest on the streets. As Kabeer (1991) writes:

Over the years, 21 February, formally observed as the Day of the Language Martyrs [commemorating events that took place in 1952], had come to be enacted as an annual reaffirmation of Bengali identity. Women wearing white saris [white is the colour of mourning among both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis] joined in processions to lay wreaths at the monument of the martyrs. As the nationalist movements gathered force in the months preceding the declaration of Bangladesh’s independence, massive demonstrations were held in Dhaka in which large contingents of women, dressed in traditional festive yellow and red saris, wearing bindis [i.e. tips] on their foreheads singing Bengali nationalist songs, including the banned songs of Tagore, spearheaded what was effectively a cultural resistance to the Pakistani regime. (pp. 121-122)

During the liberation war of 1971, women actively participated in different ways. Women fought side by side with men, and many others served in other capacities. Many of them were engaged in providing food, shelter, funds, nursing the wounded and hiding weapons at the risk of their lives. The Pakistani army made Bengali women a specific target of assault, leading to the rape of 30,000 women (Kabeer, 1991). Significantly, it was this passive role of women as victims that came to be highlighted following independence, in the ritualized reciting of the nation's history in words like 'we won independence of this land at the cost of the lives of 3 million martyrs and the honour (*ijjat*) of thousands of mothers and sisters.' Although the rape victims were formally honoured by the new state as *Biranganas* (female war heroes), the difficulty that these women faced was to be reintegrated into the society. The predicament that these women faced during the post-liberation period represents the cultural framework of a society that values traditional beliefs to its utmost reinforcing the traditional gender image (Siddiqi, 1998). Two stereotypes are drawn in literary and local media, one is, of a woman who is raped by Pakistani soldiers or collaborators and the second one is the weeping mother/sister/lover of a Bengali freedom fighter who died during the war (Naher, 2005).

It is necessary to incorporate the discussion on the women who were raped during the liberation war in 1971. The way women were treated during and after the war is very much related to women's position in the society in terms of bearing family image, starting from the Birth of Bangladesh till date. As Papanek argues (1973), "How defenceless women are in our country, if [she] happens to be kidnapped or molested against her will by anybody, she will not be accepted back by her husband or parents...she will forever have to remain outside the family...and...where else can she go except to a public brothel?" (p. 324). Often this sacrifice of the body and honour of these war heroines left them with no other choices but to commit

suicide or have an accident. Siddiqi (1998, p. 209) observes, that in “this nationalist discourse women can only exercise agency within the terms set by existing patriarchal structures”.

These war heroines were later termed as *Birangona* (war heroines), “the euphemism of the title of *birangona* served only to underscore the socially unacceptable status of ‘dishonoured’ women” (Siddiqi, 1998, p. 209). For most of these women, the half-hearted attempt to rehabilitate them was soon discarded and their fate is long lost from the history written by men. In contrast, the male heroes were welcomed and given due respect and status in the society. The extremity of this issue is nowhere more projected other than the treatment of the women who were being raped during 1971 liberation war by Pakistani soldiers and by their helpers. News reports indicate that during that time women who were raped were not accepted by their families and they had to be rehabilitated (Papanek, 1973).

While the secular nature of Bengali nationalism may be seen as having been more liberating for women than the Islamist ideology that the Pakistani state had come to lean towards, it did not really primarily seek to modify existing gender relations. Thus even though the 1972 constitution formally recognized the equality of the sexes in all spheres, certain jobs considered “unsuitable” for women were reserved exclusively for men (Hashimi, 2000, p. 186). The new state formulated policies for women regarding their domestic role as indicated in the following policy statement regarding the significance of women’s education in the First Five year plan (1973-78):

Investment in the education of women provides a wide range of private and social benefits. Their contribution towards rearing of children and management of household economy is significant. The level of schooling of women determines the efficiency of household management. Educated women better attention [*sic*] to nutrition, health and child-care than uneducated. (Kabeer 1991, p. 125]

Gender and Religious Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

The name that is intricately related to the rise of fundamentalism is Taslima Nasreen. When Taslima Nasreen, a writer from Bangladesh, attracted international media attention in the early 1990s after receiving death threats from 'Islamic fundamentalists'. What the world generally came to know about the writer and the country that she had to flee was basically the story of a 'female Salman Rushdie' from a 'Third World' country where 'Islamic fundamentalism' was on the rise. "The Battle between Free Expression and Islam Still Rages," was the opening sentence of a leading article published in *The Times* (18 June 1994, p. 19) about the events leading to Taslima Nasreen's flight to the West. The real battle, however, had more to do with different gender ideologies than with 'free expression' or 'Islam'. Taslima Nasreen was a self-proclaimed feminist who openly challenged the sexual norms of the society. This seems to have had much to do with the way events progressed. While neither Taslima Nasreen's 'radical feminism' nor the 'religious fundamentalism' of her persecutors reflect the mainstream of politics in Bangladesh, the entire episode sheds a great deal of light on the nature of the relationship between gender and the politics of religious fundamentalism (and politics in general) in contemporary Bangladesh. At the same time, the events surrounding Taslima Nasreen also point towards the need to look at contemporary international politics.

Women have been the general target of the fundamentalists in their politics. The leaders of the two biggest political parties of Bangladesh both happen to be women (one of whom is the present prime minister and the other the former). This only seems to make it easier for fundamentalists to manipulate images of women to suit their political goals. Women's participation in development activities in rural areas, the influx of female garments workers to the cities, all provide a context in which images of women, and women themselves, have entered the national political sphere with increasing importance.

Causes Behind the Growth of ‘Fundamentalism’ in Bangladesh

Although not specifically about women, the influence of fundamentalism in Bangladeshi society cannot be underestimated and under each iteration women’s roles were constrained. While there are several factors behind the growth of ‘religious fundamentalism’ in Bangladesh, the most important one was the advent of military rule in 1975 (Kabeer, 1991). It was under two successive military regimes (1975-1990) that the national identity as well as state policies stemmed from these fundamentalist ideals. Although the military rulers were not necessarily ideologically committed towards pursuing a policy of Islamization, they turned towards Islam in search of legitimacy for their rule. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, when the country became independent in 1971, it celebrated secularism, along with nationalism, socialism, and democracy as the fundamental principles of Bangladesh. Although Islam was not rejected as a component of national culture, it was subsumed within a secular and syncretic concept of Bengalianness. The Bangla word for secularism was *dharma ni ropekkhota*, literally means ‘religious neutrality’, and the constitution stressed that secularism would be ensured through the elimination of all kinds of communalism, political use of religion, and any discrimination on the basis of religion. On June 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first democratically elected Prime Minister, the founder leader of the country and also the leader of Awami League (the current ruling party in Bangladesh) clearly stated his position on secularism, saying:

Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. You are a Mussulman, you perform your religious rite. The Hindus, Christian, Buddhists all will perform their religious rites. There is no irreligiousness in on the soil of Bangladesh but there is secularism. This sentence has meaning and the meaning is that none would be allowed to exploit the people in the name of religion or to create such fascist organizations as the al-Badar, Razakars etc. No communal politics will be allowed in the country. Have you understood my pillars? (O'Connell, 2001, p. 188)

During the regime of Ziaur Rahman (1977-81), Islam emerged as a significant marker of the political and every day discourse of Bangladesh. Zia made systematic changes in different areas of state authority (e.g constitutional, administrative, symbolic) during his four year tenure. Right after his appointment as a President, Zia made amendments to the constitution of Bangladesh. In 1977, the phrase ‘Absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah’ replaced the secularism phrase and *Bismillahir-Rahman-ir-Rahim* (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was added at the beginning of the constitution (Siddiqi, 1998). This move was designed to seek support and legitimacy from those (individuals or political parties) who feared that Islam was threatened in Bangladesh by a culture that was derived from ‘Hindu’ culture. Among them were groups such as Jammat-i-Islami, Muslim League who had feared during the Pakistan period that Bengali nationalism was de-nationalizing the Muslims of East Pakistan. Thus Zia’s idea of Bangladeshi nationalism can also be interpreted as a step to make allies with those who opposed the emergence of Bangladesh during the liberation war in 1971. Zia not only introduced a new discourse of religion-inflected nationalism, but also withdrew the ban imposed on Islamic political parties after independence. It was in this context that the fundamentalist forces got the opportunity to regroup and assert themselves in the political sphere once again.

The Zia government established a new ministry called ‘Ministry of Religious Affairs’ to promote and protect the religious life of the country. The Islamic Academy, which was previously a small institution, was transformed into Islamic Foundation, the largest research centre on Islam in the country. There was a growing trend of establishment of religious institutions such as Mosques and Madrasa around the country. The government established a separate Islamic university along with an Islamic research centre for national as well as international Muslim students for the first time. Islamic studies became a compulsory subject for all Muslim school students from Classes I to VIII.

After Zia's regime, Ershad (1982-1990), another military dictator, expanded Islam in the state discourse more radically before. Immediately after coming to power on June 1988, "Ershad's first act in the new Parliament was to push through the Eighth Amendment in which Article 2A declares: 'The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Republic'" (Kabeer, 1991). Ershad sought to make powerful alliances with the military, giving them lucrative opportunities, in one hand, and segments of the Islamic forces (i.e. *ulamas*), using Islam in discourse to enhance his political career. Many of the fundamentalist groups gained a firm platform during this time. They attacked writers, journalists or intellectuals that they identified them as being non-Islamic (Siddiqi, 1998).

With this new shift, Ershad using Islam as an identity marker, claiming to resolve the historically rooted identity crisis of Bangladesh. Thus he said, "People won *Jatisatta* (nationhood), independence and sovereignty through distinction to our national identity" (Naher, 2005, p. 49). The new amendment, however, immediately came under attack by intellectuals, civil society, students' groups, women's organization and political parties. It is important to note that leading women's groups were among the first to come forward in opposing this desperate move by the regime to hold onto power. Interestingly, the dominant Islamic political parties (Jamaat), which have been calling for Bangladesh to become an Islamic state, remained critical about the new step taken by Ershad. They described it as a hypocritical move to resist the 'genuine' Islamic movement. The leader of the Jamaat-i-islami, insisted that people wanted an Islamic state not a declaration of Islam as state religion (Riaz, 2004).

While, to a large extent, both military regimes attempted to hold Islam as an ideological weapon of their political strategy that began to bestow opportunities to revive 'fundamentalist' forces in Bangladesh, it is also important to focus on the way the military

government specially targeted women in the name of 'Islam'. Given that the military and 'religious establishment' groups are both almost exclusively male institutions, it can be argued that it is the women who have had to bear the burden of the alliance. Although control over female body and sexuality is a contested issue in Bangladesh, the idea of appropriate behaviour and norms became more pronounced in the state discourse during military regime, especially in Ershad period. He attempted to reinforce the dominant ideology of 'perfect woman' through the state apparatus in certain ways, for example, the female television announcers were required to be 'appropriately modest', wearing socially admissible dress (i.e. cover their head during Ramadan). He also tried to impose restrictions on the appearance of women's bodies, once ordering the producers of Bangladeshi Saris to make the width and the length of all adult saris 1.22 meter by 5.54 meters, in order to "protect" the social and religious values of the women. He also declared that the delinquent would be punished strictly (Naher, 2005). Nonetheless, the order was abrogated facing immense resistance. Such initiatives were very similar to the measures taken by General Ziaul Haque regime ordered all women government employees to wear 'Islamic' dress that required women to wear proper dupattas or the chador over whatever they were wearing, and cover their heads (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987, p. 77), encouraging women to follow the 'Islamic dress' and characterizing saris as "Indian" or Hindu, Ziaul Haque gave women the role of bearers of Islamic (Muslim) cultural values and the markers of community. It could be argued that Ershad also wanted to establish the identity of 'Muslim Bangladeshi women' through having them wear saris in a style different than that of Indian women.

Apart from the military and the Jamaat-i-islami party, Jahangir (1990) identifies a third source of 'fundamentalism' in Bangladesh, the Tabligh movement. Part of an international 'pietistic' movement with its base in the subcontinent. The literal meaning of tabligh is 'propagation' (Hours, 1995, p. 147). The tabligh movement in Bangladesh is run by

religious leaders, who, unlike the Jamatis (i.e. members of Jamaat-i-Islami), shun direct involvement in politics. The growing influence of this can be witnessed by the annual gathering of its followers, *biswa eztema* ('world eztema', held at Tongi, near Dhaka), which is more moralistic than prompted by a desire for social justice. While the tabligh movement may shun politics in the conventional sense of the term, it does not mean that it is completely apolitical in character, or that its presence has no political consequences. The tabligh movement should not be positioned with Jamaat or other such elements under an undifferentiated category called 'fundamentalism'. While Jamaat, the military, and the tabligh movement may all be seen to have contributed towards making 'Islam' an increasingly more powerful force in contemporary Bangladesh, they clearly occupy very different positions within the political field. Thus if we are to use the term 'fundamentalism' at all, it must be in plural: fundamentalisms i.e. Jamaati Islami vs. Tablighi fundamentalism vs. the juridic fundamentalism of the ulama, 'Islamic scholars/teachers' (Jahangir, 1990, p. 61).

The Beginning of Democracy

The end of military rule at the end of 1990 signalled the country's transition towards 'democracy', the conditions under which Islam became an important political issue in the last decades still exist in Bangladesh. Given the emerging presence of multiple Islamic parties in recent years and the changing alliances among different political parties, national politics in Bangladesh today appear more complicated than ever. Although most of these Islamic political parties have not been able to find significant support in the electoral process, their alliance with the dominant parties has often played a pivotal role in national politics. For example, in the 1991 parliamentary election (after the success of a mass movement for democracy, which evicted Ershad from power in 1990), winning only 18 seat among 300, the support of Jamaat-i-Islami became crucial to ensure a parliamentary majority of the

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP, headed by Begum Khaleda Zia, the first female Prime Minister and the widow of former president Ziaur Raman). The alliance between Jamaat-i-Islami and BNP offered an opportunity to the former to play a vital role in distributing and sharing the thirty reserved seats for women that were nominated by parliament. While the BNP made the alliance to form the government, perhaps the issue that was most important for Jamaat-i-Islami was to carry on its own agenda of making Bangladesh an Islamic state one step further. When the Secretary General of Jamaat introduced a private member's bill in Parliament in July 1992, the strategy of Jamaat became clear to all. The bill would make acts that 'defile' the Quran or the name of the Prophet as crimes.

After withdrawing their support from BNP government, the Jamaat-i-Islami in 1996 parliament election won only three seats more than secularists as a sign of popular rejection of 'fundamentalism'. This did not necessarily mean the decline of Jamaat and other Islamic political parties in the national politics of Bangladesh. I would rather argue that Islam had become such an important factor and weapon in the dominant political discourse in Bangladesh that during the 1991 elections almost all the candidates, including those belonging to the communist parties, had to show their commitment to Islam through their speeches, banners, manifestos and slogans (Hashmi, 2000). Significantly, the Awami League, which was traditionally strongly opposed to the use of religion in politics, seemed to have become less resistant to utilizing 'Islamic' symbols and rhetoric. The party, often alleged to undermine Islam in all respects and accused of turning the country into a 'Hindu' one by the opponent parties (especially BNP and opponent parties), had to take measures to establish its Islamic credentials.

Although national politics appears very ambiguous in Bangladesh, one thing seems very clear. As far as the question of 'gender equality' is concerned, none of the main political parties, whether female headed or not, seem to show any genuine commitment towards

changing the prevailing structures of gender relations. Even the ‘liberal-minded’ groups, who identify themselves as ‘progressive’, often manipulate Islam, protecting the patriarchal ideology. As Hashmi observes, “The Sharia is frequently cited by both Islam-oriented as well as secular and agnostic/atheist Bangladeshi Muslim men in justification of unequal inheritance rights of Muslim women” (2000, p. 192). It is interesting that when one female MP from the ruling BNP party, Farida Rahman, during the tenure of Khaleda Zia as prime minister, tried to table bill in parliament to prohibit polygamy in Bangladesh, both BNP and opposition MPs opposed the move as an encroachment on the sharia law. This episode was like the echo of the military ruler Ershad, who referring to the sharia, refused to ratify a number of clauses (i.g inheritance, divorce) of the UN convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against women (1979).

Gender Inequalities in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a traditional and largely Islamic society; a patriarchal and patrilineal society where norms and traditions continue to shape gender relations (Hussain, 2010; White, 2010). Muslims are the majority population in Bangladesh, with a sizeable Hindu minority (about 9 per cent) and a smaller Christian minority (0.3 per cent). There is segregation of men and women and a strict gender-based division of labor. The Islamic custom of purdah (female seclusion) where women are confined to home and discouraged from public activity continues to impact on women’s role within the family, community and society in Bangladesh. Hussain (2010) notes that, “the purdah (traditional restrictions on women’s dress and mobility) has a long history in Bangladesh. The practice of sexual segregation, female modesty and propriety has always been valued” (p. 325). Marriages are arranged by families and in many cases without prior consent of the girl. Forty per cent of girls are under 14 years old upon marriage. Rozario (2001) lists economic transformations in Bangladesh that includes the growth of the garments industry and of NGO (Non-Government

Organisation) employment, have opened up extensive possibilities for new economic roles for women, but the dominant Bangladeshi culture of the perceived gender role has remained relatively little altered by these developments.

The traditional gender role of women in Bangladesh is very much purdah oriented. The role of purdah has always been a marker to define men's role as the bread winner and women's role as the bearer and care taker of children and domestic responsibilities. Although purdah in its original sense means screen or veil, its meaning has been established within cultural and religious schema. Purdah has different implications at different hierarchical levels of society. As has been discussed earlier, for wealthy women who do not need to contribute economically to the family, purdah becomes a status symbol. But for the women who need to go outside the domestic territory to work in fields, they negotiate their roles in relation to purdah and its observance is less strict (Papanek, 1973). Purdah has been seen as a tool of patriarchy to put women in the subordinate position by having control over their mobility, earning, decision making process and last but not the least on their status and treatment within family and society. Purdah has been identified as a mark of "backwardness, false consciousness, male dominance and female subservience" (Hussain, 2010, p. 327), but contradictorily, some critics argue that purdah ensures greater mobility (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983). As a result, women are more inclined to work outside their domestic periphery.

The Bangladeshi family system is a classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988) that controlled women's mobility inside and outside their domestic life, inheritance, traditional behaviour to limit the social and economic autonomy of women. Purdah worked as a major controlling agent in this regard. But in the 1970s more women came out in the workforce especially at the road construction despite traditional and religious prohibitions against women's mobility. Several reasons have been detected for this change. Cain, Khanam, and

Nahar (1979) and Beneria and Feldman (1992) stated that under the pressure of extreme poverty, men's inability to provide food and shelter the traditional family value system started to decline. The growing incidents of divorce and abandonment by men of their wives and children have been the major causes of steady rise of women's increasing participation at the work force (Hossain, Jahan, & Sobhan, 1990). During the mid-1980s the garments industry became an important source of employment for the urban women (Kibria, 1995). Essentially, if a woman can earn her own money, then she may have more options about staying in a relationship.

Bangladeshi women may enjoy more freedom than before but they continue to face and still facing increasing violence both public and private much of which is related to Fatwas. Hussain (2010) identifies rural women as the main actors of social transformation. As many women tried to get involved in the income generating process, naturally, there arose a clash of interest between the rising fundamentalist power and the women who needed to work in the fields, send their girls to schools, practice family planning, visit health clinics, take micro-credit, get involved in the income generating activities, in short, influence the decision making process of the patriarchal family structure. Shehabuddin (1999) observes that according to the secularists, it is easier to exploit poor rural women with Fatwas that take advantage of the lack of both institutional and Islamic education. Several scholars have unfolded cases of fatwa related violence directed against impoverished women convicted of violating Islamic code of behaviour and the NGOs patronizing them (Karim, 2004; Shehabuddin, 1999). As Feldman (2010) observes, "Since the mid-1990s, there has been a rise of conservative, often social movements that continue to struggle against government and NGO efforts to increase women's opportunities through training and education programs, employment and entrepreneurship initiatives" (p. 307). This struggle is prevalent in arguments against women's participation in the public sphere such as the labour market, and

is especially severe to the women who challenge the 'traditional' prescriptions of marriage. Rozario (2006) observes that middle class women students are also negotiating between empowerment and a violation of their rights as they must choose whether or not to wear veil at the backdrop of increasing Islamist movements.

Besides the Fatwa related public violence against women, there exists violence of private kind – the domestic violence, acid throwing, and workplace molestation and so on. Mohsin (2010) notes that the private is not private as the state intervenes in controlling and disciplining the private by formulating laws that regulate reproduction rights and duties. In addition, the constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the equality of women in the public domain but the private domain that in actuality regulates the life of women remains religious-specific and it is in this sphere the major discrimination takes place. As Mohsin (2010) rightly points out,

Laws controlling marriage, inheritance, and guardianship of children are clearly in favour of men. These restrict women's capability to challenge the systematic injustices since they are afraid of losing economic resources and custody of children. The Conventions of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to which Bangladesh is a signatory also makes it mandatory for the state to do away with discriminatory laws and practices; yet Bangladesh has retained its reservation to Article 2. This made it difficult to protect women's rights in Bangladesh since Article obligates that state to take measures to do away with all kinds of discrimination against women, including legal, customary, and traditional sources. (pp. 15-16)

A chief demand on the women's movement has been the formulation of a uniform code of law. As discussed earlier religion has always been a significant factor for all the political parties. Hence it is easily understandable why the private domain has never been an important factor for the political parties. The women's movement in Bangladesh has played

a crucial role in voicing women's rights and spaces in different spheres. Various organisations such as Nari pokkho (NP), Bangladesh Mahila (Women) Parishad (BMP) and Women for Women campaigned to create awareness of women's rights. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), Ain-o-Shalish Kendro (ASK), Nari Uddyog Kendra, Kormojibi Nari, Bachte Shekha and Bangladesh society of Human Rights (BSEHR), are some of the organisations that deal with legal rights, women trafficking, challenging discrimination against women and violence against women (Mohsin, 2010). The impact of NGOs such as BRAC, CARE, People's Health Centre (Gonoshashtho Kendro) and Grameen Bank, is also very significant. Over the last three decades NGOs have intervened and altered millions of women's fate in Bangladesh. They have been working towards providing employment, raising awareness of health issues of pregnant women, reproductive health and so on. NGOs have become increasingly important employers. These changing circumstances have given women some power to negotiate power within the household and thus ensure women's mobility (Haque, 2001; Rozario, 2006; Sultan, 2010).

Rozario (2006) notes that, urban middle-class women are also taking part of this movement. Although the ideology of purdah demands women should remain in the private sphere, the gradual change due to modernisation and globalisation has also significantly impacted their lives. In the present context of increasing globalisation women's positive image that signifies the Islamic way of life, has become a political agenda (Hussain, 2010). According to Hussain (2010), the rising Islamic forces are trying to shape the religious and moral foundation of society and in this process veiling women has become a medium for expressing Islamic identity. For her, the colonial discourses see the unveiling of women as a marker of modernity or progressiveness. If unveiling of women becomes the sign of modernity then the questions arises how do the educated women negotiate their identity in the globalised world? For them is veiling can be seen as a marker of backwardness? Do these

women themselves think that wearing a veil actually hinders their way of thinking, their job opportunities or their sense of modernity as a whole?

Women's participation in the labour force is much higher and increasing rapidly in all sphere (Mahmud, 2003). Recently government has established quotas from 50 per cent to 60 per cent recently for women to teach in the primary schools. In government departments, women are generally employed in the Social Welfare, Education, and Women's Affairs. Women are also taking up executive positions in banks, insurance companies and telecommunications and also in large national and multinational companies. With the increasing upsurge of information technology, globalisation and the impact of media, the traditional value system is challenged more and more. But as the literature shows, there is still major lack of investigation into how the educated women negotiate their identity and resist the traditional norms that continues to persist in the society and family. As Azim (2010) notes:

Tradition and modernity are perhaps the two poles against which women in South Asia are pitted. The main elements of tradition seem to be comprised of religion. Religion occupies a somewhat difficult position in the largely secular terrain that speaks of the empowerment of women. However while modern South Asian nation states has based themselves on a notion on of secularity, there has occurred in the meantime a resurgence of religion in all countries in the grab of modernity. Hence religion now needs to be re-examined, as in its modern manifestation, it has a special appeal for women. Within this modern manifestation, women are still envisaged as protectors of tradition, but are no longer 'stuck' in traditional roles and have access to a new discourse of modernity and rights. (p. 7)

Women and Education in Bangladesh

Women have come a long way from the British and the West Pakistan colonial period. Since independence, the Bangladeshi education system has undergone many changes. For

example, according to the report commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO, since the launch of the Second Five Year Plan (1980-1985) Bangladesh has implemented a Universal Primary Education (UPE) program during successive Five Year Plan periods spanning a period for 22 years. The UPE is a comprehensive non-formal education which aims to eradicate illiteracy from the country and to provide program stipends for female students so that more can attend school. Bangladesh currently has two programs that provide financial incentives for girls to attend schools. The first one is the food for Education Program. This program is both for boys and girls. The second one is, The Secondary School Scholarship Program which is only available to girls who are paid a small monthly stipend for attending secondary school regularly (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001). Yet still, in rural Bangladesh where much change has been seen in recent years, girls are still seen as liabilities as opposed to boys and hence not encouraged to go for secondary education let alone higher education (Akhter, 2005).

At the time of independence there were six public Universities in Bangladesh including Dhaka University which was established in 1921 by the British. During the late 1970s the tertiary sector faced numerous problems including campus violence, session jam (whereby a three year BA honors program used to take additional two to three years) and also low quality teaching. All these issues still exist in the Public Universities of Bangladesh. Initially there were not many female students studying in the Universities. But since 1990s there is a growing number of female students aspiring higher education and thus attending university education. At present, there are 31 Public Universities and 75 Private Universities in Bangladesh. The rate of enrolment of students in private universities are much higher than the public universities than it was in past two decades (Bangladesh, 2014). As there is no quota system in the private universities, families who can afford higher education send their sons as well as daughters to the universities. Women are now seen to be competing against

men for corporate jobs. Numerous reasons have been detected as to the increasing number of females pursuing higher education. Globalisation and modernisation due to the impact of media and internet (Hussain, 2010), prospect of good marriage, safety and security for future for physically unattractive girls, freedom to make choices, greater mobility, informed motherhood and educated resources for future children thus citizen of the nation (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001) and above all finding voice to resist the age-old patriarchal system in Bangladeshi society (Hussain, 2010; Mohsin, 2010). As more women are becoming educated, it could be assumed that women are better equipped to fight violence and injustice against them. But according to Akhter (2005) in September 2000, the UN organization UNFPA stated in a report that Bangladesh topped in violence against women. Dowry deaths, acid throwing, work place molestation, gang rapes, eve-teasing, sexual abuse, domestic violence and trials through *fatwa* (religious judgment) are ever increasing in Bangladesh (Islam & Sultana, 2006).

Arenda-Kuenning & Amin (2001) rightly observes that:

Increasing the average level of women's' education does not necessarily improve women's status or challenge the norms of patriarchy. Women who are educated might be more empowered than the women who are uneducated, but their choices are still constrained and shaped by patriarchy. (p. 137)

An example of these constraints is that the current Awami league government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the year 2011 has approved the 'Women Development Policy 2011' with a provision of equal rights for men and women to inherited property. The draft policy includes women's full control on their earned property, credit, land, inheritance, and market management. The policy asserts that there should be a 33% representation of women in various political organizations including upgrading the reserved quota of women in parliament to 33 per cent. According to the policy, all discrimination against women and

contradictory provisions against the CEDAW charter would be abolished. Moreover, there has been a fresh pledge for enacting new laws to ensure equality between men and women. As soon as the policy was approved, there was protest brought against it by the top scholars of Islam accusing the policy of being against the Islamic law. They called dawn to dusk hartal (strike) and demonstrated their protest with numerous statement and speech. Their protest has been ignored by the government completely.

The next chapter will present the first two case studies.

Chapter Six

Data Presentation

I began my journey to the field with the notion that I will use ‘resistance’ as an analytical tool for my research. As I continue to analyse my data, I realized resistance has emerged as one of the major overarching themes for my research. Each of the cases is unique with each individual’s response to their life events and their experience. Each of the participants has her own ways of negotiating identities. Most of the overarching themes emerged from their responses to their life events are unique in nature. Hence, the cases are presented based on the individuals’ active and passive resistance to their life’s events. While doing so the overarching themes such as the perception of ‘good girl’ and the perception of ‘veiling’ are demonstrated through the data presentation. The issues of bracketing myself became a major concern that has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three. I will continue to mention the issue of bracketing (my voice and the participants’ voice) as I present my data.

I was born and raised in a Muslim family. My parents were separated when I was seven and my father did not allow my mother to have my custody. In Bangladesh, the custody of a child automatically goes to the father if the child is seven years of age. Till seven the mother can have custody of the child. If the mother wants to have custody over the child after she or he is seven then she has to file a law suit in court. The law still exists. One of my participants is still living in constant fear of losing custody of her child when the child reaches seven. I had no other option but to stay with my father. No one asked me what I wanted. I guess it never occurred to any one that I might have an opinion as firstly, I was a minor and secondly, I was a girl. I grew up with the minimal parental supervision as my father had no idea how to raise a child. In Bangladeshi society, men are treated like assets and

they are hardly taught to take care of the responsibilities. My father did not even know how to wash his own plate let alone raise a child.

During my school life I grew up always listening to what my father wanted for me. It was long decided where I had to study or which will be my major in high school or which tutor to go to for tuition or my career choices or what I should wear or which dress I should buy and who and when I should marry. Most of the time I could not do anything but conform to the choices that were made for me because as a woman in Bangladesh I am required to have a guardian and if I had refused to conform to what I was being told I would have had to face severe repercussions. I was raised knowing most of the times that the things that are chosen for me are the best for my future and the only ways to be. It hardly occurred to me that I could have a choice of my own and even if I had, I could do something about it.

Gradually I completed my university degree and started my career as a university Lecturer. In my workplace, I was constantly reminded that I am a woman and I am trying to break the tradition by introducing things that were not there previously. My job became a burden for me that I wanted to resign from but I was not allowed to as it is a 'dream job' in Bangladesh. I was a Public university Lecturer (a very prestigious and privileged position) which suited me perfectly as I am a woman. In Bangladesh teaching is deemed as be the best position for women. I enjoyed my lectures but I hated to encounter my colleagues who continuously reminded me what I should and should not be doing.

An example of my struggle is, in Bangladesh the lecture system in the classrooms are teacher centred where teachers come in the classes and deliver lectures and are never to be questioned about anything during the lecture. Participatory classroom discussions or learner centred classrooms are there theoretically but the practice is and has always been teacher centred lectures. Apparently, I challenged that norm as my lectures were participatory and I wanted to bring in students' voices. As a result I was much friendlier with my students

especially female students who thought I was a place where they could share their anxiety and struggles. Their struggles always left me with a sense of helplessness. Most of these women could not share their struggles and sufferings with their family members because that is where their suffering was usually generated from and they could not share them with their friends because of the sense of shame and honour, a theme that will be discussed while presenting the data and in the discussion chapter. I was constantly looking for ways to help them and help myself. But the major hindrance for me was my 'voice' was never taken seriously. It always got lost among the list of 'what should be done'. Later on, my participants' narratives became my inspiration to do 'something' for the women in Bangladesh. I had to look for ways through which I can make my voice heard. In order for my voice to be taken seriously I needed to have a foreign degree and become an expert so that my voice is not brushed away because I am a woman.

I wanted to go abroad for higher education but I was afraid to apply. There were so many concerns. Even if I apply, I am woman, how can I study on my own without my father/guardian being around? But my desire to escape my workplace was far greater than my insecurity which made me apply for a scholarship in Australia. When I received the scholarship, I was told by my father that I should get married before I leave the country because I needed someone to look after me. I still have a fresh memory of that day when I revolted against what I was told and made my choice of coming to Australia as a single woman. My constant struggle to make my voice heard had taught me to turn around and fight for what I want to do and achieve. My research is related to my struggles as much as it is related to the cases that I am about to present.

Structure of the Data Chapters

Initially I proposed that I would use resistance as an analytical tool for my research. But as I continue to analyse my data, resistance became one of the major themes. Each of my participants is unique in her response to their life's events. I made a strategic choice while presenting the data in terms of the order in which I should present my cases. As the cases are unique, it was quite challenging to find the commonality in themes and then use it to rationalize the division of cases and their order. For all my participants the most common theme was resistance. Resistance emerged from my data as both passive and active. Out of the fifteen participants four kinds of resistances emerged which are discussed in Chapter Nine. According to Raby (2005) conformity can be a form of resistance. Four of my participants demonstrated conformity. However, the data chapters will focus on those participants who chose to resist expected cultural stereotypes in some way. Those who conformed will be discussed in Chapter Nine but are not the focus of the data chapters. There are three data chapters (Chapter Six, Seven and Eight) that address in sequence different degrees of resistance. Chapter Six, presents the two participants who showed active resistance, Chapter Seven presents two narratives showing some sort of resistance and Chapter Eight presents two cases where participants demonstrated non-active resistance. I present two of my participants who appeared to exhibit active resistance. Thus I have chosen six cases to represent the overarching themes for all the cases

While exploring the ways of negotiating self of Muslim female university graduates in Bangladesh, I am presenting the life stories of my participants in a chronological form. In the course I will highlight the major themes that have emerged from the participants' data. The following table serves as a snapshot of the first two participants whose narratives are presented in this chapter. Both have taken the right to decide whether to remain in an unsatisfactory marriage or to remain single in defiance of their families' wishes.

Active resistance			
Name	Age	Marital status	Occupation
Nowrin	29	Divorced and single mother	University Lecturer and News anchor
Sohana	26	Single	Brand manager in a multinational company

Case study: Nowrin

Background information

Nowrin was twenty-nine at the time of the interview. She did her Masters in English Literature from one of the public universities in Dhaka. She is the second of four sisters. Her father was a retired Government service holder and her mother was a homemaker. Nowrin was a lecturer in a Private university in Dhaka and she was also an anchor and a news caster in one of the National TV channels in Bangladesh. She liked herself to be introduced as a media person. Before starting the interview, Nowrin and I were talking about how she was doing in her life. As the conversation progressed Nowrin became very emotional while talking about the events that she was going through. Nowrin had just filed for divorce after an eight years long relationship of which she was married for four years. She was a single mother with no clue how to divorce her husband. Her parents turned their backs against her because initiating a divorce is viewed as taboo which will jeopardise family's reputation and honour. I spent more than two hours with her prior to the interview to calm her down. I tried to console her with suggestions and advice regarding where she could go to get the best legal advice. She preferred to come to my house for the interview as she did not want her father to

know about this interview. She thought that bringing me in the house would have actually set me as an accomplice with her on her divorce and it would be very hard for her to explain to her parents the content of my research. She was also afraid that if her parents came to know the content they would be furious with me thinking that I was helping their daughter to deviate from the 'right path' which in this case was going back to her abusive marriage.

My first question was to introduce herself for which she spoke for a quite a long time. She introduced her father as a Government employee, but for her mother she said,

My mother does the greatest and vastest job – she is a house wife, a job that we never think of as something big or we never attach importance to it. Housewife...we never pause and think how big the post is...she is the accountant, the HR officer, the manager...she maintains everything all by herself. This is my mother!

From the above quote the traditional gender role has been highlighted. Nowrin was expected to do the same in her own household along with her role as a bread winner in the family.

While talking about her mother, the pride in her tone was unmistakably notable. She had high regard for what her mother did and she fully appreciated her mother's role in the household.

It seemed that she cherished a modest pride for herself as well.

Purdah – Safety Net or Prison

Nowrin attended a school where the headscarf was a part of the school uniform. From year one to year twelve she along with her friends had to wear the head scarf. With age the extent of Islamic way of covering increased. By year twelve Nowrin was wearing an apron, which was like the ones that are worn in the science laboratory as a part of her college uniform. For Nowrin, observing purdah was a part of Islam but it is not something to be imposed on school children. For her, performing purdah from such a tender age deeply

impacted her way of thinking. She had no clue why she was expected to dress like this. Nowrin felt that it had compartmentalised her thought process. She referred to her two younger sisters who went to a different school that did not have the forced head scarf as a part of the school uniform. She could identify the two different streams of thoughts in the same household – one which she and her elder sister had because of going to a more conservative school and the other was with her two younger sisters who went to a more liberal schools. Her younger sisters had different perspectives about most of the things that the sisters discussed and Nowrin found them to be more open to new ideas than she and her elder sister. For her, veiling is nothing but a tool of patriarchy. She continued to explain that veiling is introduced in the schools to remind the girls that they are inferior to men in many ways. Nowrin continued to perform veiling even after she finished college as she was taught and raised that way. She was made to believe that she is a ‘good girl’ and good girls veil.

Nowrin had a very strong reaction to this. She thought the notion of deciding a ‘good girl’ on the basis of covering one’s head was absolutely pointless as ‘it does not say anything about the actual person.’ For Nowrin, religion is a personal perception and therefore, whether one decides to veil or not is entirely a personal choice. ‘No one should force’ a six or seven year old child to veil when the child does not even understand the concept of veiling let alone maintaining it throughout the school hours. According to Nowrin,

The child who doesn’t know how to hold the scarf, how would any one expect her to carry it on her head. She doesn’t even understand!! It was creating the mindset since childhood that you have to be in purdah when you grow up. No matter what you do this is what you have to have. It is a frame and you are inside. You have to be in this frame.

Nowrin understood the part of the headscarf being a compulsory part of the school uniform. And yet she raised questions against this practice. When people work in a food factory or in a hospital or in a corporate office, sometimes certain dress codes are followed. People have to

follow the dress code as a part of their job. If they are not happy with the dress code then they have the choice to leave the job. It is interesting to note that Nowrin who understood and followed the dress code in the media, did not want to understand or adopt the dress code of the school she studied in and labels it as something that hinders mental growth of women. This demonstrates that she certainly could feel the social pressure that is generated from expectations and the stereotyped image of one being a ‘good girl’ if one covers her head.

Nowrin was resentful of the fact that for twelve years she looked for answers to the question – why did she have to veil? She asked this question to her family members but it seemed no one explained it to her. She discussed it with her sisters but nobody seemed to have the right idea as to why the school had the headscarf as something compulsory. The forcing nature of headscarf generated a strong resentment towards veiling for Nowrin. During the interview, Nowrin raised issues regarding the difference in veiling among men and women. She said she had been trying to find the answer, “Why Islam has two different ways of veiling for men and women? Is it to prove women to be inferior?” She also mentioned that she understood that there are fundamental differences in the physical structure of men and women but still she had been trying to find answers to these questions. Nowrin’s questions regarding the difference of veiling between men and women demonstrates her confusion that has stemmed from her lack of knowledge and understanding of what is actually said in Islam. She said she had been looking for answers but she could not say specifically how she was looking for them. It seemed that if she had come to know she would have had to abide by the rules of Islam as she already claimed that she was a religious person and religion is ‘obviously’ a necessary part of life.

During the interview Nowrin vacillated between different understandings of herself and her relationship with her culture. Nowrin needed to continue to veil for practical purposes. When she was in the university, she had to travel from one place to another on her own which

means she had to use public transport. During this time, she realized that when she covered her head with a stole or a long cloth (*orna*) she is not harassed by men. She is considered to be a good girl coming from a good family who is not supposed to be harassed. She admitted that while she used to veil or cover her head she noticed the change of behaviour among men. Throughout the interview, time and again she raised the issue of the idea of protection that comes with veiling. But this fact troubled her a lot. She did not understand why she has to cover her head in order to feel protected. “Why the men who are teasing women should not be punished? Or women would not be taught martial arts as self-defence instead of being told to restrict their mobility or cover them up?” She refused to be considered as a ‘good girl’ by the society in terms of how she dressed. For her, her work should justify what sort of a person she is instead of her clothing. She also mentioned the crimes that people do in the name of veiling. When a woman covers, people automatically judge her to be a good person. But women cover for all the wrong reasons. Specifically, they cover in order to hide their identity as they want to sneak out for dating or perhaps they want to smuggle illegal goods from one place to another. Nowrin frequently mentioned that the society is very much aware of the dubious nature of veiling and yet it limits ‘good woman’ in terms of clothing. The moral overtone of ‘dating before marriage is bad’ was obvious in her expression.

Nowrin referred to the history of women and how, in previous years, women were kept indoors and not allowed to go out. If any woman needed to go out, the vehicle used to be covered in a net or a sheet. Women have come a long way since then. Now education has become more accessible to women and yet women are seen as a burden to a family as after her marriage she will go to her husband’s place and whatever she earns her family will not share. Nowrin became very excited while mentioning this reality that still exists in the society. She thought that society has left no stone unturned to limit women’s mobility and capability.

Nowrin's school experience of wearing headscarf has made a significant impact on the person she has become now. For more than eleven years she had questions regarding veiling but nobody explained it to her. As a grown up woman she had consciously decided to give up veiling as a protest. She affirmed during the interview saying, 'I would not veil. This is my protest.' I would like to talk more about Nowrin's protest later.

Workplace Inequality

She referred to the work place inequality that she encountered everyday of her life. Nowrin mentioned she has been a victim of workplace inequality since the time she started her career. She had to struggle a lot to prove her competence. She had worked so far in seven different workplaces encountering seven different environments. In all the places she observed a woman is treated less in quality even if she has the equal competence with a man. Nowrin shared her gained experience from her different workplaces. For the same position a woman with similar competence has to work ten times harder than a man to prove that she is as competent as the man. Women also comply with these discriminations as the job market is very competitive and they have to have their job in order to support their families. Women themselves think that they are inferior to men and then she added, "Why wouldn't they think that they are inferior?" The entire education system and job sector is divided in a quota system. The ratio for men and women to compete for Universities is unequal. If there are hundred seats in one department for students the percentage for women seats would be 35-40 and for the rest it would be for men. Similarly in government job sectors this division persists. As far as intelligence and competence is concerned men and women should have similar distribution of seats or no distribution at all. The division is only a persistent reminder of the fact that women are treated unequally in Bangladeshi society.

Nowrin refused to be treated like a secondary citizen anymore. She came to an understanding of her own personality where she realized that clothing does not define who she is but it does define who her culture thought she was. She believed that it was her inner beauty, her intelligence, her personality that should define her. Education had allowed her to think for herself and judge her self-worth in terms of how open she could be to decide what she wanted to do for herself.

Her Divorce

It has already been mentioned that during the time of this interview Nowrin was going through a divorce with her husband. She had been married for four years. During these years she had to tolerate domestic violence, physical and mental abuse both by her husband and her in-laws. Her husband was always against her being in the media as media is considered to be a place which is not suitable for 'good women'. Both of them were working and yet it was Nowrin who was expected to cook for her husband and his family after she came back from work. She was the one who was expected to clean her husband's clothes for him and make his tiffin ready for his office the next day. On top of everything she was the major bread winner of the family as she had two jobs and was earning more than her husband. She became agitated saying, "Where is it written that only women have to cook and husbands will relax? If he is tired from a day's work then I am tired too! Why do I have to cook for him and his family?" She tried her best to cope with her husband but at one point she put her foot down. I asked her, 'what made you decide to get a divorce?' She replied, "I just had enough. One morning I woke up and just thought that Nowrin will not take this bullshit anymore!" She came to her parents' place with her one year old son. She became very emotional when she was describing this event. The pain and helplessness were very obvious when she was describing her current situation.

She kept wondering which was more painful; that she was going through a divorce or that her parents were against her decision. She believed that she was not acting the way a 'good girl' should act. When she first came to her parents' house she was locked up in a room for three months with her child. Her mobile phone was confiscated by her father so that she was not able to ask for help from anybody else. Her father suspected that she was having an affair with another man. This was another reason for not giving her back her cell so that she could not contact that other man. It was unconceivable for her parents and her family to think that she might just decide not to be in an abusive relationship rather than having an affair with someone and decide to leave the marriage. 'She' must have done something wrong. During the time she was locked inside her room, she lost her job in the university as a lecturer and her job at the national TV as a newscaster. She begged her father repeatedly to let her out so that she can earn for her son and herself. She also pointed out so many times how hard it was to get a job these days. But her parents especially her father did not pay any heed to her begging. On the contrary, he had several sessions where he had heated encounter with her when he forced her to go back to her husband and continue the marriage. He also threatened her that if she did not listen to him he would throw her out with her son on the street.

Nowrin was sympathetic to her mother's role in all of the events she was going through. She empathetically said that her mother did not have any other options but to listen to her father as she was the entire time dependent on her father, 'she is a prisoner'. She never had a say in the family matter. She had always been a silent observer. In the beginning as well as towards the end of the interview, Nowrin talked about her mother's role in her life for quite a long time. Her mother has been a homemaker all her life. She did not receive much education. But she ensured that all her four daughters received education and worked to earn their own living. She inspired her daughters to be self-dependent so that they did not ever have to depend on their husbands for the necessary things that they might need for them.

Nowrin fondly remembered her memory of reading her mother's diary where it was written, if ever she (Nowrin's mother) found out that her daughters were not interested in completing their education, she would commit suicide. Her mother inspired all the four sisters to finish their education. Yet despite this, Nowrin's mother sided with her father in locking Nowrin in a room for deciding to divorce her abusive husband.

Although her mother had been inspiring, she had to take sides with Nowrin's father otherwise it would have been difficult for her to be in the same household. Nowrin seemed to be well aware that being a prisoner her whole life, her mother's thought process was also influenced by the traditional social understanding that it was not alright for a girl to divorce her husband. A woman should try to adjust no matter what. Nowrin was repeatedly urged to save her marriage and think of her younger sisters who were not married yet. If Nowrin was divorced it would be hard for the sisters to get married as their sister was divorced which meant she could not be a good wife. In Bangladesh divorce is considered to be a taboo. Hence in a family if any daughter is divorced, this brings a bad name to the rest of the family members as a result no one would like to marry their son to that family.

Nowrin had to fight day and night with her father and rest of the extended family all of whom thought that she should go back to her husband. Her husband used to come frequently to her parents' house and access was given by Nowrin's father. Her husband used to threaten her saying he would take away her son. After three months, Nowrin decided not to cry anymore and to take charge of the entire matter. She came out of her room and told her father that she would leave the house with her son if her father locked her one more time. She started looking for a job and found a job as lecturer in one of the private universities and then found another one as a newscaster in a different news channel. She ignored her husband's threatening and her father's warnings. She started consulting lawyers without letting anyone know and finally she sent the divorce letter to her husband without letting her parents and

family know about her decision and her action. She told me, “I had to do this. If my father had known he would have never let me send the letter. I cannot think of going back to the man. I don’t want my child to be raised by him.”

Once she took the decision to divorce her husband, Nowrin was scared to face the world. She cried a lot for days thinking about her future, her son’s future and her family. She said she did not know where she got the courage to put a stop to all the abuse and say, “I don’t want this marriage anymore.” But she did it eventually. She was very sad when she said, “I wish my parents were a bit more understanding and supportive!” There are two cultural aspects that are needed to be addressed. The first one is, why Nowrin did not talk back to her father initially? In Bangladeshi culture, children are not supposed to question the decisions of the parents, particularly the father. This rule is stricter for girls. When a girl raises her voice, the entire notion of ‘good girl’ is put under scrutiny within the family itself. The family becomes judgmental even before the society starts to raise figures to the girl. This leads to the second cultural aspect that needs to be addressed. In a Bangladeshi society what other people are thinking is highly prioritized instead of thinking about a human being’s life. In an average educated family, face saving becomes the major concern instead of the care for the well-being of the children. A family is easily defamed because of the way the girl has behaved. Girls are taught to compromise and acquiesce instead of raising questions or thinking about their desires. If anyone goes against this norm the concept of ‘good girl’ is put at stake.

Nowrin’s life got more complicated once she decided to divorce her husband. As she now has a child she had to think of her child’s custody. In Bangladeshi law, husbands can get legal custody of a child automatically after the age of seven. There is no law as such that says that a mother can have legal custody of her child. Nowrin’s antipathy reached its peak when she said,

I will feed the child from infancy, I will change the diaper, work for him, and keep awake for him and when he is old enough the goon will take him away from me because there is no law! How unfair is that? These laws are there from British rule and no body changed it because it has been for the men. They are the authority in this society and they decide it for us!

Nowrin wanted this to be on record. Towards the end before finishing the interview, she thanked me for taking such an initiative to do research on women. She strongly felt that her story needs to be shared with others. Women even educated women are still very helpless to the society's laws and to the rules that are formed in the name of religion. She said, "Please write about us! We are so helpless! This needs to be changed." Many conversations about domestic violence, divorce and finding any kind of support from around has given the researcher considerable experience to comment on the turmoil Nowrin was going through during the time of interview. She was an emotional wreck who was constantly trying to fight her way into divorce and have the custody of her child. Along with that she was constantly fighting with society's judgemental looks including her family. She did not know where to go to ask for help. The more she came to know of the child's custody law for divorced women the more she became restless. Giving up her son was not an option for her.

Researcher's reflection

At the beginning of the interview Nowrin expressed her views on veiling. Nowrin thought that there were two kinds of veiling. One is the physical one and the other is the 'veiling of heart'. For her, religion was very important as it sets a moral standard of good and bad and serves with a sense of purpose in life. 'It is like meditation.' She thinks religion is a very important part of her life. In this regard, it is necessary to mention, while talking about veiling Nowrin time and again referred to veiling as a 'middle aged' concept – a tool of patriarchy. Veiling, to her, is something that limits the thoughts and possibilities of a woman.

At the same time, she demonstrated her awareness of veiling being an integral part of religious belief. The paradox in her thoughts gives rise to questions regarding her understanding and clearance of thoughts regarding her own self. Nowrin also mentioned that she had respect for women who veil and that it is entirely a personal choice. This leads to the notion of Nowrin's choice where she consciously decided not to veil. Previously, it is mentioned that choosing not to veil is a protest for her. It is also to be noted that Nowrin in reality cannot veil if she wanted to continue her job as a media person and she has chosen to work in media to add weight to her decision.

I want to use my insider's knowledge here. As I am still in touch with Nowrin, in many of our conversations Nowrin shared her pride to be known as a media person. She took great pride in the fact that she was now the anchor of a TV talk show where she beat other testers to this position. Nowrin's negotiation was evident from her choice and her actions. She decided to be seen as an individual and media had provided her with that opportunity which added to the battery of arguments about veiling. Nowrin was very conscious of her 'self' in media. She was well aware that if she wanted to continue her job in the media she could not veil and she was happy with that. Her choice gave her power and strength.

Since the time of interview, I have kept in touch with her. Now Nowrin has struggled her way through her hurdles. She is now divorced and living with her son at her parents' place. **Case study: Sohana**

Background information of Sohana

Sohana was a twenty-six year old freshly graduated Marketing officer. She studied in English medium school and college. The Bangladeshi school education system is quite complex. I believe a brief introduction will give a clear idea of how different classes can be identified based on the schools the children go to. This will in turn help to understand Sohana's case more clearly.

In Bangladesh there are four mediums of education. One is Bangla medium school and college where students follow the government curriculum. This is mostly followed in public schools and colleges in other words throughout the country. The second medium is the English version of the Bangla curriculum. It means the school follows the government curriculum but the books and the teaching are in English. This is followed by a few schools and colleges. The third one is Madrassa medium where the government curriculum is followed but with a special emphasis on Arabic language and the Quranic teaching. The fourth medium is the English medium where mostly International 'A' level and 'O' level curriculum is followed. Based on these four mediums, the class system of Bangladeshi society can be clearly understood. The parents who are from middle class or lower middle class, send their children to Bangla medium and the English version of national curriculum schools. Parents from extreme lower income groups or orphans usually go to Madrassas and parents from upper middle class and rich family send their children to English medium schools and colleges.

As mentioned earlier Sohana went to an English medium school and college. This put her into the upper class of Bangladesh society. She completed her tertiary education from one of the top public business schools in Bangladesh. Like the schooling system, tertiary education in Bangladesh needs some background explanation. In Bangladesh, there are two kinds of Universities. The first kind is the public universities. These prestigious universities are held in high regard as students have to go through rigorous admission tests. Education is subsidized in Public Universities making it easier for the students who come from lower middle class or middle class to access higher education. The second kind is the private universities where education is very expensive. As they are very expensive only students coming from rich families can afford to study there. Thus, studying in a private university is another indicator of class in Bangladeshi society.

Nevertheless, the university where Sohana studied was a prestigious public university where students are selected on the basis of their merits. It is considered to be quite a challenge to be enrolled in this school. Throughout the interview it was clear from her choice of words and phrases that she was well aware of this fact and she took pride in being one of those select few.

Sohana's mother was a high ranking government officer and her father passed away when Sohana was 16 years old. Her father married twice and neither of his wives knew about the each other's existence until his death. After he died, it became a major issue in Sohana's life to be exposed to her father's polygamous nature. She underwent various emotional phases to be able to deal with this trauma. The major themes that arise from Sohana's interview are the question of 'what purdah is?', the notion of the 'good girl', oppression of a different nature which is mostly related to social media (according to Sohana), religion, resistance and resentment, and the impact of globalization. One issue that interlinks most of these themes is Sohana's view of money and the sense of class that she thought she belonged to and was entitled to have opinions of what others should or should not do.

“This is Purdah to me”

Sohana emphasised on the fact that men should do purdah first. She referred to the verse from the Quran where it is told that men should perform purdah even before women. During the interview, she several times scoffed at the double standards maintained by Bangladeshi Muslim men who think only women should wear purdah and men do not have to perform any kind of veiling and behaving which might include lowering their gaze and dressing and behaving modestly.

She strongly stated that veiling should be of mind and personality first. It is the veil of the inner self that is more important than performing the outward veiling. She referred to the existing double standards of Muslim families where girls are forced to wear burka but they do not wear it as a result of an understanding of Islam. Rather they are bound to wear it by cultural conventions or other reasons. She gave the example of some young women who were her friends and who wore burka to hide their identity while they were on a date. Echoing what Nowrin stated, Sohana reasoned women wanted to hide their identity because in Bangladesh the idea of dating before marriage is still frowned upon. As burka covers a woman's body from head to toe, a woman wearing burka is not identifiable in public places when she is out with her boyfriend or sneaking up into places where she is not supposed to be.

The other reason why women wear burka in Bangladesh according to Sohana, is for 'practical' purposes. Sohana explained the word practical in terms of its day-to-day use in Bangladeshi society. Women wear burka as a safety net. If the body is covered, women would not be gawked at or teased on the street while running their daily chores. For Sohana, this is no reason for veiling. If somebody wants to veil, the urge to abide by the religious doctrines should come from within. It should not be forced either by the family or by the pressure from society. She recommended strict rules for the safety of women concerning their public and private behaviour. Both Nowrin and Sohana expressed similar views.

While talking about her perception on veiling and whether she would veil or not, she answered by showing respect to those who wear veil for religious purposes. She expressed her hope that at some point of her life in future she would cover too. For her, religion was very important and she offered her prayers five times a day. She even offered her prayer in the office where no other girls do this and where there are no separate spaces for offering prayer. Sohana showed her deep resentment of this fact. The fact that she offered her prayers

even in the adverse circumstances amidst such difficulties, was her way of performing purdah/veiling and she emphatically asserted, “This is purdah to me.”

For her, her personality, the way she carried herself in her work place and the ‘vibe’ that she gave were all part of purdah which she understands as being ‘constrained of your behaviour.’ She stated that she was not flirtatious and in the next moment she said, ‘not that I am saying there is something wrong in being so!’ This perhaps highlights her confusion between being a modern educated person and a person who had some very conventional notions. This is related to the next theme that has emerged from her interview — the notion of ‘good girl’. Sohana also thinks that she has the right to be critical of the behaviour of others regarding what they should or should not do.

“You are a woman...you need to be graceful”

During her interview, Sohana repeated many times, ‘I don’t care what other people think of me. I do what I feel is right.’ But when she was asked what she thinks of veiling, she said that it is the ‘personal guard’ of a woman. A woman’s behaviour restates what sort of a person she is. It is necessary for a woman to make others (men) around her understand that she is not an easy catch. At the same time, Sohana perceived that Bangladeshi families are too protective of their girls. That is why when a girl is teased she does not know how to fight back as from childhood the girls are taught to be graceful and to be patient. No matter how oppressed they are, they are not supposed to raise their voice. If a girl verbally protests against such crimes on the street, it is the girl and the girl’s family who are usually held responsible for not being able to learn proper manners. According to her, girls should be taught some self-defence so that they can protest when they are being harassed with improper comments or groping and gawking in public places. In the following statement Sohana became extremely sarcastic of how society values false modesty as oppose to advocating

women learning to defend themselves. She highlighted how a woman is looked down upon if she 'yelled' (protested) back at men who are harassing her. She explains:

In Bangladesh it [women verbally protesting on the streets] is generally condemned and looked down upon. If a woman yells then the global standard of womanhood comes at question. You are a woman....you need to be graceful. You cannot yell at a man...swearing. Well I don't care...I swear...That is really looked down upon.

If a woman protests it becomes the woman's fault. Rather than men's behaviour being condemned it is the women whose status and upbringing are brought into question.

Oppression

Sohana referred to the teasing on the streets and market places as social oppression towards women. In recent years many girls committed suicide as they could not take the teasing anymore. There is a law in Bangladesh against eve-teasing but it falls under 'nari nirjaton' (oppression on women) law but according to this law evidence must be provided in support of the oppression. Sohana raised the question, "Where can one get evidence for teasing on the streets?" Teasing has proven to be fatal for women in so many past occasions but it has not been dealt with seriously by the government. Sohana reasoned, "Because it is a patriarchal society, men get away with whatever they do. Let it be public or private." She identified this to be one of the major reasons for which women or young girls in Bangladesh wear burka as it is believed women who are wearing burka are 'good girls' so they are less teased on the streets or buses or in any public places.

Sohana identified this oppression and deeply resented this act, verbally protesting on the street against it. According to her, people from the lower class tease women on the streets. But men at her workplace or men that she studied with do not do this. Contradicting her own statement, she says that all Bangladeshi men share these characteristics.

It could be suggested that she is confused because on one hand she wanted to believe that men who are educated do not do this but her belief stumbled when she met the reality. It is argued that the reason why men do this is embedded in their nature that has been constructed to oppress women. This is held to be true for Bangladeshi men where such behaviour is accepted, condoned and virtually approved. Women are oppressed both inside the house and outside the house. They are treated as secondary citizens. Men enact their frustration outside the household by teasing women. The influence of media might be another trigger for this kind of behaviour.

‘It cannot be the women anymore’

Sohana had been working in the corporate world for past three years. She earned a handsome wage in comparison to many men and women in other job sectors. She was fully aware of her monetary status. During the interview she confirmed her awareness quite a few times. The oppression (mentioned above) that she had undergone as a young girl, that oppression was not as frequent as it was before. It is still there. Still when she went out on the streets, she faced ‘eve-teasing’ but now she learnt to fight back. She learnt to recognize education as her power. She resisted the bullying by yelling back at men. She cited examples of how she fought back on the very morning this interview was done. She went for a morning walk and somebody passing by her made a gross comment and she yelled back at him in abusive language. She said, “The man was so afraid that he ran like a rat.” She found this quite amusing that how the man was so scared and never ever imagined that she could use such language. She further added as nobody protests, men take it for granted that they can do whatever they can with women and then get away with it.

She was considering ordering pepper spray so that she can teach a lesson to men who pass comments on the streets. She believed parents should be less protective of their

daughters and teach them self-defence instead of forcing burka upon them as safety net. This forcing of veiling only teaches women to maintain double standards. Women are forced to do something that they do not believe in to protect themselves on the streets.

Sohana was asked about her thoughts as to why men pass improper comments at women. She identified two reasons behind such behaviour. She stated globalization as the first reason is because of the influence of Bollywood and Hollywood channels. These channels project the image of women who are not covered and are dressed in the most fashionable and revealing way. The traditional image of women being covered in veil or in burka is no longer shown on the media. That is one of the major reasons for men's frustration of what they watch on television and what they find in reality at home. That is why, Sohana explained, they pass comments on women when they are on the streets. The second reason is, men find amusement in taunting women as they have nothing better to do. Dhaka is a densely populated city where there are hardly any places or things to engage people for their recreational activity. Men on the street, find pleasure in taunting women and they consider it to be recreation. When asked about the reason why she thinks this is, she supported her logic saying that this is how her male friends described the situation.

Sohana's resistance had another form. She is trying to go abroad and her future plan is not to come back to Bangladesh as she "has had enough of this oppression. I don't have to take it anymore. I want to do something with my life." Her resentment in this statement shows that if she is in Bangladesh she will not be able to achieve her goal that she wants to achieve in her life. Sohana asked and answered her own question:

Why should I wear purdah when I go outside? Well I understand that I should embrace it because my religion preaches [it]. I should embrace it understanding my religion. I should not be forced. I should not wear it as

an armour when I get out. I should not feel the need to guard myself. If someone should stop anything, this should be these men.

So, for her escaping from her country seems like a major solution to the oppressions she had been going through.

Influence of Media/ impact of globalization

Sohana believed that the status of women in Bangladesh is changing very fast. They are given importance in the corporate world. In most of the multinational companies the gender balance is more focused because these companies have to maintain a global image. If any company does not have a balanced gender profile, the company will lose face in the world market. Companies are also employing more women as women are perceived to be more productive, focused and sincere than men. There was a time in Bangladesh when companies were not very keen on hiring women as they have to go on maternity leave for six months but this is now outweighed by their productivity and conscientiousness.

The change in women's image is also very evident by the way women now dress in the workplace and in public. The influence of both Bollywood and Hollywood culture is evident in fashion trends. Women are now more prone to wear jeans and a shirt and also sleeveless dresses. Such clothing was not evident even a few years ago when women were being teased or taunted about not being allowed by husbands or parents to wear such clothing. But now with the influence of media the tolerance level has been raised. That is why, it is no longer considered to be odd when women dress in these western attires.

With the increasing influence of media, the culture is also taking a new shape. Women now go to bars and 'hang out' with friends in restaurants. This is something which was not encouraged rather it was frowned upon. Sohana also thinks that the traditional role of women taking care of household and cooking and rearing children has changed. She believes

that men have taken up most of the household responsibilities. They became more considerate of women's duties and they lend hands in cooking and maintaining household chores. Sohana offers no explanation for this belief that does not match her other statements about the roles of men and women in Bangladeshi society.

Anomalies/confusions (Researcher's reflection)

There are certain anomalies that come out from Sohana's perspective. First of all, Sohana thought that she was maintaining veiling by offering prayers five times a day. She also said quite assertively that she went to bars to hang out with her friends although she did not drink. Such socialising (let alone drinking) is prohibited in Islam. At the same time, Sohana said she wanted to see herself veiling at some point in future but simultaneously she was approving of her friends' perspective that women should wear shorts if they like and that in near future burka will not be worn by women as an impact of globalization. In describing this, her tone was very supportive and anticipating. She stated that with the upsurge of globalization there would be a time in the future when the practice of wearing burka will no longer exist. Her anticipatory tone on burka not being there anymore and the following quote, seem to be contradictory with what she had been saying about her religious belief.

In ten years' time a lot of the situation like passing comments, or women hiding behind burkas—all of these would disappear. Because it is a rapidly changing scenario.

According to Sohana, religion is used as a tool to suppress women. Religion is used as a political tool in many other ways as well. At the beginning of this discussion, Madrassa education is discussed. It was also mentioned that people of lower middle class or orphan children go to Madrassas. The teachers who teach here are poorly educated and trained. On top of it, students who pass Madrassa are not accepted in the Public Universities as they

cannot meet the required marks to get into the Public university. For these students, studying at Private university is possible because of the cost of education. As a result, these students have to rely on the higher secondary teaching that they have received from Madrassa which basically does not leave them with many job opportunities. They end up being religious clerics who give *Fatwas* to people in the name of Islam. Mostly these are the people who play with religious sentiment and think that women should be kept indoors.

Sense of Entitlement

From Sohana's interview she appeared to be confused about her perceptions on purdah as well as on the fact of what should be the 'proper' social conduct for herself and people that are around her. It appeared that most of her perceptions are influenced by her monetary status and her educational background. It is important to note that her educational background is also a major indicator of her monetary status. Sohana perceived her conduct to be the standard for the rest of the women in the country. She also thought she is in a position to give opinions on how other people should or should not behave. For example, when she talks about her prayer five times a day in the office, she decisively said that, "This is purdah to me! This is how much religion is important to me!" But in the very next moment she says she sometimes goes to bars to 'hang out' with her friends where Islam any act related to drinking is entirely prohibited. Then again, she is very supportive of her male friends' opinion about girls wearing shorts.

She saw purdah in three ways. First, she saw it as armour for protection from eve-teasing or public harassing. Secondly, she sees purdah as an opportunity to behave in socially unacceptable ways and also to make girls submissive to society's norms and terms. But lastly and most interestingly she saw it as a 'postponed virtue' for herself. Something she wanted to observe sometime in future but at the moment she was just happy with the way she acted

which is giving in to the global fashion and the corporate life that she claimed to be the result of rapid globalization. It is very interesting to note how Sohana allowed herself to break the rules. She indulges in a self-dialogue. During the process she justified her actions as being more virtuous than most other people. This justification then led her to self-assurance that whatever she was doing is the standard which for an outsider like myself, appeared to be a very confused person who is yet to decide to choose between her priorities- religion or enjoying life. It is her confusion that gives way to a life led in double standard. On one hand thinking that she was a pious and virtuous person who needed to uphold the image of a 'good girl' and yet on the other she was the girl who goes to parties, enjoyed wearing latest outfits and sharing and supporting the thought that people around her had changed to a great extent. She strongly believed that things around her are changing rapidly. Men around her had changed a lot and yet she wanted to move to a first world country in order for her to get a better life. In other words, she wanted to escape. On one hand, she said men around her changed and the next minute she said she had had enough of the oppression and bullying by men.

Quite frequently Sohana referred to the double standard that exists among women as they are forced either by the family or by the society to wear purdah. She was very critical of the existing double standard. Interestingly, she did not see her way of living as a double standard. She customized religion to fit in to her life.

Chapter Seven

Data presentation

As stated in Chapter Five there are three data Chapters. This second data chapter presents the case of two participants who demonstrate some degree of resistance although both remain in unsatisfactory marriages conforming to their families' wishes.

In between			
Name	Age	Marital status	Occupation
Rukhsana	31	Married	Business entrepreneur
Nasrin	35	Married with two children	Primary school teacher

Case Study: Rukhsana

During the time of interview Rukhsana was thirty-one. Rukhsana was working as a business entrepreneur in a multi-national company. She had her schooling from one of the private schools. It has been discussed earlier that private schools in Bangladesh are very expensive and only students from affluent families can go to these schools. She completed her Masters in Economics from a very well-reputed private university. This places her in the wealthy class of Bangladeshi. Rukhsana's father was a retired army officer who was less educated than her mother who completed her Masters in Sociology from University of Dhaka. Although Rukhsana's mother was more educated than her father and a university graduate she (mother) was not allowed to work. Rukhsana's father thought that letting his wife work would bring shame to the aristocracy of the family. So Rukhsana's mother was a homemaker.

It seemed that Rukhsana resented that her mother had to ask for money from her father for every little thing that she (mother) needed to buy. Rukhsana seemed to have understood the humiliation that her mother might have gone through. Rukhsana expressed her frustration that her mother had to give an explanation to her father for every little thing she spent money on where as she had the education to support herself to become an independent woman.

Rukhsana understood the value of education from her mother as her mother supported and inspired her and her elder sister to complete their higher education and taught them the value of independence, “My mother used to tell us that being a woman is difficult. You have to look after everybody’s needs. Let it be your parents or in-laws. You have to sacrifice throughout your whole life”. She spoke very openly about her father’s hypocrisy as her father wanted her to finish her higher studies and get a job so that she did not have to depend on anyone else for her sustenance. She questioned her father about his double-standard where he did not allow her mother to work but he wanted his daughters to be well established. There was no answer to Rukhsana’s question from him. Rukhsana did not press him for an answer as that would have been an act of disobedience and she settled with his silence.

Appearance versus Reality

Rukhsana was one of the two participants who invited me over to her house for the interview. The location of her house was in a very upmarket in Dhaka. The furniture and the numbers of servants in her house provided evidence that she and her family belonged to the upper class. As I entered Rukhsana’s house, I was shown to the living room which was very well decorated. Rukhsana introduced her mother-in-law to me who came to exchange greetings and expressed her wonder within few minutes about me being ‘still single’. During this time it was very evident that her mother-in-law did not speak to her. I cross-checked my observation with Rukhsana later and she confirmed that they were in very bad terms as her mother-in-law did not like her because she could not bear children and secondly she (mother-

in-law) thought that Rukhsana was too career oriented. Both the reasons were good enough for the mother-in-law not to view Rukhsana as an ideal daughter-in-law. Rukhsana directed me to her mother's apartment which was one floor down to her in-laws' apartment. She gave instructions to the servants about their responsibilities for the time she would be with me for the interview. During this time the authority in her voice was very distinct. I asked her why we could not have the interview session upstairs. In reply she said she would not be comfortable having the interview in her in-laws' presence. From the interview Rukhsana appeared to be a self-made and confident person who was capable of making her own life choices both in personal and in professional life. She spoke very assertively with full authority of her opinions. There were not many occasions when she seemed unsure or she vacillated in her opinions. While analysing the data, I found her appearance to be paradoxical with the life choices she made.

As a student, she had been in love with her class mate but could not marry him. The reason was the man she wanted to marry was beneath her status in wealth and her father did not approve. She married a man of her father's choice. At the time of the interview, she had been married for five years in an unhappy marriage but did not think of leaving the marriage as that would not be approved by her parents. She thought about ending the relationship and even attempted a few times to end it by leaving her shared house with her husband and getting her own place. But she had to come back to the relationship as her parents threatened her to cut off all relationships with her if she divorced her husband. Rukhsana at that time was a leading marketing entrepreneur and earning a handsome amount of money to support herself independently. Still she had to give in to her parents' decision and be in the marriage. When I asked her why could not she take the step as it was not working for her anymore? She replied, "I need a guardian to survive in this society. If I am divorced, perhaps I will not be

able to get married anymore and then I will have to live without a guardian and my parents will not be happy about it.”

Rukhsana wanted to go abroad for higher studies but she was not allowed to when she was single. Later as she was married, she was not allowed to by her husband. Rukhsana referred to her sister's life while talking about her own. Her elder sister had a similar life. In comparison with her sister, her sister ended up becoming a housewife who had a brilliant result in her Masters from University of Dhaka in English Literature. Her sister took a job in teaching as that was what was expected by her but she left her job after she got married. Her (the sister's) husband did not allow her to work, so she became a fulltime mother and a homemaker. Rukhsana did not seem to comprehend her sister's point of view of stay-home wife and mother when she (sister) could have accomplished so much more in life. Like her elder sister Rukhsana was expected to choose a career in teaching or in the medical profession. These two jobs are viewed as the ideal job for women. So, when Rukhsana chose her career in marketing, she faced severe criticism from her family as well as her 'well-wishers' who thought her career choice was wrong. I asked Rukhsana why they viewed it as wrong. Rukhsana's reply was akin to how I understood this expectation as I grew up within a similar cultural setting. It was because in Bangladesh any other job except for teaching and the medical profession is viewed unsafe for women and the common stereotype in this regard in Rukhsana's word is “good girls do not work in marketing, banks or in media”. Rukhsana had to fight with her family for her decision to have a career as a business entrepreneur.

The next paradoxical decision from Rukhsana's part was the discrepancy between how she viewed veiling and how she carried it out in her personal life. Rukhsana took up veiling after she got married. It was not forced by anyone but her own choice. At that time she was working at a multi-national company. After few days of taking up hijab, her boss called her in private and let her know that if she did not give up veiling the company might

have to let her go. After taking up hijab she lost a major number of customers. I asked her what she thought might have been the reason behind that. Her reply was that it was a cultural stereotype in Bangladeshi society. A person who wears hijab is seen as a backdated person who does not keep up with the progress of the world. Eyebrows are raised questioningly about of that person's capability and intelligence. This view is still largely prevalent in Bangladeshi society. Rukhsana admitted that her friends and she shared the similar opinion when they were younger. She wanted to progress in her life. The job was the best place for her to assert her individuality. So she left veiling to continue with her career. In the workplace, Rukhsana faced many incidents of sexual harassments. To get her clients and to be successful in her career sometimes she could not resist some of the harassments and there was nothing she could do about it because of the lack of support at work. But these incidents left her scarred as she said, "I felt very insulted. These were high officials which means they were educated but there was not any reflection of education in their behaviour." She felt that if she had been in hijab she might have been respected and no one would have harassed her with improper/indecent proposals.

During the interview she took a considerable amount of time to explain to me how much religion was important for her and how much she valued veiling which is mandatory for a practicing Muslim woman in Islam. When she was explaining her views she expressed her guilt as she preferred career over her belief. According to her Bangladeshi society is a rapidly changing cultural set, especially the job sector where 'modernity' is highly valued. She did not want to be left behind. So, I asked her what she meant by 'modernity'.

Her explanation accords with what all the other participants voiced. Modernity is understood in terms of the contemporary vogue. This is dependent on what is shown by the media or TV channels, especially the Indian channels. The image that is portrayed by women on Television is understood as 'modernity'. That is the image that is followed and revered in

the professional sector. I asked Rukhsana how education was viewed in this scenario.

Rukhsana responded to this question quite jokingly pointing out education was the secondary issue, it is just a tool to have status. The first thing is appearance especially in the marketing sector “as if I am the object of sale along with the deal that I am trying to make with the client.” The notion of veiling did not go hand in hand with the contemporary understanding of ‘modernity’. On a second thought she mentioned that there was a fashion upsurge with veiling where women took up veiling as part of fashion. According to Rukhsana, this had nothing to do with their understating of Islam rather this is another way of trying to fit into the current vogue of the day. She was candid about the confusion of the modern and globalized Bangladeshi society.

According to Rukhsana globalization or modernization has resulted in a hybrid culture. The traditional values, customs and religious understandings are changing rapidly because of the influence of Indian TV channels. There is an emerging new culture among middle-class, upper-middle-class and rich families in Bangladesh that is known to be a restaurant culture. People go to restaurants and spend time with their friends and take selfies to post on facebook. This has become more important than spending time with their families. She referred to the young generation in particular where young girls and boys “are very openly dressed” and “they behave in a very improper way in public. This is not our culture.” I asked her what she meant by ‘improper’ and ‘open dress-up’. Rukhsana explained that their clothing was very westernized and sexually provocative and so was their behaviour in public.

Rukhsana mentioned another stereotype regarding veiling or hijab that none of my other participants mentioned. She spoke about her experience during the few months when she took up hijab instead of welcoming her decision a lot of the people around her tried to find out the reason why she would take a decision like that suddenly. They asked her whether it was because she wanted children and she could not have children that is why she vowed to

Allah that she would start veiling so that Allah would provide her with a child in return as a reward or she had joined the Islamic fundamentalist party and in order to fit in she had taken up hijab. Rukhsana clearly expressed her disgust with the ignorance and judgmental tone of people around her. I asked her what was the reaction of her husband to all these. She replied that her husband is very indifferent to any of her issues and he was not bothered whether she could bear children or not. But her in-laws were definitely not happy and they even discussed that their son should remarry so that he could have children. This was traumatic for Rukhsana. She went through a very hard time coping with this kind of treatment from her in-laws who claimed to be educated and Islamic and yet according to her did not have any humanity. Rukhsana's dedication to her work helped her cope with this ongoing trauma. She had very little support from her husband to help her cope with her situation. She could not ask for help from her parents because she was not living with them and every time Rukhsana tried she was being told by her parents that she was very impatient and she complained a lot, instead Rukhsana should try to compromise and deal with the situation.

Perception of veiling

While expressing her views on veiling Rukhsana said that she perceived veiling in two ways, the internal and the external veiling. This is in line with the perceptions of all the other participants. For internal veiling Rukhsana meant not having sexual relationship before marriage and that was what she did when she had her relationship with her boyfriend. As I tried to follow up this perception asking her to explain it a bit more, she added that "as I am working in corporate sector, veiling/purdah of mind is necessary and I trust the veiling of my mind". It appears that by veiling of mind Rukhsana meant not having an extra marital affair or catering to indecent proposals by her clients. Rukhsana was very open about linking the internal veiling with the external one. She expressed her frustration by saying,

It is very painful to see how we are categorized when we veil. I can do everything while I am veiling as Islam does not stop from doing anything but people will not let me. I am judged and valued by my appearance. With the external veiling, we are also expected to sacrifice so many things, I understand that from my experience. Like my husband and I work are in the same post but in different companies. He comes home with his work and work at home after hours. I have the same workload but if I do it after I am back from my office I am labelled as someone who does not take household responsibilities or not a good wife. So I have to sacrifice my time and work to make the in-laws and husband happy and put off my work for next day. Women are always less prioritized.

Rukhsana quoted ayat from the Quran and hadith in support of her argument that Islam dictates every believing woman should cover her body. But she also said that in order to pursue her career and to become a successful business entrepreneur she could not do what it was required by a true believer. In her heart religion was important but she also wanted to become someone as a Muslim woman and did not want to be judged and valued as a woman or by veiling. Interestingly, although she said did not want to be judged and valued either by her gender or by her clothing, in reality these were the factors that she negotiated on a daily basis to have what she wanted. Unlike most of my participants, she resisted the traditional gender roles that were expected of her like choosing a career in teaching. She had to make major compromises when it came to her marriage as well as keeping her job and become successful in her career. She attended parties and drank in the parties and she also smoked shisha. She did not see these acts as major deviations from her faith. She reasoned, “You have to do these things if you want to build networks. This is a part of the job.” Interestingly, she only expressed her guilt while she was talking about giving up veiling.

Researcher's reflection

During her interview, I had a difficult time understanding in places as I felt she was shifting continuously. There was hardly any match between the person she was saying she was and the person I saw. She seemed to have made decisions about herself i.e. how did she want to project herself and what picture did she want society to have of her. Her idea of herself is heavily influenced by her understanding of the fashion of society. She vacillated between the moral ground and the vogue and then choose a pathway that led her to a contemporary idea of modernity. Rukhsana was highly critical of the emerging restaurant culture of Bangladesh as well as the double-standard of Bangladeshi society. Spending time with her in many different occasions after the interview gave me the opportunity to observe her outside the interview time. I observed her to be going to restaurants and taking selfies and doing everything that she was critical about during the time of the interview. As a researcher with emic and etic position, these were very intriguing observations for me that raised more questioned than I already had.

Case Study: Nasrin

Background information

Nasrin has a BA (Hons) and an MA in Botany and she got first class in both her degrees. She has two sons aged seven and four at the time of the interview. She always dreamed of doing her PhD and be something in life. She had the required marks to pursue a PhD degree in any Public Universities in Bangladesh. It was her mother's long cherished dream as well that Nasrin would complete her PhD. Nasrin had two siblings, a brother and a sister. She was the eldest. She was fully aware of her brilliant result and she referred back to her good results time and again during the interview. There was a deep regret in her voice when she talked about her unfulfilled dream of a PhD. Nasrin and her family had a major

economic set back when she was in school. Her father worked for six years without pay. During that time the entire family was solely dependent on her mother's income and they were forced to move to a village. Living in the village took away the opportunities of better schooling from Nasrin and her siblings. Nasrin believed if she could have lived in the city during that time she could have achieved even better results. She was proud and regretful at the same time of her brilliant result. She was proud as she had brilliant result when she did not even have the bare necessities to do a good result and she was regretful thinking if she had other facilities to support her studies she could have done even better. The entire family suffered a lot in this situation along with the father who became a heart patient in due course.

Nasrin took pride in her mother's way of handling this tough situation and she derived and still derives strength from her mother's patience and perseverance. She understood the value of education for a mother, "That is how I feel, how important it is for the mother to have education and a job. She is the only person who kept everything together." Time and again Nasrin referred to the subordinate role of her mother in the family. Although it was her mother's earning that sustained the family, she (her mother) had very little voice in taking the major decisions in the household.

Stereotype

In Nasrin's interview the predominant and the most recurrent theme is the stereotyping of the concept of 'good daughter/daughter-in-law/wife'. Talking about stereotypes is always complex. In Bangladeshi society, the stereotyped notion of the good daughter is inextricably linked with culture, religion and norms of the society. Firstly, the stereotypical notion of the good daughter needs to be explored. A good daughter will always listen to the elders and uphold the family expectations, in other words never have a voice. Then, secondly, this framing needs to be applied to the behavioural expectations of a

daughter-in-law as these two concepts are interlinked. A daughter-in-law is considered as virtually a servant in her husband's family. Once married, a daughter-in-law is expected to take up all the responsibilities for household chores. She is expected to be obedient to the husband and husband's family. Being obedient means performing all the chores including cooking for everyone in the family without asking any questions or raising voice against something she did not approve of. That is what was expected of Rukhsana too. As she chose not to focus more on household chores, her mother-in-law stopped talking to her labelling her as a daughter-in-law who was a 'careerist'.

Thirdly, in this notion of stereotyping the good daughter and daughter-in-law, the male power structure plays a major role. This power structure is mostly practiced by the male members but this is also practised by the female members of the in-law's house. Another subsection of this issue was the father himself — how he understood and practiced the power in terms of social construction and how this impacted Nasrin's life. Fourthly, while understanding Nasrin, it is necessary to understand and evaluate how she constructs her own identity and how this is negotiated due to the expectations of both her parents and by her in-laws.

Notion of Good Daughter

Nasrin's life was governed by the notion and the effort of fitting into the criteria of 'good daughter'. Since the beginning of her university life she tried to focus her energy and her work on the words of her mother. The following was what her mother said to her while she was leaving Nasrin on her own in the first day in a university dormitory. Nasrin's mother explained her behavioural expectations from Nasrin.

You are the eldest of our children. A lot depends on you. Don't ever do anything that will jeopardize the study of your younger siblings! We have many expectations from you. Your father has already had two strokes. So

probably he cannot sustain any more pain. If something happens to your father your younger brother and sister won't be able to study anymore.

Nasrin deeply pondered over what her mother said and acted it out in her own terms. She never dated anybody during her study period in university. Not dating boys is seen as a mark of good and obedient daughter. In Bangladeshi context, it is still seen as a taboo if a girl decides to choose her own life partner. In most cases the parents do not agree to the girl's choice. They expect to choose the husband themselves for their daughter. In the case where parents do not agree to the daughter's choice two things can happen. One is the girl will no longer be welcome in the parents' house which means they would disown their daughter. Secondly, if something goes wrong with the marriage the parents may refuse to take responsibility to settle the family dispute of the daughter. In extreme situations they might refuse to give the daughter shelter as the daughter did not comply with the parents' choice before getting married.

Perhaps these are the reasons why Nasrin did not try to choose a partner of her own. Another reason was, she was acting responsibly to save the family's face or honour. This is also a concept which is deeply rooted in the society. If a girl chooses somebody of her own choice she is considered to be acting against the father's wish. This is seen as 'over smartness' for a girl who is not paying much attention to the society's norms. The family in these cases will lose face in society. People will raise fingers to the family saying the parents did not raise the daughter in a proper way. This can be disastrous for the parents and sometimes for the younger siblings who are as yet unmarried.

Nasrin responded to these social norms saying, "So I kept my guard on." Apart from the above reasons, this sentence is significant in other ways too. This 'guard keeping' refers to the chastity of a woman. The face saving that was referred to in the earlier paragraph is also related to the sanctity of a woman's body which is regarded highly in Bangladeshi

society. If a girl dates before marriage and/or has sex before marriage, it is regarded as demeaning for the mother and father. As a result of this dishonour the parents might disown the daughter or might become ill due to the trauma of the dishonour. Thus, Nasrin's 'keeping her guard on' is in actual sense a gate keeping towards her family's honour. If she did something out of the ordinary and her father fell sick, her younger sister and brother would also have to bear the repercussions of her act throughout their lives. In the brother's case it was more of social rather than economic burden. If anything happened to the father, the brother's education would suffer because of lack of money. But for a younger sister, the suffering was two faceted. Firstly and mostly, it was social as she was also a girl whose elder sister brought dishonour to the family so the assumption would be that she would probably be like her. And secondly, she would also fall victim to the economic constraints as her brother. In all probability she might not be permitted to carry on with her studies as a punishment for what her elder sister had done. All of these factors were working in Nasrin as she negotiated her study and her surroundings. These notions led her towards the conformity to the traditional social structure. This impacted her perspectives on protesting or raising her voice as a daughter-in-law. The perception of guilt and shame are inextricably linked.

Nasrin was confined both physically and mentally within a series of socio-cultural boundaries. As a result, she was virtually a prisoner within an invisible box. The walls of the box are her family, culture, society, religious belief, and she herself as she tries to make sense of all her boundaries that frame what she was going through and what she wanted. Nasrin herself and others policed the boundaries that generate a deep sense of guilt if Nasrin ever chooses to set foot out of the boundary.

Nasrin was tricked into an arranged marriage just three months before her MA final examination. Her entire family was being deceived by her prospective in-laws. Her father agreed to the proposal of marriage because Nasrin's father-in-law promised that he would let

Nasrin carry on with her studies and also maintain her career. Her father-in-law did not keep his word. At the time of her marriage her husband did not have any employment. This vital information was concealed from her and her family. At one point, her father came to know of this information but surprisingly enough, he advised Nasrin to wait saying, “You never know, he might have a job”. In this entire marriage process Nasrin was not once asked about her opinion. The marriage was decided and carried out by the fathers of the two houses. As Nasrin’s father knew her prospective father-in-law, he assumed that the family would be good (meaning that they would treat the daughter well) and so the son would be good as well. One concerning concept here is the father’s confidence in his choice and opinion. He only relied on his judgment and did not do any proper investigation on the past of Nasrin’s husband or about this family. He gave his daughter’s hand to a man whom he knew nothing about and yet thought it was a good decision. Nasrin had been paying for his mistake her entire life. Nasrin’s husband was a drug addict and Nasrin’s father-in-law wanted his son to get married as soon as possible because he thought marriage would probably rectify his son’s bad habits.

Nasrin’s maltreatment in the in-law’s house started almost immediately as she was brought into her husband’s house in Dhaka which is 400-500 KM away from her family home. After her completion of her MA examination, her father-in-law brought Nasrin in Dhaka telling her parents that she would be admitted into a coaching centre where she could prepare herself for the BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) examination. While giving the account of this time, Nasrin talked about her doubts for making her choice to come to Dhaka. She wanted to stay back at her parents’ house as it had more freedom and she would be able to study. She said, “Everybody knows you cannot study if you go to your in-laws”. But right after she was brought to Dhaka she was sent “straight into the kitchen” from where she only managed to escape after eleven years. She was expected to take care of the entire ceremony

of her sister-in-law's marriage. She cooked the entire day for all the guests visiting the family. She became dehydrated with extreme heat of the kitchen and for working days in the kitchen. Just as when she was married off without being consulted in her in-laws' house she had no voice. She was expected to work as an unpaid servant, to cook and clean for everybody.

Her father was invited to attend the ceremony that Nasrin cooked for. After the ceremony was over, Nasrin pleaded with her father to take her with him back to his house. Interestingly, her father was not sure whether he could take her with him or not. The power structure is seemingly very intriguing. In usual cases the assumed notion is that men are in the superior position of power in the society. But here a man was giving another man power as he (Nasrin's father) was in subordinate position as a father of the bride, a position that is implicitly inferior. So he asked, "Will they allow you to leave"? He finally took Nasrin with him to his house where Nasrin was admitted to the hospital immediately. She was suffering from extreme dehydration and urinary infection. With much pain and bitterness in her voice, Nasrin said, the entire time when she was sick none of the members from her husband's family called to know how she was doing nor did they pay for her medical expenses. When she recovered she was again sent back to her husband's house and was returned to the kitchen.

She never tried to talk back to her in-laws as it is against the 'good daughter' behaviour. The moment a daughter/daughter-in-law raises her voice it goes against the notion of the behaviour of a 'good daughter'. To be a good daughter and a wife women are expected not to have questions or to opinions of their own. Nasrin was trying to cope with the traditional role as it was handed down to her by her mother when she left her in the dormitory of the first day of her university life. When Nasrin conceived her first child, her days went on without any proper food or care. As a result, her child almost died during birth. She explained her husband's position in this. She said her husband did not know any better as he expected that the mother-in-law was taking care of her while in reality she did not even receive regular

check-ups from a doctor. It is very interesting to note that Nasrin was defending her husband's take on this matter saying her husband did not know any better but they were living in the same house. It can be assumed that it is normal for husband and wife sharing the same room to know and inquire about each other's health. It is as if she was defending a stranger. Within the seven days of her first child being born she was sent into the kitchen to cook for everybody in the household. In the later part of her conjugal life this notion of conformity to the 'ideal wife' kept on moving forward as Nasrin was never allowed to ask questions. She perceived this behaviour as inhuman. It was equally practiced by her mother-in-law, her sister-in-law and her father-in-law.

Oppression

Nasrin went through different levels of oppressions both mental as well as physical. In the above discussion few of the physical oppressions were being discussed. Each type of oppression left another scar in her which ultimately sparked her resentment. She felt that she was tortured by her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. Her mother-in-law criticized everything that she did and put obstacles in Nasrin's way so that she could not do anything that she wanted to. Neither her mother-in-law nor her sister-in-law ever helped with the household work. Nasrin cooked for her own family and her sister-in-law's family. During this period, her mother-in-law used to look after Nasrin's sister-in-law's children but never helped Nasrin with any household chores or in raising Nasrin's sons.

There came a time when Nasrin decided to try her luck with BCS examination. This is a very competitive examination and required a lot of time preparing for the test. Nasrin's sister-in-law and brother-in-law were also taking the test. They stayed at Nasrin's place while they were preparing for the examination. On the day of the test, Nasrin prepared breakfast for everyone in the house and then her mother-in-law served the breakfast to her own daughter

and son-in-law but completely disregarded Nasrin. Nasrin was shocked and the resentment in her tone was very obvious when she said, “As if I am not a human being! As if I did not exist!” Nasrin did not qualify for the test. She did not have any regrets that she did not qualify for the test but she very much resented the way her mother-in-law had behaved toward her.

Another crucial example is when Nasrin wanted to sit for the Primary school examination, her mother-in-law suddenly left her house two days prior to the exam. Nasrin had nobody who could look after her children for those few hours. She had to ask for her sister’s help who came only for one day to look after her children. Nasrin had strong resentment in her tone when she described the duplicitous nature of her mother-in-law (MIL). According to her, her mother-in-law acts innocently in front of her father-in-law (FIL) and gives the impression that she (MIL) is a victim of Nasrin’s abuse. This act almost cost the life of Nasrin’s second child. When Nasrin was seven months pregnant, her mother-in-law complained to the FIL that Nasrin did not look after her. The FIL then insulted his son (Nasrin’s husband) saying he (the son) cannot control his wife’s behaviour. Hearing this accusation, Nasrin’s husband hit her so badly that she lost consciousness for two hours. When she regained consciousness her first ever verbal protest came in the form of lamentation where she warned all the family members that she would never forgive what they did to her and Allah will render justice.

Nasrin was also oppressed by her sister-in-law who would stay at Nasrin’s house with her husband and three children every month for a week and expect Nasrin to cook and clean for everybody. Continuing to discuss their interaction, Nasrin described her sister-in-law. She covered herself from head to toe. She wore niqab (the face cover) and gloves to advertise her Muslim identity (in Nasrin’s words). She offered her prayers five times a day. Nasrin’s mother-in-law also wore a burka but did not wear a niqab. One of Nasrin’s strong resentments during the interview was how she was being forced to wear a burka by her sister-

in-law and her mother-in-law. One of the criticisms from the MIL was that Nasrin did not perform prayers diligently. During the interview Nasrin raised questions with much emphasis on these extreme displays of religion. On one hand, she felt that her in-laws were torturing another human being and on the other hand they themselves were proudly displaying their Muslim identity. Nasrin felt that their behaviour contravened the first condition of being a Muslim which is to be kind to another fellow human being.

Not my father-in-law or my mother-in-law or my sister-in-law or my husband could see the inhumanity in the entire process. They brought a girl and pushed her into the kitchen for working days and nights.

She was angry and could not suppress her anger when she was explaining the way religion was being used to maltreat her. In the name of veiling or obeying religious dogma her in-laws were torturing her in ways that is not expectable in any religious beliefs. She expressed her strong opinion and emotion regarding how she views veiling.

For me the veil of mind is the greatest. I am praying and covering the entire body, but my soul is ugly that is not purdah. I think integrity of mind is the most important thing. Physical purdah is important but the purdah of mind comes first.

As a result of the pressure to wear burka, Nasrin started to wear one right after her marriage. But the one she wore was not a new one, rather it was an old second hand burka given to her by her sister-in-law. She became very emotional when she was talking about this imposition that she deemed as suffering. She again referred to her hope that she was a brilliant student and she could have done so much better with her life and now in this marriage she had to wear a second hand burka for eight years. During this entire time she never had the opportunity to buy clothes of her own choice. She had to wear burka for economic reason as well. As she did not have many clothes, the burka worked as the agent to

hide her scarcity of presentable clothes. She was angry and emotional and raged to even think of the oppression she had been through.

Her resentment made her ask questions regarding the way her in-laws were behaving. What is point of maintaining a religion only in a few rituals when the core is being continuously violated? But surprisingly, these people were using the religion to oppress Nasrin. She refers to Purdah as something that should be reflected in people's behaviour. It is not only an outward adornment. It is a life style that is deeply embedded in following Islam.

Resistance

The slowly built bitterness paved the way to Nasrin's resistance to the oppression. Nasrin's account of her first mental resistance started with her thoughts of committing suicide. While she thought she cannot take anymore abuse, she thought of ending her life reasoning that if she is not there, there would not be any pain anymore. It is vital to point out that taking her own life became an option for her and yet she never thought of leaving her husband. She engaged continuously in a self-dialogue. She constantly reminded herself of her children. If she was not there, there was nobody who would take care of her sons. Her sense of being a 'good daughter' also sprang up frequently as she kept on weighing her possibility to take her own life. She thought of her siblings and her parents who would lose face/honour if she commits suicide. At one point she thought of ending the relationship with her husband. Yet again she came back to her relationship arguing with herself. During the interview, she referred to her husband's inhuman behaviour and how she learned to remain quiet instead of arguing when she is right. She thought if keeping quiet saves her from getting beaten up, it is better to be so. Then again, she says her husband is not that a bad man. He probably loved her a little as he sometimes wanted to take her out. He was an angry man but for the rest of the

part perhaps he had feelings for her. This is how she justified continuing the relationship to herself.

Nasrin gave another reason for not giving up her relationship. If Nasrin had left her husband, how would she face her sons' questions. They might have blamed her for raising them without a father. They would have said, "You could have been more patient till we grew up. We would have done something." It is very interesting to notice how Nasrin inflicted future guilt on herself and defends her action of not leaving her husband. It is as if she knew leaving her husband would have been the right thing to do.

She vacillated between action and inaction and reasoned in her own unique way. She thought of her sons who would eventually grow up and blame her for the failure of her relationship. She assumed the future guilt from her sons who would hold her responsible and for be impatient.

This is why I am surviving. Because when they will grow up...they will ask me why I wasn't more patient. They would say, 'you could have been more patient...we would have grown up.' This is I how I am living my life. Sometimes I wonder why I am living like this. But then I think for my parents. They might not be rich but they have honour and status in the society.

Her resistance came in two ways. One is being subversive and one is being a pro-active where she took charge of her own actions even to very small degree.

For her the resentment and the anger that were being built up for so many years, acted as trigger to make her decide and tell it to herself that, "I can't remain stuck within these four walls for the rest of my life. I have to go out. And I will." Nasrin's first ever resistance happened when she got her job in the primary school. She said, "I found roots under my feet. Now no matter what happens I know I would be able to provide for myself and my children."

This statement is a literal translation of what she said. By roots she meant a strong base. As she started earning, this gave her the freedom and space to think that she is independent. In Bangladesh, the basic salary for primary school teachers is 8000 taka which is equivalent to 143 Australian Dollars. It is very obvious that this was not enough to support her two sons and herself and yet she saw this amount to be her ‘roots’/ strength for future decision making in the household.

For the first time in eleven years of her marriage she employed a domestic help to help her with the household work. She was being interrogated by her mother-in law who said she did not need any help especially there is point of paying so much money to the servant. Even though Nasrin had employed a part time maid, she still had to give accounts for her actions. As she did not want to start a fight she kept quiet in front of her but she pointed out during the interview, “I am paying. So I will decide.” Apart from this she also employed an Arabic teacher for her sons for Islamic education. Before that, she used to teach her sons. After Nasrin started working in the school, her husband wanted her to wear burka. But this time Nasrin was not silent any more. She verbally protested. This she repeated quite a few times during the interview. She asked her husband not to ask her to wear burka any more as she is more comfortable in wearing sarees to school. She stated, “I am an independent individual. You have never valued that. I feel comfortable wearing saree, so I will wear it. I feel good in wearing saree. He didn’t say anything.” It is reasonable to suggest that this quote sounded too direct for her to say it to her husband’s face. Probably she was only saying this to me that this is how she felt inside because the very next minute she said she gave reasons to her husband for not wearing a burka.

Nasrin provided her husband with reasons saying that as she is teaching children she cannot wear the same burka over and over again. The children would raise questions regarding the cleanliness issue that she preaches in the class. She explained what she meant

by 'cleanliness issue'. She taught the children personal hygiene and to wear clean clothes. But as a teacher if she herself wears the same burka every day the children might raise questions that the teacher herself is not practicing what she preaches. Wearing the same burka every day did not propound cleanliness. On an apparent level this might have been accepted as good logic as her husband accepted it. But she revealed to me that is what she told her husband, in reality she enjoyed wearing saree. She did not share these feelings with her husband because she was afraid that her husband would not accept that she enjoyed wearing saree to the school and this would result in unnecessary argument. Nasrin felt happy to wear saree to school as saree made her feel more comfortable while she was working and it also gave her a professional look. She masked her resistance to her husband with an acceptable excuse that would work for her to do what she wants to do. She was a smart woman who was consciously making her choice of necessity and choosing her battles.

Coming for this interview was another step towards her pro-active resistance. I negotiated for ten weeks to get an appointment with her. She kept on giving me times and then cancelling. I understood the complexity of her life that she had too many responsibilities to take care of. Finally, on the day of interview she could make it for that day. She apologized and gave reasons for her prior cancellations. When she came for the interview she did not disclose this to her mother-in-law or to her husband. She thanked me for being so patient with her and giving her the opportunity to talk about herself. The entire time during the interview whenever her MIL or her husband called she told them that she was meeting with her son's teacher and will be back shortly. When I asked her why she did not tell them she answered, "It is my business where I go. I don't have to tell them everything." She stayed two hours extra than she intended to do. She told me she would have stayed longer if she could. She could not talk to anybody about these issues as people might tell on her to her mother-in-law or her husband. Talking to me made her feel good.

Researcher's reflection

Towards the end of the interview Nasrin said with finality, "I found my voice. I have had enough." In her own mind she thought that she finally had gained her freedom as an individual. But had she actually got her freedom or empowerment? For a start, she sneaked out for the interview. When I asked her the reason why she did not tell her husband she was coming she replied, "They would never allow me to come here. Now I could have created pressure but that would have created scene. I don't want any scenes." For the payment of the maid and the Arabic teacher as well, she kept it a secret. She did not tell her mother-in-law how much she is paying them as she thinks that this information will create unnecessary problems in the house. She said that now she mostly keeps quiet about things she has different opinions about. She did this to avoid her husband's anger. As her sons were growing up now she did not want to get beaten up in front of them. Sometimes, her husband wanted to take her out. She restricted this frequency to avoid fights with her mother-in-law. Nasrin's journey towards her freedom had been taken in very small steps. But for her it had worked as a confidence boost. Even if the extent of her freedom is questionable and she would probably never leave her husband and try to cope with any adverse situation no matter what, for her these steps are very big. Coming out of the kitchen and not have to work there for twenty-four hours a day is good enough for her even though her responsibilities have been doubled as a working mother who still did not have any help in her house hold chores.

The next chapter will present the last two sets of narratives of the six case studies that comprise this research.

Chapter Eight

Data Presentation

In this chapter I present two cases that demonstrated non-active resistance which concerns how my participants' think about their life events, their experience, their oppressions and their understanding of their educated self. Both remain married despite some ambivalence and thinking about resistance which occasionally appears as passive non-compliance.

Passive resistance			
Name	Age	Marital status	Occupation
Tonima	30	Married	Home maker
Nazia	29	Married	NGO worker

Case Study: Tonima

Tonima's analysis

Tonima was thirty two years old at the time of interview. When I spoke to Tonima on phone she sounded very enthusiastic and independent in taking the decision to participate in the interview. I offered to go to her house for the sake of interview but she gently refused to be interviewed at her house and wanted to come to my house instead. I agreed to her choice. On the day of the interview she arrived with her sister-in-law at my house. I thought I explained it to her very well over our phone conversation that I was

interested only to interview her. I was a little taken aback as to how to handle the current situation. For cultural reasons, it was not possible for me to ask the sister-in-law to leave as that would be considered rude at the same time I could not understand how I should proceed with my interview with the sister-in-law present during the process. More importantly, I was not sure how to ask about their plans or why her sister-in-law was accompanying her. It is important to mention Tonima lived right across from my house so there was no question of security as a reason why the sister-in-law might be accompanying her. It was not culturally appropriate for me to ask why her sister-in-law was with her. So, I decided to wait for a more appropriate moment. In any case I started to talk to them and gradually I tried to shift the casual ‘chit-chat’ to my research. I spoke to them for half an hour but still could not manage to understand how I would start the interview. I decided to ask in a straight forward way whether I can start the interview. I also clarified as this was a one on one interview, the sister-in-law could not be present in the room. I hoped the sister-in-law would leave but she surprised me by saying that she would wait till the interview was over and would leave with Tonima. So I took Tonima to another room for the interview.

Tonima seemed to be very confident and carefree in her attitude about herself. She seemed to be capable of taking her own decisions and voicing her rights. She graduated from a Private university even though she qualified for the Public one. She was supported by her father in this decision. In Bangladesh, it is a dream for every student who is aspiring to higher education to be qualified for Public university. It was a unique decision from Tonima’s part to give up Public university and settle with a Private one. She took more than seven years to finish her Masters. At the beginning, she presented her reasons for taking so long to finish her degree saying, “I had some personal problems. I don’t want to discuss this here unless you ask specific question.” I noticed her hesitation and unwillingness to discuss the ‘personal problem’ and decided to wait whether it was absolutely necessary for the

interview's sake or not. I also wanted to observe whether she at any point decided to share her problem or not. She completed a degree in Computer Engineering and had two jobs. But she gave up her job because she was struggling to deal with her personal problem. At this point she asked me to ask her different questions and if need be she would focus on her personal problem. So I asked her about her perception of purdah or veiling.

Tonima's Idea of Purdah

For Tonima, veiling was a religious understanding. According to her, both women and men are instructed to veil. For men it is more lenient and for women it is stricter. She was taught to recite the Quran and about many issues regarding religion gradually as she grew up. But she was never forced to veil. For her, veiling should come from inside (as an act of obedience) and no one should force another human being to veil because that is wrong in the eyes of Islam. She was taught to dress up modestly from her adolescence by her mother. She used to wear skirts and other Western dresses but her mother instructed her not to because people would talk behind her back and call her immodest. So, she gave up wearing skirts although she sometimes wore them inside the house. Tonima had a very critical view on what Bangladeshi people understand by veiling. She referred to time again the way women put cloth on top of their heads but they fail to cover the rest of the body. For her, a large part of veiling is showing modesty by screening the body. Covering the head is definitely a part of Islamic veiling but the entire body needs to be covered as well. Tonima's expressed her opinion about women now-a-days who wear hijab and along with that they wear western clothing which is far from the notion of veiling. Tonima mocked those who say, "I am covering my head and for the rest of the body, I make it look sexy by making the curves distinct", but for her that is not veiling.

Tonima also mentioned that in Bangladesh in many cases women are forced to wear hijab. They are forced by their families and sometimes by the existing circumstances in the society like eve-teasing or gaping and gawking while women are travelling for work. In these cases veiling protects them from these criminal activities. It is sad but it is also the reality. For Tonima, a woman should not be judged by the way she dresses. She referred to the discussion that she had with her mother sometimes. She thought that her mother was very critical of women who wear western clothing. She argued with her mother on the point that, the person who wears western clothing might look indecent outwardly but might be a better person in terms of humane qualities than most of the women who are veiling and doing unethical activities. In a way this contradicts her earlier assertions.

Tonima was asked by her husband to start veiling. According to her, her husband did not force her but he was persistent in his request. Tonima reacted very strongly to this situation. She protested saying, “I do not dress indecently nor do I flirt with men. For me this is modesty. Veiling needs to come from within. I need to be convinced myself that I am ready to do it otherwise, don’t tell me to veil.” She also referred to the arguments that she put forward regarding Islam. In Islam there are five pillars – Kalima, Salat, Fasting, Hajj and Zakat. Veiling did not come in this list. It is better to fix the pillars first and then talk about the accessories. It is important to clarify the instructions of Islam. Although veiling is not mentioned amongst the five pillars of Islam, it is considered to be compulsory for both men and women. Tonima viewed veiling was not a part of the pillars hence less significant is erroneous. Veiling is as much important like the rest mentioned above. The hadiths and Quranic ayats related to this are discussed in the Introduction (Chapter Two).Veiling as a Part of Culture

Tonima thought that in Bangladesh veiling was not seen as a part of religious necessity rather it was a cultural requirement. She referred to the tradition of veiling as something women do as they grow older. According to Tonima, in Bangladesh the tradition for older women is as they reach thirty or above they gradually start to veil or to be more prone to religion. But younger women are prone to maintain the fashion. She referred to the cultural globalization that resulted from the internet, soap operas and television channels. She predicted that if she ever had a daughter by the time her daughter grew up, she would only

wear western clothing. But western clothing did not mean anything to Tonima as long as she taught her daughter good manners and humane qualities.

Tonima thought ‘dressing up’ in Bangladesh has undergone a massive change over the last few years because of the cultural globalization. For her women started to wear more hijab as a part of their social protection but it had no religious underpinnings. Men made women to wear hijab. Men work outside and see what life is like for women and when they come home they feel they should provide protection to their women by telling them to veil. Tonima blamed the clerics who preach that women should cover but there is no mention of men’s veiling at all. She resentfully exclaimed, there was a time when women were expected to be kept under burka all the time. It did not matter to men whether women were dying in the heat. All they cared about was the face saving attitude that they have. Luckily the situation had undergone a change now. At least now there are a few women who can do whatever they want. Tonima seemed to have a very open mind about clothing and the change of culture. She seemed to be welcoming the changes occurring because of globalization.

As it was mentioned earlier, Tonima repeatedly referred to her personal problems that hampered her education for more than two years. She was very hesitant and unwilling to discuss the problem from her past life. She kept on saying that unless I asked her directly she would rather avoid this matter. While I was asking questions regarding women’s education in Bangladesh at one point I felt the need to know what delayed her degree. The following section will be talking about the cause of her delay in finishing her education.

‘Personal Problem’

Tonima was married before when she was studying her bachelor’s degree. She was married only for three months. In Bangladesh girls are sometimes married off while they are studying and the reception is done later on. This is called *kabin*. The man and woman can

stay together if they want as according to the Shariah law the marriage is done but some families prefer that the man and the woman live separately till the wedding reception is over. The man and the woman do not have much say in this as this decision comes from the older members of the family. For Tonima, this was the case too. Tonima's marriage broke off because her husband demanded dowry from her family. According to Tonima, her husband was interested in Tonima's family property and there were other reasons too which Tonima did not want to talk about. The decision of divorce came from Tonima herself and she was supported by her parents and especially by her father. Her father was very firm about ending this marriage. She gave it one last chance and spoke to the man in private and after that she decided to end the marriage. She was devastated as this was her first relationship.

More importantly, her neighbours and extended family members created pressure on her and on her parents not to proceed with the divorce as they said nobody will marry her afterwards. Tonima was under constant hesitation whether to end the relationship or not. She was confused during the interview about which part troubled her most – her emotional stress that she was ending her marriage or the pressure from neighbours or extended family members who said she can never have a family. Tonima considered herself to be very lucky as she received full support from her parents. Her father was very firm in taking all the necessary steps to end the marriage. Tonima felt very sorry for her father as he had to face society's questions on her behalf. Tonima stayed inside the house all the time to avoid people's talking and judgmental looks. At one point she stopped going to the university and dropped a year. She found it very hard to get back to her usual self. Even after six years of her first divorce (during the time of interview) she found it hard to come to terms that she had undergone a divorce. She was a graduate and yet did not find any enthusiasm to start a new career. In her own language, "As if something inside me died and no matter how much I try, I cannot revive that spirit."

Tonima got married again. Her parents told about her divorce to her current in-laws. According to Tonima, her in-laws and her husband were very broad minded to have accepted her even if she was divorced. Before the marriage they needed to be sure Tonima did not have any physical contact with her previous husband. While explaining this Tonima was a little proud when she said, “I did not have any physical contact with that man (her previous husband). We did not spend any nights together. When my in-laws were convinced of this fact they gave consent to this marriage.” From this quote two issues emerge. The first one is the emphasis on chastity both by Tonima and her in-laws and parents and the second issue is Tonima’s attitude towards her divorce is contradictory to what she had been presenting herself to be — an independent and strong woman capable of taking her own decisions.

For the first issue, it seemed to be a very open condition to be laid on the table of marriage contract. Women’s getting divorced is considered to be a taboo in Bangladeshi society as no ‘good woman’ would leave her husband. If a woman gets divorced that means that there must be something terribly wrong with the woman otherwise she would have stayed in the marriage no matter what the situation. But Tonima’s situation was a step further from that mentioned above as she has to bring in the proof of her chastity to be able to get married again. More importantly, Tonima showed no feeling of insult or marginalization that she had to present proof of her virginity rather she herself took pride in the fact that she did not have any physical contact with her husband. This she saw as her credit. This is in sharp contradiction with the woman who stood up for her right to be able to wear whatever she chose to wear and not to be instructed by her husband to veil in public as she was not convinced about it from within. It is interesting to note that she kept on telling about people’s judgmental looks and words which she had fallen a victim too and yet when it came to the

notion of getting married for the second time she valued chastity just like her society did and did not feel hesitant to discuss this matter with her future in-laws.

Women in General

It has been mentioned earlier that Tonima thought she was luckier than most of the women in Bangladesh that she had her family's support to end her first marriage. According to her, life for women in Bangladesh is very hard, especially for women who were in abusive marriage and wanted to get away from it. In most cases families pressure women to stay in their marriage as it will be hard for them to find husbands and families have to face questions regarding the daughters' inability to continue the marriage. Marriage also makes it is hard for women to pursue higher education in Bangladesh. In Tonima's experience many women who married during their university years failed to continue education because of the lack of support from both in-laws and their own families. Tonima mentioned two such cases from her own experience who were her class mates. Tonima overheard the phone conversation of one of them who was trying to convince her husband to let her continue her studies. Tonima's friend could not talk to her husband at home because her mother-in-law would over hear their conversation and the result would have been difficult to handle. So her friend chose to come to the university and had the conversation over phone. Later she discussed this issue with Tahmia saying that her husband was trying to console her and was asking her to give up her studies to keep peace in the family or else his mother would continue to torture her. In that way the peace in the family will be restored. At one point she started to cry and said, "I should have never gotten married before finishing my studies." Eventually the girl stopped attending the classes and Tonima did not see her again at university.

Tonima referred to another classmate. It was during the second year of her university degree. Tonima's friend was married into a family where she was expected to run all the domestic chores including washing, cleaning, cooking, shopping and ironing. The pressure was so much so that she became sick after three months of her marriage and eventually she divorced her husband. She changed to a different university to avoid unwanted reactions such as people's stares and their judgmental comments that she could not carry on with the marriage. Tonima felt bad for both the women and said, "It is a curse to be born as a woman in this country! A woman has to put up with so many things and there is no one to listen to her misery."

In the beginning of the section I mentioned Tonima did not want to talk about her 'personal problem'. By the end of the interview she asked me to keep it confidential. Although I said it prior to the interview that all our conversations would be confidential, I reassured her. During the interview she expressed her opinion about her own self. She thought she had a more open perspectives than most of the women and men around her. She gave examples her husband saying that, "He does not have an open mind as I have. I have seen the world and mixed with many people and that made my perspective enriched and stops me from judging other people." What she meant by 'seen the world' was when she was a child her father had a transferable job and that is why she had travelled to most of the regions of Bangladesh. Although she was very candid about her perspective on women's choices of clothing and protesting the imposition of veiling, her opinion about her surrounding people were contradictory to the openness that she claimed.

Towards the end of the interview I asked her whether she would like to explain why her sister-in-law was accompanying her. She was a little embarrassed and then explained it was the traditional custom from her in-laws family. Whenever she went out somebody from the in-laws family accompanies her. She did not like it that much but could not say anything

as it might offend her in-laws. She joked with me saying that, “If I am working in an office, sometimes I feel that they would go and drop me at my office as well. But what can you do, you have to make adjustments in life.”

Case study: Nazia

Background Information

Nazia was twenty-nine at the time of her interview. She completed her MA in Anthropology from one of the leading public Universities in Dhaka. She was working on behalf of rural women in a Non-Government Organization (NGO). She had a younger brother who was studying in the university. Her father became paralysed when she was only nine months old. Her mother used to be a primary school teacher who later left her job in order to raise children and look after her stricken husband. For Nazia both her father and mother were role models and she always shared her feelings as well as her activities with both her parents. This was while her father was alive. Since his death she continued to share all the details of her life with her mother. According to her account this sort of relationship is unusual in Bangladeshi families as children are expected to maintain a certain sort of distance as a form of respect with their parents. This generally stops them from discussing their life's events with their parents let alone talking about their choice of boyfriends or girlfriends.

From this point of view, Nazia's situation was certainly different from other Bangladeshi women. Perhaps this had influenced her to be open about her lack of observance of purdah for religious reasons. It is also important to mention here that religious beliefs were not pushed by her family. Nazia's account places her in a middle class family with a lower income where she underwent economic hurdles for most of her growing up and later in college and in university. During the time of the interview she was earning and supporting

her mother and brother's education. She was also paying the debts that her family incurred because of her father's medication.

Her Introduction to Purdah

All her life Nazia grew up listening that women should perform purdah. This made her feel angry and she raised questions whether Islam was male biased. Whether it is only women who are told to perform purdah and why not men? Why are men excused? Her perception was mainly influenced by her neighbours and from the bayans (Islamic preaching) of the religious clerics in the area where she lived. But she never had a proper understanding of this issue till she did some reading and found out that it is men who are told to perform purdah and purdah is not only what people should wear but also the code of conduct that is expected from both men and women.

Nazia recounted that she found religion to be a “very complicated” and confusing concept. For her it is simply “a way of life”. It distinguishes the good from the bad in society and renders an “essence of fear” that holds a society together. By the phrase “essence of fear” she referred to the fear of heaven and hell, in other words the religious preaching that tells an individual to do good and refrain from the bad. She carefully avoided her perception of Islam but emphasized that for her religion is humanity – to be able to do good for others and not to harm others. I asked her about the importance of religion in her life. In answer to this question she repeated her view on religion saying, “The biggest religion is humanity.” She dated a Hindu man who was an honest person and all that mattered to her was his strength of character not his religion. She would have married him even if it is considered a taboo for a Muslim woman to be married to a Hindu man. But their relationship did not work out as human beings not as people belonging to two different religions.

Nazia also did not want to know much about Islam as she thought if she came to know too much it would only create complications in her thoughts and her way of life. So, she decided to leave it aside and carry on as she considered the right way. Her concept of religion and her understanding of societal expectations have in reality affected most of the decisions she made in her life as well as how she perceived purdah both in her life and in Bangladeshi society.

“Most of the cases I compromised”

Further exploring how Nazia was introduced with the concept of purdah, she started her answer from her childhood. She focused on the step-by-step insertion of social norms as she grew up into what she perceived to be a tolerant, liberal household.

As an adolescent girl, Nazia loved to wear skirts. This was something she enjoyed wearing as she felt very comfortable with this dress. She used to go outside her house to play with the rest of the children in the block. She was not told by her parents to wear anything different. Then the time came when one of her neighbours whom she called ‘aunty’ called her aside from the rest of the children and asked her why she, ‘runs around like this. I am growing now. I should not play outside or wear skirts.’ It did not stop there. The ‘aunty’ came to Nazia’s house and told her mother the same thing and in addition to what she told Nazia, she said if her mother did not teach Nazia to dress in a proper way, Nazia would be sexually harassed. Nazia overheard this conversation and she became scared of being sexually harassed. Although at that age the phrase ‘sexual harassment’ was not very clear to her but she understood that it must be something very wrong that would happen to her if she did not take up a stole or wear shelwar kamiz (glossary). This fear made her use a stole the next day when she went to play outside. From Nazia’s own account, “As I loved to play, what I did the next day is, I took an *orna* (stole) for the very first time. My mother also accompanied me the

next day.” Her mother accompanied her to the playground to see whether there were any other reactions from the neighbours. Perhaps Nazia’s mother wanted to make sure that taking a stole was enough or whether Nazia needed to do something more. According to Nazia, although the family was liberal, her mother cared about what the neighbours’ thought of how Nazia should dress.

At this point, it is necessary to introduce the term *orna*. It is a piece of extra cloth that women wear with shelwar kamiz. Although, on the apparent level this is just a piece of cloth, in reality this particular cloth holds a lot of deeper meaning and serves a deeper purpose. This extra clothing signifies the entire gamut of modesty. The degree of modest behaviour or how far a girl is observing modesty depends on how the orna is being worn or what sort of fabric this piece of cloth is made of i.e. whether it is transparent or not. If the fabric is transparent then it does not fit under the category of decency.

When Nazia said that was the first time she took an orna before going to the playground, she meant that, this was her first step towards modesty. The ‘aunt’ also strongly expressed her opinion that Nazia should start wearing shelwar samiz as she was growing up. Like orna, shelwar kamiz has also degrees of modesty. Usually when a girl reaches puberty she is instructed to wear shelwar kamiz as this dress covers most of the body and wearing it signifies the girl is showing respect to the societal and cultural norms that surround her. Nazia’s taking up the stole before going to the playground not only suggests that she was taking a step towards modesty but also that she was conforming to the norms of the society. As the stole is worn on top of the dress it is expected to cover the upper portion of a female body. This cover becomes an integral part of observing veiling. But interestingly, veiling has an entirely different meaning in Bangladeshi society.

According to Nazia people in Bangladesh understand veiling in a different way. They perceive burka as the only form of veiling. Not the headscarf or the hijab. For Nazia, the notion of modesty which is an integral part of purdah or veiling was a gradual process. It is hard to mention any particular age because this has been done over a certain period of time since her childhood until the time she was studying in the university. In the time of interview she still needed to weigh her actions according to what people say or what people might say in her workplace or what those just outside her household might say. Sometimes the way she should dress or behave came from the neighbours, sometimes it came from her close relatives and sometimes she took it in from her peers. Her neighbours time and again instructed her along with her mother that it was about time that she should start wearing shelwar kamiz and discard skirts because her body was changing. Slowly, Nazia stopped wearing skirts and then ceased going outside to play altogether. She stated, “Gradually I stopped myself from going out and playing all together. I started playing indoor games instead and eventually gave that up as well because I took up reading as a hobby.”

The social behavioural norms were being taught to her by her close relatives. For example, her uncle and aunt explained their views when Nazia and her brother slept in the same bed. At that time her brother was nineteen years old and she was twenty three years old. She was called in by her uncle the next morning when he told her that she should not sleep in the same bed with her brother. Both her brother and she became very upset by this manner. They stopped visiting their aunt’s place but she did not forget the way she was being treated and how she felt on that day. Both her brother and she were very offended by this behaviour. During her interview she showed her resentment and sadness saying, “As if my uncle was showing a female body to my brother, not his age-long familiar sister.” This is not a very common picture in Bangladeshi society. Sisters may share the same bed with their brothers until a certain age. By the time they reach puberty usually there are different beds for girls

and boys and depending on the family's financial status the girls and the boys have separate rooms. It is very unusual for a brother and a sister to share the same bed as Nazia indicated particularly as young adults. Possibly that is why Nazia's uncle reacted strongly.

As Nazia was upset by this incident, her aunt later on had a chat with her and tried to explain things to her. The aunt explained that now she had grown up, her body had undergone a change. She should not sleep in the same bed with her brother as her brother had also grown up. In this entire situation the objectification of female body became the most prominent one. The relationship between a brother and a sister never became an issue to be considered or treated with compassion. The social norm of a girl's growing up is clear with Nazia's description of this event. The spatial segregation is reinforced even among blood relatives. Relationships become less important in the face of traditional demand which society sees as the correct way of life.

In another event Nazia was again approached by her close relatives. Inside her house she did not usually wear orna, not in front of her brother, father or mother. She was approached by one of her close relatives who dictated to her to wear a stole in front of her brother as she had grown up. Nazia reacted to this event very interestingly. She did not listen to the relative who asked her to wear a stole in front of her brother. But she did not challenge or correct her relative's behaviour either. She negotiated her way by not offending the relative by challenging her and at the same time not agreeing to do something that she was not convinced of. She used to wear orna in front of her brother when that relative visited their house but for the rest of the time she maintained her usual self. She said,

I compromise to a certain extent. If I protest I would be a disobedient girl and my parents would be blamed for that. So, I don't protest. The idea that they have I cannot break it in a day and if I want to do it, it would be stupid. So, I don't see the need.

This quote shows Nazia's awareness of the reasons behind her own decisions. She had a strong sense of self identity. She was wilful in her choices but she blended in with the crowd because she did not want unnecessary confrontation. In some cases she offered passive resistance by seemingly agreeing to what she was told to do but doing the opposite in reality. It was her conscious effort to choose not to protest things that she did not agree with. As she alone cannot change the situation, she chose to conform to the norms to maintain a balance. Striking a balance between what the society wants and what the individual wants has always been seen as a woman's responsibility. In Nazia's situation this was no different.

The next phase was Nazia's part is convincing herself to wear a dress with which she was not comfortable in. As mentioned earlier, she was asked to wear shelwar kamiz repeatedly, thus she started to wear it. The idea that shelwar kamiz was a more comfortable dress than the skirt was reinforced by Nazia. As she said, "People actually inserted in my mind that it is comfortable." And gradually she came to terms with this idea that shelwar kamiz was comfortable. She was not comfortable in it and felt suffocated. In an agreeable voice she answered the question, "How did it make you feel?" She said she knew she had to wear it. All her friends were wearing it. When she used to go out with her friends, she used to be the odd one as she wore a skirt and people kept on staring at her and at some point she was being molested in public places.

Time and again Nazia had a dialogue with herself and in her dialogue she vacillated between her choices to blend in or to stand out. In this case as well, she had a dialogue with herself thinking that skirt was in reality singling her out in the public places. That increases her likelihood to be sexually abused. In order to prevent the unwanted gaze and the sexual abuse she needed to start wearing shelwar kamiz so that she could blend in with the rest of the crowd of girls. She also emphasised the point that, the skirt and shirt that she used to wear, they were very loose and in no way a provocative dress as the skirts were long ones. Still it

became an issue as it was different from the rest of the girls of her age. So she made her choice of giving up her favourite dress and her favourite hobby – playing outside. She did not want people to point at her parents because she was challenging the norms of society. If she had not complied her parents would be the ones to blame for not raising their daughter correctly. She adopted the norms because that was how she was expected to behave by her neighbours, close family members and her peers. She reflected on her wearing the shelwar kamiz saying that, “then I was growing up and gradually I understood that my body was changing and I should start wearing shelwar kamiz. Since then I tried to wear shelwar kamiz but I felt suffocated and uncomfortable.”

“The things that I was taught to maintain — is purdah to me”

For Nazia, purdah was mostly decency in dress. Naturally the question arises how would she define ‘decency’? She defined decency in three steps. The first is, dressing decently. What she meant by ‘decent’ is the sort of dresses that women are encouraged to wear in the society. This had no relation with religion or Islam or her belief in Islam. This statement then requires further explanation which is drawn from the way she performed and viewed burka in particular. Nazia used to wear burka. She started to wear it when she was in college. The reason behind her wearing a burka was very different from anything religious. She took up burka because of her family’s financial condition. When she first started her college course she understood that she needed to maintain a certain sort of dress code that requires money. At that time her family was going through a financial crisis because of her father’s illness. Four of her friends were also going through the same sort of financial difficulty. So, along with her four friends she decided to take up burka. As burka is expected to cover from top to toe, what the person is wearing underneath burka does not matter for both the person wearing it and the people who see her from outside. Nazia and her friends grabbed this opportunity which helped her aid her family financially. Besides helping out her family, wearing burka

served two other purposes for Nazia. It protected her from eve-teasing and gave her the appearance of a 'good girl.' She casually said that, "I supported my family and saved myself from eve-teasing. I became a 'good girl'. I had the image."

Since her adolescence Nazia had been trying to hold up the image of a 'good girl'. This image has a lot to do with what she wears. As stated above, the beginning of this conscious formation of a 'good girl' perhaps started with her taking up a stole with her skirt and then gradually giving up wearing skirts and then no longer going outside her house to play. She took this image one step further by taking up burka. Although she had other reasons to wear burka it did help her provide herself with a concrete image of a 'good girl'. Perhaps because of this image of a 'good girl' Nazia was not disturbed or sexually harassed. Nazia explained that by 'good girl'—she meant somebody who listens and conforms to what society wants her to be. It is what she called the 'standard' behaviour something "that the majority of people do." Nazia viewed purdah as proper dressing which is accepted by the society. The next view is the veiling of eyes. With proper dressing a person should also have a controlled gaze. To make her view more understandable, Nazia cited an example. When she was surfing net, she would not go to the sites that are obscene meaning the pornographic sites. So, controlling herself from visiting these sites is purdah to her. This also suggests the controlled exposure to things around her, she considered to be the part of veiling.

Nazia then focused next on the behaviour of a person specifically behaviour that is not harmful to others and at the same time, behaviour that is socially acceptable. In reality she led her life till now maintaining what she said and that is why she gave up wearing a skirt so that she could be a part of the socially acceptable behaviour. She had done that in a conscious way without any confusion from her part that this is what she wants to do in her life. This is where she celebrated her decision making capacity.

Stereotyping Burka

On one hand, Nazia had the stereotyped image that whoever wears a burka is implicitly a 'good girl' properly taught and raised by a good family. She knows manners and boundaries. On the other, she also became a prey of another stereotype that comes with burka. Many of her relatives warned her mother and even teased her because of her new attire. This time they insinuated both to her and to her mother that now that she was wearing burka the things that are not permissible became easier for her to do as she would not be recognisable when she would do such things. Both Nazia and her mother reacted to this situation with silence. This silence could be interpreted as a form of passive resistance.

When Nazia started studying in the university, she encountered other sorts of stereotyping that came along with her attire. She had a Muslim male friend who she was very close to. This friend and she used to go to places together and rode the same rickshaw. Her male friend was questioned by other male students of her department. He was interrogated as to why he would be hanging out with a burka clad woman or why would he hold hands with her or ride the same rickshaw because these activities are in stark contrast with the expected behaviour that comes with a woman wearing burka. Nazia jokingly said that during this time she was going out with a Hindu man and people were criticising her for hanging out with a male friend. Her dating a Hindu man will be discussed later in this chapter.

“As they left it, I left it too.”

Nazia does not wear burka now. She gave up wearing burka when she was in third year in the university. For her giving up burka was not a big issue as she did not wear it for any religious purpose. But the decision of giving it up was much influenced by her peers. She used to attend various cultural programs in the university by wearing regular clothing like her other friends, so she did not wear Burka during these occasions. For Nazia wearing burka was

not generated from any religious conviction, she had only appropriated it according to her financial and social need.

During this time her friends used to tell her to be experimental with burka as different westernized versions of burka was already there in vogue. She gave this a thought and again engaged in a self-dialogue thinking if she was to design and make a new burka why not give it up all together and focus on the new trend of shelwar kamiz. She completely gave up burka after she saw her peers in college who had decided to take up burka with her to escape financial difficulties. When she visited her four friends she found out that all of them had given up burka. They explained to Nazia, “We don’t think we need it now. We are earning now. We have income, so we don’t have to ask our parents for anything. We can maintain ourselves now and do a little fashion.”

As Nazia and her friends were all earning, they no longer needed to depend on their families’ money, and could indulge in fashion like the rest of their social group. Nazia also felt the same about giving up veil and she gave up too. When Nazia got enrolled to university, after few months she gave up wearing burka altogether. During that time her family’s financial condition became slightly more stable and she could afford new clothes. Although giving up burka was not a big deal for her, Nazia had to face severe criticism as she chose to give up the attire/image of a ‘good girl’. When asked whether this decision was difficult for her. she said candidly, “As I didn’t start wearing it keeping the Islamic point of view in mind, it was not a big deal for me to leave that practice.”

Most of her friends do not veil in any form and thought that at some point of time they would start performing veiling but not yet. They were young and this is the time to enjoy life. By enjoying life they meant to try out different fashionable accessories and dresses that come and go with the trend. Nazia teasingly said to her friends, it is at the young age women are

instructed to perform purdah. She was asked about her own view regarding taking up veiling. She avoided answering whether she shared the same view or not. Rather she mentioned a different state of mind that complies with the view of her friends. It is important to mention how Nazia views her subconscious way of selecting dresses. Now that she is wearing shelwar kamiz, she chooses dresses that have more decorations at the bottom not at the top, because she has to wear a stole to cover the upper portion of her body. So, if she bought a dress that had more decorations at the top that would be futile and a total waste. On top of this, her entire act of giving up burka can be interpreted as her desire to celebrate fashion of the time and fit into her social group.

Time and again she was asked about her decision in giving up wearing burka, sometimes by her neighbours and sometimes by her relatives. While asked how she handled this situation, Nazia answered in a truthful manner that she lied to people, “I then came up with certain health excuses for giving up burka. I lied to them saying that I sweat a lot and I catch cold.” Again she chose the path of least resistance. She did not want to go into too much detail regarding her decision and that is why she told people, “I have health issues. That is why I cannot wear burka anymore.” She knew people around her would not understand the fact that she was not wearing burka for any religious reason and similarly they would not understand her giving it up as well. Although she lied to others, she was very candid about this lie during her interview.

Criticism of Burka

Nazia was critical of the existing stereotyped notion of veiling in Bangladeshi society. As a city dweller and as a woman who had been working with rural women for a long time she was familiar with the way veiling is viewed by rural people and city dwellers. According to her, Bangladeshi society only sees covering the head as veiling. Many rural women only

stretch the end of their sarees over their head and the most of the upper portion of the body is nearly bare as they cannot afford the additional blouse and undergarments and this they see as covering. Nazia compared to this way of clothing with contemporary city dwelling women who think they are modern and modest at the same time, so they adhere to a kind of combination of western clothing (tight jeans and tops) with hijab over their heads. To her, this cannot be veiling. The first idea of veiling is modest clothing. The modern cocktail of western and Islamic understanding of veiling therefore fails the purpose of modesty. She also added that she observed that many young women have suddenly started to wear a new sort of burkas that are shorter in length and are tighter as well. They wear it with jeans. These versions of burka certainly look very different from the original form of burka, the purpose of which is to cover from top to bottom and to cover the body without making the curves prominent. As in her own words, “It is ‘so called’ smart in look.” The use of the phrase ‘so called’ suggests her disagreement and judgmental tone towards women who wear this sort of burka in the name of Islam. Although, she herself wore burka for quite a different reason than religion, she was not ready to accept others’ decisions and practices even though she was not aware of why they made their choices, just as most people were not aware of her reason to wear burka.

Nazia also cited the examples of her colleagues who have a negative view of these “hybridized” burkas. According to her as these varieties do not support the original purpose of veiling rather they make the curves more visible. She also criticized this sort of dressing as being influenced by modern dressing. Nazia was asked to define what she understood by the word ‘modern’. For her modern means to have openness of thoughts and she thought Begum Rokeya (see Chapter Two) was much more modern than any women of this time. But for her unfortunately, modern girls only focus on dressing to keep pace with the fashion of this time. She repeated her thoughts saying, “It is just fashion, nothing else!”

For Nazia, girls hardly think for themselves. They follow either tradition or vogue without giving much thought to this issue. This closeted mind is also shared by men who can hardly think outside the stereotype. Her colleagues also define 'modern' in terms of dressing. Nazia explained what she considered to be 'modern'. Her colleagues send their children to Bangla medium schools. Even if they can afford to send their children to an English medium which is more expensive, they still prefer to send them to Bangla medium. According to them children who are sent to English medium schools become modern as in they do not care about the traditional values of the society like obeying their elders, dressing in an appropriate way and speaking in a traditional way. They speak half English and half Bangla as a sign of showing off and also as a sign of their becoming 'modern'. Nazia resented this new culture.

Nazia spoke about dress and how it might link to sexual harassment. She disagrees with her colleagues on the issue that women are mostly raped now because of their improper dress. She argues that if what women wear is the reason for increasing number of rapes then small children would not have been raped. It would always have been the women who do not dress 'properly'. To explain her view further, she shared her own example in workplace. She had been a victim of sexual harassment in her first job. Her supervisor used to pass improper comments on women's breasts. One of her colleagues left her job as she could not take this harassment any more. For her, she was frequently called by her supervisor into the office to sit in front of him with her laptop and work. During that time all Nazia could think was whether she had her stole in the right place. It was a difficult time for her. For a long time she had to put up with it. The work place did not have any laws prohibiting sexual harassment. She waited till her co-ordinator visited the place. She shared her experience with her. The co-ordinator resolved the issue trickily by giving Nazia a desk top instead of a laptop so that when she was called by her supervisor she could give the excuse of working on her desk top.

Nazia was very assertive about the fact that dressing would not decrease the number of rapes. Rapes happen because of the moral degradation not because of how women dress. It is because men do not have respect for women as human beings rather they just view women as an object for sexual gratification. She was quite assertive when she said:

This is how I feel it. If a woman is wearing decent clothing a man with respect for women would respect her. He would have respect even for the indecent one. But men who do not have least respect for women, for them women are nothing but a lump of flesh or a vagina. For him purdah or decency does not mean anything.

Rape as well as any sexual harassment happens because it is used as a weapon to dominate women, to keep women as sexual objects and as secondary citizen of the society.

In addition to this point, Nazia was resentful of the fact that women are always blamed for the rapes. If a woman is raped, a part of the society starts to scrutinize the girl who was raped. They start to think the girl must have provoked the rapists in some way — either by her behaviour or by her clothing. Nazia gave a practical example from her life. When she was a teenager, she used to play with both girls and boys. One of the boys from her playmates wrote her a love letter. She was shocked and shared the experience with her aunt who was also at her age. To her utter surprise her aunt blamed her. Her aunt told her she must have done something to provoke this boy otherwise, “A man would not just write to you unless you do something!” This infuriated her. She did not understand the logic then and she kept on giving arguments for her innocence. But now that she has grown up she realises, “it is always the woman’s fault.” She exclaimed during the interview,

If I want to cite an example of patriarchy, this should be it. She is a woman. She lives the reality of a woman; she was the one who blamed me. That is when I started to understand it is usually the

girls who are blamed for most of the things. This is one of the major reasons why girls are married off early.

It is expected that if girls are married off early these sort of occurrences would not occur as marriage is thought to be a shield for such kind of behaviour, although marriage can have other consequences.

From this same train of thought girls are expected not to pursue higher studies. When Nazia was in grade nine, her neighbours were worried about her marriage and used to pursue her parents. They used to tell her parents that she had grown up now and it was the right time for a girl to get married. But neither Nazia nor her parents paid any heed to it. According to Nazia, it is not easy for a woman to pursue higher education in Bangladesh not only because of the social norms but also because of the responsibilities after marriage. When a girl is married she is expected to take charge of the entire family of her husband, cook for them and look after the household. During this time it becomes very hard for her to think of pursuing education because she is already tired all the time with thinking about the duties she has to undertake. On top of this, if she has a baby this becomes more challenging as it is always the mother who is expected to look after children. So, if anything bad happens to the child for example if the child meets an accident or becomes poorly mannered, the mother is always blamed. If she goes after what she wants, education or job, and the child meets with an accident during that time, it is quite easily imagined what sort of abuse and stress she would have to deal with. It is particularly challenging for women who are in middle class or lower middle class. Society and its rules are particularly rigid for such women.

Along with this comes the understanding of gender roles in the society. Nazia now earns and helps her mother financially. Her mother and she had to face questions in social gatherings on a number of occasions. The questions were mainly to her mother who now relies on her daughter's income. It was very humiliating for her mother to face such questions

in a public gathering. Nazia overheard the conversation and confronted the persons who were talking to her mother in a derogatory manner asking them what is wrong if her mother is taking financial help from her daughter. She exclaimed with rage, “Can’t a mother take daughter’s money?” Then she pointed out to the researcher the mental attitude of people. As it is the daughter who is earning it is seen as something not acceptable by society, because girls are not expected to earn for the family. But had it been her brother’s income the society would have perceived it as something to be proud of that a mother is living by the earning of her son. In her own words,

It is very interesting to note how they perceive gender roles. If my brother earns and spends on the family it is not a crime but as I am a girl they see it as a problem that I am spending my earning on my mother. My mother was so embarrassed! And this guy was working as a high government official. This is the mentality! But had it been my brother, it would have been a different statement mixed with pride and exaltation.

Nazia stood up for her mother’s honour by protesting the incident on the spot something she usually did not do in the past. Her active resistance in this case shows her strength of character. She is capable enough to fight back when the occasion demands but it is she who decides which occasion is worth fighting for.

Resistance

For Nazia conforming to the tradition played a vital role in her construction of self. She conformed to the traditional notions with a clear idea that this was what she wanted to do and she kept on doing so. As she said, “Still I conform to the tradition.” But in her conforming to the conventions, she only conforms to tradition as long as she needed to bear the image of a ‘good girl’ or as long as she does not have to put up a fight with the people around her. She sometimes kept silent, sometimes lied, sometimes stopped having any connection with the

people that offended her and sometimes conformed to the traditional expectations partially. In many cases Nazia avoided confrontation. She saw this in her mother as she grew up and then in the work place by her supervisor. This is what Nazia has seen all her life around her.

Gradually she internalized this lesson.

Nazia's resistance was particularly visible when she started dating a Hindu man. Her family was not against her decision. She was confronted by her friends who asked her about her decision and how she was violating the sharia. But she was firm in her decision of dating this man even if he was Hindu. She knew the path would not be easy but still decided to be with him as she saw him to be an honest and a good human being. As she stated, "I think being a good person is the most important thing. I felt what is the big deal if I marry an honest Hindu man instead of a dishonest Muslim man?"

Researcher's reflection

As already stated, for Nazia the biggest religion is humanity although this is not expounded in detail. She was confused about her perception of religion and how religion was being manipulated by Muslims to their own advantage. She resented this sort of religious practice and was ready to fight for her decision. She knew it would be difficult and said, "I can imagine how difficult it would have been for me if I had married my previous boyfriend." But eventually she ended the relationship but for a different reason. The person she did marry was her university friend and very extraordinarily it was she who proposed to her husband. This is extraordinary because in Bangladeshi society this action of a girl proposing a man for marriage is a taboo therefore not encouraged and is frowned upon.

In a lot of ways Nazia was traditional as she tried to fit into the traditional roles of society. But at the same time, it would be wrong to say she 'gave in' to society's expectations. She only maintained some as long as she felt they will harm people she cared

about if she did not agree to them. But then again there are some where she put her foot down and made a decision as to what she wanted.

She educated herself into the culture step by step and she mentioned these steps clearly during her interview establishing her reasons for her choices and the fact that it was she who made the choices. For this same reason, burka became an option of convenience for Nazia and she appropriated the use according to her need. She is highly resistant to some of the traditional expectations that she does not believe and a large part of this wilfulness goes to her family's credit who brought her up in a relatively open environment. Sometimes she vacillated in between what is right traditionally and what she wanted but in the end she took her decisions logically and calmly, in a way that made her an independent person.

Nazia dreamed of going abroad to acquire a higher degree in her future. She stated, "Most of the time I am in a dilemma" as to what should be the right step for her so that she did not have to face questions and disapproving looks. She perceived her Muslim identity to be a curse because she could not do so many things because of her it. It was not her Muslimness she was concerned about rather it was how this Muslimness was interpreted by society with its 'do's' and 'dont's' that did not allow her to go further.

Chapter Nine

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will first address the tensions that arose from my data and then gradually focus on the other themes that emerged from my participant's understandings of their life worlds. I will discuss the data from all fifteen participants, not just those presented in chapters six, seven and eight. The tensions that arose from the interviews with all fifteen participants are complex in nature. The ways they construct their lives and the choices they make are full of paradoxes, contradictions, confusions, conveniences, resentments and judgments which attest to the overlapping complexities of the tensions that they negotiate within their life-worlds. One recurrent theme that is evident in all the interviews is how the participants understand veiling. Both inward and external veiling were discussed. The former was emphasized by all the participants but no one seemed to be able to articulate clearly what they actually meant by inward veiling. They each referred to one or more attributes of inward veiling as they thought befitting but appeared to not have a fully developed understanding. The tensions existed also between what the participants thought is religiously right and what they actually practice in real life; between their understanding of culture and religion; and between how they understand modernism and globalization.

The Understanding of Veiling

Mernissi (1991a) theorized veiling as spatial, visual and ethical. I am using physical in place of the term visual, and I am using internal in place of ethical. One clarifying factor in this section regarding ethical or spiritual veiling is, Hamzeh and Oliver (2012) argued the ethical or spiritual veiling to be refraining from the forbidden or haram prescribed by the

Quran and Hadiths. My participants did not refer to the laws of Islam as a part of their ethical understanding of internal veiling. As this is a phenomenological study, as a researcher I have to give the accounts of my participants' narratives the way my participants gave me. As none of them mentioned haram or forbidden things in the light of Islamic understanding, I will be discussing the way they understood internal veiling which is not quite in line with how Hamzeh and Oliver (2012) discussed drawing on Mernissi's (1991a) work. I consider this a major finding that my participants being Muslims (some of them are practicing) seemed not to have a distinct idea about these differences. For the sake of clarity and better understanding of the confusions my participants had, I tried to be consistent as they have shared their stories with me. In the presentation of the cases in the data chapters, anomalies and contradictions surfaced from what the participants said about their perceptions of veiling and how they experience it in their day to day life. As an insider of Bangladeshi society and as a practicing Muslim, I have prior understanding of some of the issues but on some occasions it was difficult for me to elucidate the contradictions in words as they are too much intricately overlapping and culturally embedded. The nature of my data has helped me to observe more closely to locate and understand the paradoxes that I explain in this discussion. I will start with my participants' view on physical veiling. They all agreed that veiling or covering the head or covering the entire body with loose clothing is an obligatory requirement in Islam because veiling is in essence 'modesty' or 'haya' (Mernissi, 1991a). They associated veiling with modest dress and something that is not sexually provocative. For most participants covering the hair with a scarf or throwing a stole on top of regular dresses was equivalent to physical veiling. But from their interview, their confusion about what should be the actual dress code that encompasses the idea of veiling was evident. All of them were against wearing niqab. Some said that veiling is only covering the hair and others responded that loose clothing should be considered veiling. Of the fifteen participants, only two were

wearing a headscarf as a matter of conscience with what I considered to be a proper Islamic understanding of why they should do so. These two participants took up veiling in the last few years and as a consequence of their act one of them lost her job and the other struggled for few years to get a job despite having brilliant results in her Masters. For the rest of the participants veiling is a matter of convenience and social convention. Whether they veil or not that depends on variety of factors such as guilt, fashion, identity marker of a 'good girl', symbolic shelter, hiding identity and economic reasons (Khan, 2014).

Some of my participants used to veil before the time of the interview. At the time of the interview these participants had discarded veiling. It is interesting to note that, even if they had discarded veiling they were speaking about the advantages of veiling and why they had to give it up. They appeared to be defensive of the fact that they were not doing it anymore. They confessed that although it is required in Islam, they were not performing veiling and by not performing it they were committing a sin. It was self-justification for not wearing hijab anymore. It appeared as if they were engaged in a self-dialogue in which they were giving the reasons for not performing veiling while knowing that it is a religious requirement. A sense of guilt for not conforming to that requirement was evident. In future when the 'time is right' they will start doing it again. Age was a determining factor in this. For most of the participants, the common view was that they were still young and they did not need to veil at this stage but rather they should enjoy life a little more and think of veiling when they would grow older. By enjoying life they meant wearing fashionable clothes and jewellery and being able to participate in the peer group celebrations. They believed they can start veiling when they are ready and that will probably be when they are older. They saw hijab as a hindrance to their freedom, a kind of limiting agent that holds them back from what they want to do and as a symbol of oppression that stops them from 'enjoying life' but still makes them guilty about giving it up. They were articulating that morally they understand

that they should veil but they rationalize to customize veiling according to their own need. It is important to mention here, the participants who did not veil or wear hijab did not consider the way they dress as immodest or not veiling. By wearing modest/loose cloths they felt that they were still practicing some degrees of modesty or partial veiling.

Most of the participants thought that in Bangladesh women do not understand Islamic reasons for veiling even though they are veiling. Interestingly enough, none of the participants identified themselves with ‘most women’. My participants were certain, if these other women are asked about the reason why they are veiling; they would mention religion as the key reason behind their religious clothing although they were wearing veil for many other different reasons that were not related to Islam. According to my participants, these women think and claim that their life style is guided by Islamic understanding but in reality for most women it has become a cultural fashion statement. My participants were highly critical of the ways many women wear hijab in Bangladesh. There is a fashion upsurge of ‘camel hump’ hijab that women wear along with jeans or tight fitting clothes that is far from being modest. Rather this sort of clothing serves the opposite purpose of veiling as it highlights the bodily curves and thus does not serve the primary purpose of veiling which is being modest. Some women go to the extent of attaching tiaras on top of their hijab. The question arises if the primary purpose of veiling is not to attract attention of the opposite sex, then how does this sort of clothing refrain the opposite sex from being attracted? So, I asked about their opinion regarding why these women would do so if they know what is required in Islam. The participants were unanimous in their opinion that it is just a fashion statement (this will be discussed in detail in the globalization section).

My participants added another strategic reason that has prompted most women to wear hijab. Wearing hijab is seen to be the identity marker of a ‘good girl’ – a theme that has been reinforced by my participants’ lived experiences many times in many different

occasions and forms. According to my participants wearing hijab gives women the licence to do things that they want to do by hiding their identity and it also safeguards women in the public places from sexual harassment. As burka is the symbol of ‘good girl’, an identity marker, my participants who used to veil before, adopted burka whenever they went outside to avoid sexual harassment in public places or in public transports which is very similar in nature to the women they were being critical about. Their reason to wear burka or veiling is in line with how Papanek (1973) has termed the purpose of veiling as a ‘symbolic shelter’ in the public sphere.

Unpacking Social Anomalies/ Social Stereotype

The participants were resentful of the expectations and perceived role of veiling in society. All of them said that the main purpose of veiling is to hide the identities of women while they are dating. In Bangladesh, for women dating before marriage is still frowned upon. Parents reserve the right to choose the partners for their daughters which has been identified as the key factor of patriarchy (Kabeer, 2011; Siddiqi, 2008). Women deliberately dress in burka while they are out on a date so that no one can recognize them and report it to their families and relatives. It serves as a disguise. As a religious Muslim woman, I always had the understanding that burka or hijab is worn for a holy purpose, to please the Almighty. But my understanding encountered a severe bump when one of my participants invited me to a local restaurant. I need to mention here that I am in touch with almost all my participants and they still share their views and their life events whenever they feel it is necessary to them. Apparently, the restaurant where I was invited to was in a ‘posh’ well to do area. It was dimly lighted with soft music creating a very romantic ambience. After we made ourselves comfortable the waiter gave us the menu and gently asked whether he should serve Shisha. I did not understand what he was referring to until much later. I only saw my participant telling him this would not be needed. I observed, a woman in hijab and elegantly dressed (something

I would like to refer as modestly dressed covering from head to toe) walked in with two men. I assumed they must be her brothers because religious women do not associate with non-blood related men. To my utter surprise, I saw the woman smoking shisha with the two men and from their conversation I understood they were friends and they came here to hang out with shisha and drink. My participant remarked, “I wanted you to see this. This is a very common scenario in Bangladeshi context that you were not aware of.” I came out of the restaurant awestruck. As an insider, I was not aware of this ‘common scenario’. Time and again ‘restaurant culture’ was being mentioned during the interview as the new vogue of the time. People go to restaurants and ‘hang out’ to have a good time and this is one way of demonstrating one’s class and status in the social compass. My experience made me go back to my data and find a strong similarity with one of my participants who emphasized that she was very religious as she is the only person in her office who offers her prayer and yet she mentioned that she has many boy friends who she goes to bars with and ‘hangs out’. She personally believes in modest clothing but is also very open to girls wearing shorts because what one should wear will depend on one’s personal choice. It is important to note here that she prefers western clothing.

My participants also emphasized the view that in Bangladesh women are forced by their parents or their husbands and in-laws to take up veiling. Their performing veiling has nothing to do with religious underpinnings rather it has got everything to do with making a compromise to keep their family life intact. Three of my participants were facing this at the time of interview. One of them still wears it otherwise she will be verbally and physically abused by her husband and in-laws. My participants questioned the patriarchal practice of women being expected to perform veiling while in the Quran the first instruction to veil fell on men (Chapter Two). Their resentment also encompassed the expected outward appearance for women too. If a woman is veiling, it is automatically assumed that she is from a good

family and she is a 'good girl' hence she is praised and her status in society is raised therewith. All of them agreed that this is wrong and then pointed out what women do by using veil as a disguise. As described in my study, this one sided view on women's clothing is the tool which men and unfortunately other women use in the name of religion to practice power and make women believe themselves to be lesser human beings or secondary citizens with very limited/chosen rights. Through the act of iterative dogma of 'ways of doing things' the standard behaviour of a 'good girl' is propounded (Butler, 1999).

Five of my participants used to wear the veil when they were younger. They wore it because either they were forced to or they did not have enough clothing to go out. This was as a matter of personal economy: as they could not afford presentable clothes they used to wear burka. They shared their experience about how they were viewed by the society when they used to veil. They agreed that there is a cultural stereotype toward women who veil as not being 'modern' and smart enough. Veiling for them was a mark of backwardness as they could not fit into the contemporary fashion trail with the rest of their peers. From an insider's perspective, this stereotype perhaps is a little related to class but none of my participants overtly mentioned class as a reason. That is one of the reasons why they have given up veiling. They wanted to fit into the more globalized platform. This idea of 'veiling' as a sign of backwardness is very similar to how the western world views veiling. This tension will be discussed in relation to the perception of modern-globalized Bangladesh in a later part of this chapter.

Contrary to the above view, the two participants who took up veiling recently explained that for them veiling gave them greater mobility. They explained that it works as a safety net for them – a way of being sexually harassed or taunted on public transport which has become a serious problem in Bangladeshi society. They also felt that now that they veil they are viewed as women who have brains who are not judged in terms of their appearance.

This gave them a sense of entitlement and greater confidence in their own intelligence. Studies concerning rural women by Hossain and Kabir (2001) and Fledman and McCarthy (1983) suggest that veiling increases women's mobility in rural areas. To some extent this is applicable to urban contexts such as this where veiling becomes a portable shelter from sexual abuse. Here veiling is seen as a 'social guard' for women while commuting in public transport. A pragmatic and temporary solution to public harassment and a very good example of Papanek's (1973) 'symbolic shelter' theorized earlier. Veiling becomes a strategic weapon to combat public harassment and the unwanted gaze.

Of Veiling and Social Acceptability

Almost all the participants talked about 'inward veiling' and gave mostly very vague explanations of what they understood by 'inward veiling'. Time and again I wanted to understand whether by inward veiling they were referring to ethical veiling or the acts that are referred as haram or forbidden in Islam and hence Muslims are encouraged to refrain from them. But their understanding in this regard remained very vague as none of them referred to haram directly from Islamic point of view. From their responses it appeared that the 'inward' and the 'outward' veiling are two overlapping concepts. Inward veiling can be interpreted as something that one perseveres to acquire from within to build up an ethical scale of right and wrong and what is socially acceptable or not. Mostly this the moral scale seemed to be influenced by one's personal perception of societal 'do's and don'ts'. Many of the participants repeatedly mentioned that inward veiling is the personality that one needs to work on to refrain from unlawful behaviour. As far as the explanation related to what unlawful behaviour is, the participants differed. The opinion varied between Islamic law and social code of conduct. This varied understandings of what they meant by 'inward veiling' vacillated between their lack of understanding of Islamic law, obligation to Islamic law, social acceptability, going with the vogue/modernity and the need to fit in or the need to be

the good girl. Purdah or veiling has been associated with framing of the mind. A number of participants argued that when purdah is forced on a child who does not understand why she needs to veil, that action in reality puts her within a frame that she internalizes and acts accordingly. She starts to think in terms of social acceptability and regulates her actions by allowing her to only adhere to actions that will make her socially acceptable. If there is anything that she feels that is not socially acceptable, like dating before marriage or wearing western clothes or going to parties or concerts, she will use the physical veiling in order to 'enjoy' life and at the same time being in the social zone of acceptable behaviour by maintaining her outward appearance.

It is the same when veiling is imposed on an adult. Repeatedly my participants pointed to the apparent double standard and tried to relate it to their understanding of inward veiling and how they have maintained their 'goodness'. The inevitable issue that surfaces from this tension is if anyone chooses to behave differently there may be repercussions. They might face severe criticism from the members of the family (to the point of restraint and violence), the extended family and people they are surrounded with. This on an apparent level might not look like public shaming but the affect on one's sense of self and identity is similar to that of public shaming that results in turning away and hiding from familiar people. In many scenarios close family members such as parents would turn away from the 'rebel' refusing to keep in touch with her until she comes to her senses (which means conforms to what is expected). In most cases, the rebel does not have many options but to give in.

In Bangladesh, physical veiling is the scale by which a woman is judged as being from a good family or not. My participants were very uncomfortable about such judgement. One of them argued, "You do purdah and that means you are a good human being – it's not logical. Purdah cannot be the criteria of being a good girl. It depends on a person's actions." My interviewees thought a person's sense of integrity should be just for that person. They

agreed that a woman has the potential to do many things but her options are circumscribed by social custom and behavioural expectations. My participants were examples of this. Despite being educated and having some career options, they felt that they were not able to follow their own preferences. What a woman wants to do with her life and what she is allowed to do, are two different dimensions where she is in a constant dilemma to make a choice and in most cases there are not many choices only how to survive. My participants considered the decision to veil or not to be an extremely personal decision that varies from person to person.

One of the participants emphasized that she is the only person who offered her prayer in her office despite the fact that there is no prayer room. She explained this is what she considered to be purdah. She also believed that purdah depended on her way of interacting with other men who were not blood-related. She did not flirt with her co-workers but she thought she was very liberal and open minded as she went to bars to spend time with her male friends. She was very emphatic that she does not drink but when others drink she does not mind. She explained that her educated male friends with whom she goes to the bars to hang out with, they are disgusted with the reality that women in Bangladesh are unable to wear shorts in public places. It is important to mention here wearing shorts is contrary to the Islamic understating of modest clothing for both men and women (Chapter Two). My participant said she did not see anything wrong in other women wearing shorts as it is personal choice. Her understanding of modest clothing in Islam seemed to be highly negotiable depending on her situation and her personal preference.

Responding to Social Expectations

One of the major areas of tension repeatedly evident during the interviews and analysis was that the participants appeared to be maintaining double standards by lying and hiding facts from their families. For instance, my participants preferred my house instead of

their own as they thought that they would not be able to answer my questions frankly in the presence of the other family members. Almost all of them lied to their families to come to my place for the interview. They sneaked out of their houses to be interviewed. This apparent lie, in reality, is a choice that they made for themselves. That they were forced into this decision indicates how circumscribed their choices really were. Although all my participants are educated and theoretically have better choices in life because they are educated, this turned out to be not the case. I asked my participants about the lies they told their families in order for them to come for the interview. Almost all the answers were similar. Their family would not approve of my presence in their households and they will not be able to talk about their experiences in the family's presence. Both of these reasons need a little exploration.

Firstly, I am not approved of in their household, because I am perceived as a feminist. I am a single woman, working with women and for their rights, so 'naturally' I can only infuse rebellious ideas to these women which in future might result in domestic feuds. On top of this, I am also divorced and had the courage to walk out of an abusive marriage. I might be seen as a negative role model who might inspire my participants to question the ongoing abuse that they have been going through. So, my presence might be seen as a negative influence. Secondly, it became self-explanatory during the interview as these women unfolded their experiences with the societal and familial expectations that they have to meet every day. If the interview had been conducted in their own house they would not have been able to express their distressing situations and how they deal with this distress. Almost all the interviews involved emotional outbursts of anger and resentment about the oppression that they face within their homes and the wider social system. So, they negotiated their decision to take part in this research by lying. This paradoxical behaviour was because these women saw it was necessary for them to lie to their family to work for a cause that they feel was ethically necessary but something their families would not understand.

This apparent act of dishonesty demonstrates how identity is negotiated and renegotiated by these women. The fluid nature of identity that has been theorized in Chapter Three is demonstrated by how my participants acted differently in different contexts and relationships. We adjust our way of speaking according to the demands of the situation. But for my participants, they renegotiate their own ways of being as they take each decision in life. The example of them sneaking out of their house for a few hours to come for the interview session attests to the kind of adjustments they have to do in their day-to-day life. These women's identities are manufactured by their parents, in-laws and society. They are created and taught to be anything but themselves.

These women have built compartments. They change their identities as they move from one to another. With the outward veiling, the readjustments are more obvious when they prioritize their career or their husband's choices for them to veil or not to veil. It all comes down to surviving the situation. While talking about religion and veiling and the need to veil in Islam, the data demonstrates the superficiality of their understanding of the matter. Whether one wants to become a practicing Muslim or not, that is undoubtedly one's personal choice. But using religious identity in any form to renegotiate identity is a different issue. The cultural understanding of veiling and religion is more pervasive than the actual understanding of the religion. The ideological conflict of what is the right thing to do is there but never questioned as that will only lead to arguments and unhappiness. This then raises a lot of tensions in perceiving the lifeworlds of the participants. These tensions are not limited to the domestic sphere but they exist in the professional domain. In the workforce some participants were forced to choose between their jobs or their veil and that is also the centre of their perpetual confusion. Although, my participants felt that they are not judged by physical appearance anymore, in reality the way they were treated by the institutions where they were

working or they went to for interview exhibits an entirely different treatment and reality from their perception.

Modernization or Globalization

The identities of my participants are also shaped by how my participants understood modernization or globalization. It has been argued in Chapter Two the concept of globalization and modernization are understood interchangeably. Globalization is understood with respect to the influence of social media. According to Moghadam (1999) cultural globalization is the standardization of hybridized cultural norms in a developing society paving the way to a western centric attitude. This is carried out chiefly by media. My participants echoed what Moghadam theorized (Chapter Two). All the participants identified media as having the major impact in the social change. The participants were being disparaging while talking about the latest trend in hijab. More and more women are adopting hijab but the hijab is worn with skin tight jeans and T-shirts – a westernized/hybridized version of clothing that demonstrates the pressure of being glamorous, fashionable and modest at the same time. It appears that the women are caught in between the choice of fitting into the notion of ‘good girl appearance’ and the choice to be publicly desirable. My participants were unanimous in their opinion that this is not considered to be hijab or veiling as the clothing are sexually provocative thus does not fit into the definition of modesty which is the core purpose of hijab. If the primary purpose of hijab is not to attract attention or to be modest, these mode of clothing are far from that purpose.

There is a fashion upsurge in general in the lifestyle of people in Bangladeshi society. My participants thought that women are now more outgoing and they are more open in the way they dress. Women who are not veiling are more likely to be keeping up with the latest fashion trend. The fashion trends are mostly influenced by what is projected in the social

media which broadcast Indian soap operas and reality shows and Bollywood movies that has always been impacted by Hollywood trends and is hybridized in in itself. As Raju (2008) notes, “In the private spheres of middle-class households Bollywood has a strong visual and aural presence” (p. 158). Women have become more modern and globalized in appearance as they tend to follow the projected image of media. This Bollywood fashion trend is “crisscrossing the middle and lower middle class and consisting of the maid servants and housewives, university students, teachers and white-collar executives, are more interested in having some fun by watching these films and following the film stars” (Raju, 2008, p. 158). This is what most of my participants voiced while talking about globalization and ‘being modern’. One of my participants, Sohana was very specific about how the images are being portrayed and expectations are being generated among men to see women in certain ways via the media. Sohana identified this as one of the major reasons of the increasing public harassment and verbal and sexual assault on women. But whether this idea of being modern increases educated women’s decision making capacity was the next issue that surfaced on my mind. So I asked my participants whether their decision making ability or influence in the society has undergone a change or not. Most of my participant did not know how to respond to this. Some of them agreed it has and then said but the rate of sexual violence has increased because of the way women expose their bodies. And some of them were assertive on a positive note saying that women are more liberated now.

The second issue that was being highlighted by the participants as modernization/globalization is that parents want their daughters to get higher education. Higher education was described as ‘status achievement’ in Chapter Two. My participants identified this as a fashion because this denotes class and status in the society. As an insider, I would agree with my participants that educating a girl is only a credential because it brings status to the family in the community. Education is not considered a resource for the women.

Because if it had been taught as a resource then most of my participants might have had a different life-expectations or life-choice than what they have now. Education is also seen as a criteria to get a ‘good husband’ meaning an educated husband. Educated girls have a ‘good selling’ value as brides in the market but the irony is as ‘education’ is not seen as a resource (by the women, the parents, the in-laws or husbands), it just becomes an ornamental certificate for the women for their future life.

The third understanding of globalization among my participants is that women are now more outgoing and they want to pursue their career and my participants directly related this as the influence of media. The way media portrays women in the Indian soap operas as well as in the Western movies, women are under constant pressure to keep up with the trend shown on the television (Raju, 2008). Education, in this respect has become a fashion statement to make women more outgoing that challenges the age old gender roles of ‘good’ women. Islam (in this case which is represented through veiling), in this rapidly changing globalized Bangladesh, is seen as a restricting/traditional/imposed behaviour and is rejected without any question or probing and is identified as something that is backward. There is a direct connection between how women are dressed and whether they will be able to continue with the job or not. The modernized or globalized accepted view of modern/educated/smart women is women will not wear hijab. Because veiling or hijab is contradictory to smartness/cleverness. For my participants (as discussed in the data chapters), a woman’s brain/ability/competence all becomes the secondary criteria for selection of a person for a post. Women’s position as human beings is sexualized and thus they are treated as objects not as intellectual beings who are capable of doing and achieving goals. As stated in Chapter Two Muslim women appear to be squeezed between Islamic fundamentalism and modernity.

It has been mentioned earlier that two of my participants chose to veil as a part of their religious understanding. They explained during the interview how much it is necessary

as part of being religious. However, their experience in terms of their acceptance in their jobs was not that pleasant. One of the participants who used to teach at a private university as a lecturer were told to give up veiling because her image does not suit the smart image of the university. She had to leave her job and now works at an English medium school. She applied for the post of lecturer in other universities but she was not given any opportunities. The other participant who adopted veiling was also forced to leave her job as she does not fit into the image of the institution. She is now working as a lecturer in a Madrassa (an Islamic school). There are examples to the contrary of what has been just described. Just like women who gave up their jobs in order to hold on to their religious beliefs, there are participants who chose to give up veiling to pursue their career. One of them is Rukhsana. She used to wear hijab but as her chosen profession was marketing, she was directly told by her employers that if she wanted to keep her job she had to give up veiling. She chose to give up her hijab. During the interview, she talked about other women who work with her, who gave up their hijab because they wanted to be successful in their career. She also mentioned, being modern is very important in today's "globalized professional sectors" and wearing hijab definitely does not fit into the criteria of being modern. Particularly, in her field, where she has to 'sell her face every day'. In that sector also wearing hijab is seen as a mark of backwardness and she will not be effective with clients; so, she made a conscious choice to be a corporate woman who is able to meet the demands of her employers.

The Understanding of Culture and Religion

In any given scenario, discussing the understanding of culture and religion of any individual is a complex issue. The complexity lies in the relativeness of the issues as perception is dependent on variables. In the data chapters, how my participants view religion and culture has been discussed while presenting their lived experience. Their ideas of culture and religion are both very vague. The vagueness of the ideas becomes noticeable as their

confusions and contradictions emerge. For all these women, my interview was the first time when that gave them the scope and permission to think about themselves. In Chapter Four, I distinctly mentioned that each of the women wanted their stories told to the world. While doing so, they also expressed their awe that their lives might be important as well. This was the first time in their life they were asked questions about themselves, their own opinions and their views on the lives that they are living. During the interview, their confusion of their own idea of self, their belief about religion and culture were sometimes explicit while they presented contradictory ideas and practices and sometimes this was implicit. Their confusion was understandable as being asked what they thought was a completely new experience for them. Only while analysing the data it became clear what was highlighted through their pauses and hesitations and their attempts not to reveal some matters in order to present themselves in their best assumed selves. Their understanding of the cultural practices was grounded in their own views of veiling and vice versa. All of them agreed that religion is important and yet most of them wanted to live their life by trying to fit into modernization. Those who did not veil assumed they would do so later. The participants' understanding of religion was adjusted to accommodate their own understanding of how they want to enjoy life.

The cultural practice of the wife being treated as a secondary citizen was questioned but not from a religious perspective. The phrase 'secondary citizen' was being used by two of my participants who were maltreated by their husbands and in-laws. They resented that they earn, cook, clean and shop and yet they needed their husband's permission to spend their own hard earned money. They have very little voice in the decision making within the household. One of them questioned, "Where is it written that women have to do all the work? If he gets tired after a day's work then I get tired too. Why do I have to come back from the office and cook for the entire household?" My participants think that Islam is biased towards the rights

of men as that is what they have been taught, so Islam was blamed for this perceived unfairness. Most of the participants strongly resented the sole expectations that women uphold the family images and the duties, responsibilities and adjustments they constantly have to make to keep the family going. I tried to ask questions about their knowledge in what Islam actually says about the roles and responsibilities about men and women and whether they could provide any actual reference to what they were saying. Those who blamed Islam paused for a while and then replied that they cannot provide the reference but this is what they were being told by the family members while they were growing up which is a traditional and informal training in piety (Mahmood, 2001).

All of the participants had a very vague understanding of the distinction between Islam and culture or religion and culture. For some, the idea of fitting in with the advance of globalization by adopting fashionable clothing and perhaps going for the job that one likes, materializes the hybrid identity. While analysing their stories these women were very candid in expressing their surprise that there was a possibility for them to think about their identity. The identity that they hold is the identity that they need to assume in order to save face in a culture that values or upholds superficial behaviours and morals. The unwritten laws of cultural expectations in Bangladeshi society becomes the standard of piety for a person particularly women without any religious understanding attached to it. They do not have any clear sense of identity. This impacts every step of their lives starting from their decision making capacity to their sense of entitlement. For these women they were logical in understanding their take on life but for me, they seemed disillusioned and for the most part, not logical at all. As an insider and as a Muslim woman who has faced similar struggles in life, the logical approach for me is to be able to find the answers to the questions instead of following them blindly. It appears that these women not only believe the inherited cultural

and traditional understanding of Islam but also follow this without questioning potentially at the cost of their intellectual, moral and emotional capacities.

Shame, Power and Oppression

In Bangladeshi society, patriarchal structures create the gender asymmetries that are very different to how power is understood more broadly in government, industry or business. I would argue that power is having control over others people's lives and being able to make a choice to exercise that control, as my data suggests. Within the intra-household relationships, power works in intricate ways that is sometimes very hard to locate as power. As Kabeer (1997) argues,

Households are not inhabited by managers, workers, shareholders and directors but by mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters who often love each other. People who define themselves in terms of such familial identities may still exercise and experience power, but they will do so in very differently from workers and managers. (p. 300)

Although, Kabeer's (1997) study considered rural Bangladeshi women, it is applicable to both rural and educated women. In the intra-household relationship power is covert and it is understood in a different way. My data shows how power is exercised within the household mostly as a continuous conflicting self-interest force that emerged as one of the central themes — oppression. Oppression can be categorized in two ways. First is the domestic one which starts inside the home but is almost never understood as oppression as it is carried out by the members of the family who are supposed to love. It is important to mention that most of the time when the family members are oppressing the girl in a family, they do not see it as an oppression rather view it as the right thing to do or they are essentially doing a favour to the girl by showing her how to be in the real world. This 'favour' over the course of time becomes an integral mode of living for the girls on whom this favour is bestowed. This aligns

with Vygotsky's social theory of learning, which stipulates that the development of the child's higher mental processes depends on the presence of the mediating agents in the child's interaction with the environment (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). This appears to be why women in Bangladesh learn to cope with society's behavioural expectations and restrictions.

Societal behavioural norms are gradually internalized by the females as rules to be obeyed and not to be questioned. The very idea that something can be questioned, is a remote notion in this societal context. In general, asking questions or protesting an imposed norm is not encouraged in Bangladeshi families. This is in alignment with Bourdieu's theory on Doxa where he theorized the internalization of social norms to the extent that it goes beyond any questioning. As it has been argued in Chapter Three, someone can only perceive not having something when someone has the knowledge that 'that thing' could be had in first place. For most of my participants internalized norms were practised without the knowledge that there can be an alternative. For some knowledge of an alternative comes much later when they are oppressed to the extent that they have to raise their voice to escape from the oppression, violence and injustice.

As discussed earlier, Foucault has been hugely influential in shaping the understanding of power from a top down process where previously it was being viewed as an instrument for restraint or intimidation. Power is the ability to control and it mostly exists in asymmetrical relationships but Foucault also argues it is everywhere and comes from everywhere giving every individual the capability to exercise some sort of power from their given positions. It might not always be a negative force making people do things against their will but also a positive force that can be productive and necessary to bring change (Foucault, 1978). My data demonstrate that individuals practice power even in the most oppressive situations. I will argue this power to be the sense of self-entitlement if not empowerment.

In asymmetrical gender-relationships as my participants' narratives demonstrated, one can get the ability to control another person's life's choices because society has bestowed that sort of power on that person to control the life of another human being. For me this is the negative kind of power that is practiced by individuals on other individuals to assume a superior position. But when an individual gains empowerment that is also power – power that the individual has on oneself. I will term it as positive power the kind that can bring transformation, first to the individual then to the society in time. Kabeer (1999) theorized the dimensions of empowerment as the following triad:

Resources (pre-condition)	Agency (process)	Achievements (outcomes)
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While trying to apply these concepts in analysing my data I found it difficult in all these cases. It is true that a few of my participants had a very strong opinion of 'what it should be' but there was a major gap between what they were voicing strongly and what they were practising in their life. I could personally relate to it because I was doing similar things with my life. I was working for women's rights and propagating how women should walk away from abusive contexts and relationships but in reality I was in an abusive relationship for three years and I did not even let my parents know about it because I thought that would bring shame to my family and I questioned what will happen after I am divorced. I thought I would never get a husband and I would be socially ostracized and people would talk behind my back pointing at me saying I am divorced and it was all my fault that I could not stay in a marriage.

At that time this was the most crucial issue that stopped me and made me compromise with my repeated humiliation in my home. It made me ponder over my situation, I have education, a well-paid job and family who loves me, then what was the reason that was stopping me from walking away from an abusive marriage. Although I ended my marriage

because I could not tolerate the abuse any more but I was feeling guilty of failing as a ‘good daughter’ who could not stay in a marriage. While writing my data chapters it dawned on me that it was the threat of shame that stopped me from ending the marriage and that made me feel guilty after the divorce. I was bound by the shame and guilt that have been imposed on me as a veil to put me inside the frame. Religiously, I was not feeling ashamed because Islam did not ask me to be under any oppression but my cultural adaptation of Islam made me shackled. A self-imposed concept of shame that screened my judgment from seeing my higher education as my major resource to emancipation. It was not easy and it was not unique but being in Australia helped me with a different perspective that made my divorce a little easier than it would have been if I had been in Bangladesh.

I could relate my situation with my participants. I ended my marriage not because I realized education was my resource but because I had to resist. As Foucault contends, “Where there is power there is resistance”, both for me and for my participants whatever form of resistance that they were showing is because of they cannot take the oppression any longer (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96). Resistance emanates as a driving force to survive.

Coming back to the discussion applying the theories of Kabeer (1999) and Foucault (1978), locating power and the use of it was much simpler than trying to find ‘agency’ from my data. I went back to the understanding of resource by my participants over and over again and I realized there is no understanding of resources from my participants because understanding resource is embedded in understanding the ‘self’ or identity of my participants. Identity of an individual in the society has been theorized to be “multiple and contradictory” and as a “site of struggle” (Norton, 1997, p. 15). According to Norton (1997), “subjectivity is produced in a variety of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power in which the person takes up different subject positions” (p. 15). The value of speech cannot be understood without considering the person who speaks, and in order to understand the person,

the individual who speaks it is most important to consider that person with respect to their larger networks of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1977). When we are interacting, “we are negotiating our sense of self in relation to larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space” (Norton, 2010, p. 362). I understand identity as something socially constructed which is inextricably linked to power, value, systems and ideology (religion, culture etc.). All these factors shape my sense of self as an autonomous human being who is capable of making life choices. Identity, for me, is related to my decision making capability, my sense of agency. In essence, identity is fluid but for my participants there is hardly any understanding of ‘self’. They see their family and their in-laws’ opinion as their resources and that became the standard for their behaviour. They do not consider any material possession such as: jewellery or inherited land property or salaried employment as their resource to change their situation. As theorized in Chapter Three, my view of resources for an individual aligns with how Kabeer (1999) has contended material possessions as resource.

In addition to this, I have argued, education, family and friends are resources. As the data suggests, my participants do not view friends and family as resources. Perhaps the reason behind this is, they are mostly criticized and judged by their friends and family members and largely, the social role they have to play as a ‘good daughter’ is to this social sphere that they were brought up in. The data also suggests, most of my participants do not view education as a resource for them. Education for these women is a certificate that the family wanted them to have and that gives them and their families a status in society. Using their education and earning a living and gaining some independence only comes when they start to resist. I want to argue, achievements are seen and paid heed to only when one understands she can use her resources to work her way to her agency, which for me is a survival mechanism. This places resistance in my study as the first dimension of

empowerment or self-entitlement. The idea of self-entitlement is a blurry concept for my participants as each participant is only acting in order to survive her current situation.

A subsection of domestic oppression that my data reveals is the assumed norm of judging others that is seen as a self-entitlement by my participants. As has been discussed religious belief is absent from the understanding of 'traditional Islam'. When my participants were asked about their views on Islam or religion; all of them answered religion is very important in their lives. Some asserted that they love Allah and some reasoned religion is needed as it dictates certain moral standards which they believe to be essential for society. Some of them replied that it is better not go too deep when it comes to understanding Islam. According to them, it is better to be content with the knowledge about Islam that they have gained from the family and the surroundings. It appears that the more they know about Islam, it is more likely that they will be required to follow more. It seems a little ironic that all my participants individually claimed that the way they are practising Islam, is in reality the right way. Almost, all of them had a judgmental overtone on how other people are doing it wrong. It seems that it is the individual who decides what seems to be the right way of being in Islam although they did not have any formal training in piety nor did they want to go back to Islamic knowledge to find out what they are saying whether that is there or not. It appears their informal training in piety (family and tradition) moulded with the ideologies of the people they were surrounded with formed their perceptions of the right kind of behaviour. In that way they situate themselves within their context and exert power on each other and sometimes in a larger sphere.

Domestic Oppression

For each of my married participants, mother in-laws were a major factor for all the oppressions that they identified. There is no mistake that father-in-laws are also in this picture

and the house rules are mostly set by the father-in-laws but the carrying out of these rules are mostly mother-in-laws who behave very differently to their own daughters as opposed to their daughter-in-laws. One reason behind this behaviour might be that they themselves were being treated like that by their mother-in-laws and now when it is their turn to be mother-in-laws they adopt the role and practice power in their own sphere of influence which I will term as 'generational imposition' that goes around in a cycle. Added to the social rulings, are then the laws that are practiced within the in-laws house; by father-in-law, mother-in-law and by husbands and sometimes by sister-in-laws. They become the ambassadors of the oppression that they had once undergone. Men created and imposed the rules and it is carried on and preserved and policed by the women. One of the follow up questions to my participants was how do they see themselves as future mother-in-laws to their sons. Will they be the same? All of them answered in negative but as a researcher, I think, this will make a wonderful study for future research to go back to the participants in fifteen years or so and see how they behave in that situation.

Domestic oppression is inextricably linked with the social oppression because the domestic norms reflect acceptable and lawful social behaviour. This is closely related to the idea of shame and honour. My participants time and again keep on referring to *izzat* which literally means honour. The social connotation of *izzat* is deeply rooted in the social recognition of the family which is embodied through the daughters'/women's behaviour. Anything out of the expected brings 'shame' which is "by nature recognition" generating a sense of guilt for failing to fit into the anticipated (Bartky, 1990, p. 95). A family operates largely in a way because it wants to uphold a certain kind of image in order to be socially recognised. These expectations are internalized and practised by the family which sparks a chain reaction impacting each life decision a girl takes. Raising a voice against these issues then brings disgrace and tension to the family. Shame works through bodies by "de-forming

and re-forming” the ‘self’ as required (Ahmed, 2004, p. 103). So, women resort to finding other means to partially fulfil what they think they want to do. These negotiation choices are very complex and they vary from lying to the family to go meet a friend or be interviewed or wearing burka while leaving home and changing in the university to a different mode of dress.

Professional/workplace Oppression

One of the major tensions that has been identified earlier is what women have to do in order to have a job. Most of the participants clearly stated that they are treated very differently than their male colleagues in their workplace. When it comes to proving one’s competence, a male colleague gets greater privilege with less competence. A woman has to go through higher challenges to prove her worth and yet might not be taken seriously. Alongside, there is sexual and verbal abuse that are in most cases unaccounted for and go mostly unreported as the woman who reports harassment might end up losing her job (Nowrin: “In each and every sector we are reminded that we are secondary citizen”; Nazia: “My boss harassed me for two years and I still have to be in the job because I need to support my family. There were no clear rules of sexual abuse in my office”). But these issues are beyond the scope of this research as this is in itself might be a major research issue.

One major workplace oppression that my participants faced is the discrimination because of the way they were dressed when they were veiling. Nusrat was working as a lecturer at a Private university. She took up Burka and from the next semester she was not allowed to teach anymore and was told that, that was a prestigious university that values modernism in every sphere and Nusrat’s wearing Burka clashes with those values. There was no way for Nusrat to launch a complaint or even ask for any written laws for this policy. I

asked her why she had not complained. And she encountered my question with a surprise because it never occurred to her that she could complain against this anomaly nevertheless after a pause she reasoned her action saying that, “There is no point complaining. Who will I complain to? Everyone is like this. This is what is like in Bangladesh.” Nusrat chose to give up her career and wore burka.

As the above discussion demonstrates the ways of how oppression works as my data has revealed that domestic and social oppression are inextricably linked influencing one another constantly. The ways and boundaries practiced in the individual level later shapes how the individual will influence others in broader sphere (Islam & Sultana, 2006).

Resistance, Agency and Self-entitlement/achievement/empowerment — the ways

First steps to resistance

The discussion on power and oppression as elaborated in the case studies as well as in this chapter lead on to the next phase of the inseparable components of power which are resistance and agency and empowerment. Almost all my participants showed some sort of resistance to their individual situations. To some extent many of their circumstances were similar and in many case how my participants understood their situations were also very alike. Each of my participants is different in their ways of responding to life events and the ways they analyse their circumstances. Based on the data, I have grouped their resistance into four categories — ‘I am not oppressed’; ‘I am oppressed but I am powerless to change the situation’; ‘I am oppressed and I am doing something about it’; ‘I am oppressed. I am resisting and rebelling’.

‘I am not oppressed’

Three of my participants are very happy with their lives. They are home makers and they think and believe women should be indoors. They asked, if both the husband and the wife work outside then who will look after the household and raise children? Cooking different meals for lunch and dinner for their husbands because their husbands prefer to have the meal like that seems to be a great sense of joy for them. They were also very elated with the idea that their husbands 'let them do what they want to do'. As an independent individual, I found the idea of someone 'letting me' do something to be a confronting thought. I followed up on this with them asking how they view someone letting them do something. They were very happy with this notion and think that their education will be of best use if they are teaching their children and maintaining a balance within the household.

They argued that if both the husband and the wife run after career and success, families will fall apart. One of them went a little deeper to find the root of this problem. She said, the TV serials are the major reason of infusing this idea that women need to be always up to date with the latest fashion and question everything that they have been taught as a part of the tradition. This they identified as a drawback of globalization or modernization that they understand as women become more outgoing. One participant explained that there is a constant pressure to fit into the image of presentable women that the media is portraying and to meet that image women need to work and earn for themselves and that brings in the imbalance in the family. For me, the confusing part was even though she has had a Masters in Journalism from one of the reputed universities in Bangladesh, she did not view education as her resource. All three women saw peace in their conformity to their husbands' wishes and structured some sort of happiness in conforming to the notion of the expected behaviour of a 'good wife'. Even if there was any unhappiness or suppressed desires, they chose not to reveal this to the researcher and maintained an 'all happy family' face. There is no resistance from

them and they do not see any oppression hence their sense of agency and the practice is absent.

‘I am oppressed but I am powerless to change the situation’

The second category is where some of my participants see oppression but they think that they are powerless to do anything about it. They feel stuck in their oppressive families and need to continuously adjust to demands as they think they do not have anywhere to go if they want to break their marriage or want to run away. These participants consider that, it is more preferable for them to live with the abuse as the society will be much harsher if they leave their marriage. In that way, they will no longer be regarded as a ‘good girl’ and bring shame on their family and children. So, they find it more comforting (paradoxically) to conform to the existing lifestyle instead of raising their voice. That brought me to the point where I felt that it was my duty as a social researcher to ask them how they view their experience while they consented for the interview for my research or more importantly why they consented. As agreeing to sit for my interview and then adjusting their daily schedule by lying to their families to come to me for the interview suggests a different reality from what they are living. Because for me this was an act of rebellion. Their response to this query was quite overwhelming for me. They wanted me to write about their stories. They thought maybe they cannot do anything to change their situation but writing about it in my research might bring in a social change where the oppression will not happen to other girls because people will be more aware of the situation.

‘I am oppressed and I am doing something about it’

Nasrin has been oppressed all through her married life. She has been going through physical and mental abuse. She is highly qualified with brilliant academic results. For me such qualification earned me a scholarship in Australia to pursue my PhD and then my future

dream to work for women for change. For Nasrin, this has never been an option as she is caught up in the idea that she is married and she needs to continue with her married life. In order for her to do that, she has sacrificed her academic dreams. Personally, I do not think 'dreams' are a right choice of word. In order for some wish to be a dream, the realization of 'self-worth' that 'I am capable of dreaming' needs to be there. Nasrin does not even have that realization that she might have the potential to be someone other than a married woman running around with domestic chores and utilising her education only when needed to earn money for the family. Her resistance is then driven from her life's view which is to be honouring the traditional cycle of 'shame and honour' that never allows women to have 'self-worth'. As discussed in the case study, she has shown resistance. She has shown that she also has agency. But, from both my insider and outsider perspective, her resistance is circumstantial. She only went for work because she had to. Once she started to work and earn money that gave her a voice. For the first time in her life she decided to appoint a house-help and she argued in support of her choice of clothing with her husband. She was very confident during the interview that she has finally found her voice and she can do 'whatever' she wishes to.

The reality was quite different as she had to lie to her husband and mother-in-law to be able to come for an interview with me. She could not let them know for several reasons. First, as this was taking time from her household duties. Second, she is helping a single woman with research about women's rights (that is how she described it) which would create considerable household unrest. Third, in doing so she would be considered a rebel against the family and that would add to the existing tension between Nasrin and her family. Nasrin's understanding of her personal resources and her self-worth appears to be mainly in her own mind. She sees this being enacted through being able to work and being able to negotiate how to spend a small part of her earnings on the clothing she prefers. Her decision not to wear

burka against her husband's wishes or to appoint a domestic help to help her with her domestic chores – to be able to pay for these, to be able to claim ownership of these decisions is a major breakthrough for her. She expressed immense confidence and self-entitlement during the end of the interview that she actively resisted the oppression and took a major step forward with her life's choices by these two acts. Ironically, she was still receiving the phone calls from her husband asking about her whereabouts and lied that she was with her son's teacher in school.

'I am oppressed. I am resisting and rebelling'

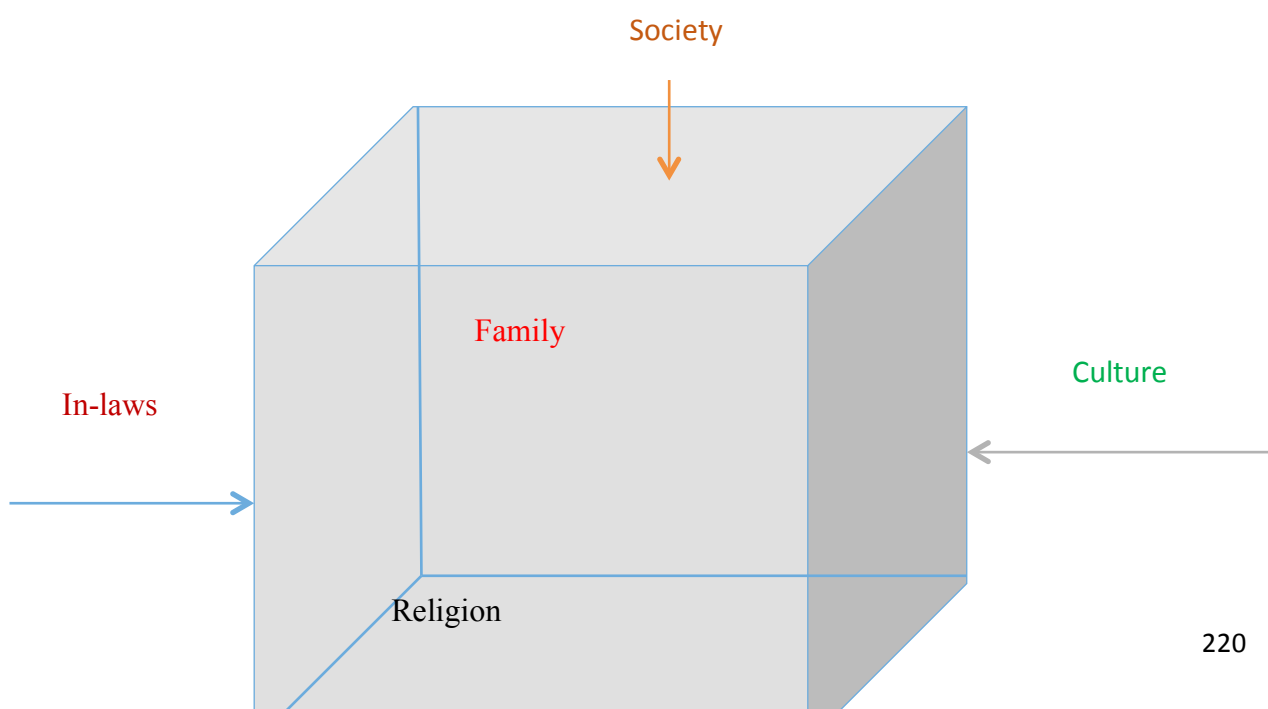
For Nowrin and Rukhsana, resistance was very visible. Nowrin was aware that education is her resource but still was not able to establish a boundary between how she wants to spend her money and her belief that the entire household is not her responsibility. She was caught in between the dilemma of what her parents wanted which was for her to be a 'good daughter' and carry on in her abusive marriage and what she herself was taught that it is important to live in the society and if she is divorced it will be hard for her to fit in with the taboo of a divorced woman and her self-worth as a human being that just because she is a woman she should not be treated like a 'secondary citizen' in the household. The debate went on for a long time until her self-entitlement gave away to her decision to divorce her husband. In doing so, she had to resist her family in sending her back to the traditional role of a 'good daughter' who needs to abide by the expected roles/rules. Her struggle with her father is a constant one but in most cases her resistance was to ignore what he thinks and do what she wanted. When it reached a point she had to reply back, she threatened to leave his household with her son. For the father, it was even greater shame as he would not be able to monitor the whereabouts of his daughter. This worked in her favour. In becoming a single mother she is now socially ostracized. Her job and her son have become her sole concern.

As a professional, she had to prove her self-worth in her work place all the time and compete with men who were equally competent like her and yet privileged just because they are men. She kept silent against these anomalies as this might make her lose her job. As a media person, she enjoyed the attention of lights and make-up. Giving up veiling was an act of resistance in itself as she thinks society cannot make her someone who she is not. She did not believe that a piece of cloth on her head should tell the world that she was a 'good girl' and that was why she very strongly said, "I will not veil anymore. I gave it up. This is my protest". Although, she thought that she has taken a major step by divorcing her husband, she was very concerned how her life will turn out to be without a husband. In order to stay away from people's judgment she had stopped socializing all together. The only connection to the outside world was her work and myself. In spite of her vehement resistance to her family, she did not let her parents know that she was coming to me for this research because she shared the similar fear as Nasrin. She believed lying in this case was a major life-skill strategy and she adopted to this method whenever she felt it fitted her agency.

Rukhsana's resistance was a little different than Nowrin's. Rukhsana had full understanding of education as her resource and she utilized her academic excellence in her advantage. She was one of the corporate women in a leadership role, a place where most cases women cannot reach. She worked long hours in the office and refused to conform into the notion of 'good daughter/ in-law'. She earned as much as her husband did and as she was not financially dependent on her husband, she chose who she wanted to be with or where she wanted to go. She had a troubled married life. Although, she took most of her decisions on her own, she did not want to divorce her husband even if she had been in a non-functional relationship for a long time. In the past, she came to the decision of divorcing her husband a few times but did not because her parents wanted her to continue with this marriage rather than bring taboo to the family. Whenever she came close to decision of divorce her parents

showed her where she was wrong in the relationship and sent her back in her husband's house. She had been identified as an irresponsible person in the marriage as she vehemently reacted to her husband's cheating on her. It seems, it is a loop where my participants fall back into every time they want to break through the pattern. In the struggle of survival they engage in self-dialogue most of the times to delude themselves in being in certain circumstance and while doing so they lie to themselves as well as they train themselves to maintain themselves to a double standard by lying to the people around them. They lie to themselves and they carry it in their actions which in time becomes their reality.

In Bangladesh, this has been the fate of many educated girls who have to forget about their potentials once they enter the in-laws' house. In most cases they are confined both physically and mentally within a series of social, cultural and religious boundaries. As a result, they are virtually prisoners within an invisible box and are guarded by their own parents, their in-laws, the social conventions and more importantly their own selves. The phrase that Nasrin used as "guard keeping" is applicable through all my participants' entire lives. The concept of guilt and shame are the glue that held the walls together and made them conform to the social norms. The following is a visual representation of how I see my participants who exist somewhere inside this box:



Purdah as a Symbolic Social Sign

For each of the four categories of my participants that I have discussed, purdah takes a different form. Overall for my participants veiling can be described as an occasional observance depending on the circumstances. During the interviews they tried to rationalize their action of adopting or abandoning. The internalization of social norms works as a barrier to their own freedom of choice. It creates the dilemma of what they ‘want to do’ and what they are ‘meant to be doing’. As has been highlighted during Nowrin’s case study, she felt that no one explained to her why she was veiling for the first twelve years of her school-life. For the rest of the participants why veiling is important is in reality a very vague concept. For most of them, they know that veiling is a part of Islam and it is an obligatory act. However, none of the participants demonstrated any understanding of how veiling is related to modesty. The participants have this unquestioned religious knowledge which is obligation and the social knowledge that the girls who veil are considered to be ‘good girls’ from ‘good families’. The concept of modesty that is inherent in the Islamic understanding of veiling is replaced with the outward appearance of wearing ‘socially acceptable’ clothes. I would like to argue that the society as well as the women themselves brings the body as the locus, as the representative of social signs that through performance makes them who they are. This performance is not carried out on a public level. Rather it is carried out through the social discourse where women, as they reach puberty are being told by the family members as well as by the other women from their surroundings as to how they should dress or what are the

modes of dressing or whether they should engage in outdoor games and who they should be friends with (including a considerable resistance towards male friends). These social rulings are handed down to young women usually by older women. All the participants emphasized that these rulings hardly come from the men in the household or the neighbourhood.

One of the reasons why these rulings come from the women perhaps is because of the safety precaution of protecting girls from being molested or being harassed while traveling from one place to another. The other is the reinforcement of the social understanding of ‘decency’ and ‘modesty’. The social understanding of if a girl covers – then ‘she is a good girl’ was questioned by most of the participants. The superficiality of this view was repeatedly questioned as to ‘why is it all the time women who need to cover? Or, how is this rational that if a woman is covered then she is a good girl?’ Their questions demonstrate the unmistakable rapport between the ‘representation of the body’ as the archetypal of collective image of the socio-cultural reality of Bangladeshi society.

As explored in Chapter Five, the fundamentalist groups always demanded women’s bodies be covered. But it will be wrong to say that this is the demand of any particular group. The society as a whole, irrespective of men and women, demand that women need to be modestly dressed to imply their moral characters, their integrity, and their family background. What happens if that integrity is violated when a woman is associated with amoral activities such as prostitution, or drug trafficking or dating is never been put to question. The relation between veiling and modest behaviour as propounded in Islam thus is not being addressed by the family or the society in general. There are exceptions contrary to this view but they are very limited to an individual level.

While expressing their views on physical veiling, my participants were torn psychologically. On one hand, there was the guilt of not adhering to the religious doctrine

and on the other hand there was the understanding of modernism that they think they cannot live without. Most of them pointed out that they have to live in the society where they have to mix with other people where they have to maintain certain status and trends. The understanding of modernity for my participants is to be able to go with the contemporary trend in fashion. That is one of the ways to fit in society. They see it as an influence of globalization and progress. They believe that if they are not adhering to modern custom it will make them look outdated. They associated pursuing higher education as the direct influence of globalization. It can be assumed that they see globalization as a positive force that gives them the opportunity of higher education leading on to better life choices. As an individual, my understanding of better life choices is to be able to do what I want to and to have greater freedom in mobility and my decision making capacity. Remarkably, for most of the participants there is a stark contradiction in what they were saying about what they understand as better life choices and how they were practicing them in their own lives. The guilt of not veiling or being religious was there along with their own choices to become modern in a globalized society. Interestingly, they were very critical of the society they live in, particularly with how women dress up in tight jeans and t-shirts. They criticized these trends as the negative influence of globalization that is happening because of the influence of the media and TV channels that portrays certain kinds of life patterns that are aspired to by the younger generation. For them, this trend is at the heart of most of the molestation occurrences. They were affirmative if the girls were in 'proper dresses' most of the time the sexual harassment can be avoided. This is in complete contrast to what they practice in their life styles while they think that it is alright to enjoy life a little and to be 'modern' and then blaming any consequences on the negative effect of globalization (the influence of social media). The complexity of their understanding and their confusion of the actuality only demonstrates the complex choices that these women have to make in their everyday life.

The repeated reference to social acceptability reinforces the notion of fear of becoming an outcast in the society. The idea of modesty or decency is inextricably linked with this fear of not being able to be a part of society or how people will judge their actions. The dilemma perhaps starts when one is torn between the guilt of not being righteous, responding to the need to be modern, and yet still meet society's expectations. During the interview, many times it seemed that my participants were confused and torn and many times it seemed what they are doing in reality is maintaining double standards. This seeming untruthfulness is more akin to self-delusion which is a constantly negotiated and adjusted lived experience for the women in my study.

Concluding Thoughts

Butler's theory of performativity is used to explain how Bangladeshi society view women's body as the representative of the cultural and religious identity. By performing what society wants from the childhood women internalizes the behavioural norms that comes along with the notion of modesty that is explained and supported by Bourdieu's theory of Doxa. This then needs to be related to oppression and power where Foucault perceives power not as a linear process but as something that is pervasive in all spheres. Although, Foucault did not see power as an oppressive or negative force as it has the ability to bring in social change, the first part of my research sees power as an oppressive force. Foucault theorized, 'where there is power there is resistance', and my participants distinctly have shown resistance. Their resistance then brings me to the crux of the dimension of power where Kabeer (1999) has shown that there are three dimensions of empowerment which I understand and have explained as 'positive power'. But before coming to empowerment, the intricacies and interconnectedness between power, oppression, resistance, resource and agency needs to be addressed. In Kabeer's (1999) theory of dimensions of empowerment – she included resources (pre-conditions) as the first step that precedes agency and leads to achievement. My

data suggests that for the women in my study having the sense of resources is absent from their life world. They do not see education as their resource but give complete precedence to their cultural understandings as their only resource and respond and negotiate situations accordingly. It takes an overwhelming or critical experience to make these women acquire some sense of agency which may trigger a reappraisal of the resources they actually might have. This sense of agency may be maintained or subside to the initial position of accepting cultural dogma.

In doing so, my participants engage in self-dialogue and self-convincing either to conform or to rebel and after rebelling all participants returned to conformity. This then becomes a cycle as they strategize their everyday living. From their own stance my participants practice power by imposing value judgement on others. They criticize behaviour that they themselves are performing or wish to perform. Their sense of agency or self-worth only comes through the choices that they think they are in charge of. On another level, they do practice agency. Deciding to participate in the research behind their families' backs was in itself the proof for that. But this practice of agency is covert in nature. The overt or evident practice of agency comes mostly when they put their resource into use and decide to do something about the oppression and dogma. For some, the practice of agency appears to be the biggest step of their lives. Unfortunately, from my data, my participants were unable to take a second step. I would argue, although it appears that mostly my data shows that my participants do not have a sense of agency, their choice to participate in my research manifests a different reality. For me, it suggests that they have a sense of agency and they practiced it by participating in my study as perhaps they believed that their participation might bring a greater good.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the construction of femininity of Muslim university graduate women in Bangladesh. When I started my study, my initial queries were relatively simple as I intended to shed light on how higher education might have impacted Muslim women's lives in a rapidly changing globalized society such as Bangladesh. The reason behind my query originated in my personal history of struggle as a Muslim university graduate with a very good job that made me financially independent and yet I remained so socially bound. My struggle to 'fit in' inspired me to take up this apparently simple query. As I embarked on my journey, the more I read the more it became obvious that there are very few studies concerning cultural veiling and Muslim educated women. My field experience and later on the process of analysis have changed my simple query of exploring the negotiation of femininity into gradually something much more complex that I could not foresee. I had two research questions,

1. What are the identity practices of young university female graduates in Bangladesh against the backdrop of purdah, Islam and globalization?
2. How do these young women negotiate power dynamics within various social institutions?

Veiling or purdah has been the central issue of my study as in Bangladeshi society veiling transcends the limitation of its literal meaning and its religious identity. Underneath the understanding of veiling as an Islamic identity maker enacts the socio-cultural mandates of unwritten rules that will make a woman the 'good girl'. Shame plays a major role in shaping the 'self' of a good girl. The threat of shame overpowers women's agency and dictates and overshadows the steps these women take in every walk of their lives. They take on shame on their body and then to soul as that is what their informal training in piety tells

them to do. The confusion for my participants was to draw a distinct line between what is considered to be Islamic and what is considered to be cultural. The confusion is mainly due to the pervasive nature of traditional expectations and the anticipation of what will happen if one fails to 'fit in'. The role of the body in making of the self in which outward behaviour of the body constitutes both the potentiality, as well as the means, through which an interiority is realised. While women's bodies are made to bear the burden of modesty and collective cultural identity, the larger conceptualization of the body's relationship to the making of the self is quite different. In Islam veiling is necessary as it is the symbol of submission to Allah not for other symbolic significance. In the practice of faith, for most of my participants, the societal anticipation perpetuates their constant struggle becoming a 'good girl' that the society will validate. In the perpetual construction of the embodied representation of veil, it is "given a symbolic meaning far greater than its religious and social status" (Mirza, 2013, p. 6).

Identity is viewed in this thesis as context-specific, many-sided and always evolving with an epistemic status and with real consequences in a person's life, partly constructed by ideologies to which one is exposed, personally interpreted, and finally with the social component of it having a dialogic nature, affected by how others view self and how the self is represented. Identity is constructed, contested and intersecting social phenomenon in the asymmetrical gendered power structure. The power is infiltrated by the dominant group whose rules remain unchallenged and unexamined because women are being taught to be subversive in the name of religion that has all the fabrications to give women the firm belief that they are lesser human being and they do not know any better. Through the reiteration of the normative, the "Dominant groups set the parameters within which the subordinates operate. The dominant group holds power and authority in the society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used" (Tatum, 2000, p. 11). The dominant group is seen as the norm for humanity, in my case, the society.

The family-household is the site of gender discrimination where the domination and oppression are exercised and challenged and then spread from there to a more wide-ranging periphery. The life narratives of my respondents show that the experience of inequality is constantly reminded by the dominant group. The dominant group has saturated the culture for all especially the subordinates to learn the ways of being and becoming the stereotypical 'other'. It is the constant struggle to identify with the set image that works as a driving force. The subordinate always has to pay attention to the people who control the outcomes. In the situation of unequal power, women always have to focus on survival. It becomes very important for the subordinates to be highly attuned to the dominant power structure as a way of protecting themselves. Being able to anticipate and avoid confrontation, ostracization or social and familial exclusion becomes a crucial part of negotiating self. Survival sometimes mean not responding to the oppressive behaviour directly. To do so might result in physical harm to oneself, even death. Because of the inherent risks in unequal relationships, women sometimes develop covert ways of resisting or undermining power of the patriarchal power structure. My participants have to deal with unavoidable challenges in becoming women while they persistently try to negotiate, accommodate, adjust and appropriate in between their personal choices and family loyalties, integrity and identity. In most situations there are forced choices and no apparent middle ground. To survive in an alien, hostile situation that has no space for her integrity or respect for her individuality, causes a major loss of self. Women have very little time to attend to them. The negative messages are all internalized leading to self-doubt and sometimes to no sense of self. Breaking beyond the structural and psychological limitations imposed on one is possible, but not an easy task as it is physically and psychologically taxing. It is easier and safer to give in than to continue a constant battle of being a 'troublemaker' who refuses to

‘fit in’ the given image of ‘self’. In between these dilemmas of multiple and paradoxical spaces their femininity is realised.

Women wear veil for many different reasons that are not necessarily a part of their faith. My study shows that their strategic responses to everyday practices as individual negotiate the discursive structures of gendered power within the household as well as broader periphery such as work place and social interactions. There are transformations of situations that these women undergo sometimes by putting up subversive resistance and sometimes by being strategic. This shows their sense of agency and also saves them from being abject. This might not always be carried out at a conscious and intentional level, but there is always a creative appropriation and adjustment between their strategic agency and their sense of ‘self’ and their normative ways of being.

In this phenomenological study, the narratives of my participants’ lived experiences reveal not merely the stories of victimhood, discrimination, and oppression – they are in reality also accounts of strategies, resilience, desires, and empowerment/self-entitlement (no matter how limited it may seem). There are major gaps in knowledge about the lives of educated Muslim women in Bangladesh as well as in the world. The ambivalence, stigma, imbalanced power structure, oppression, resistance and empowerment/self-entitlement need to be talked about to generate future dialogue for an inclusive society where women will have their rights as human beings. This will not happen overnight and not with just one study such as this. But this study is a major step forward, a platform to generate more talks on women’s personal spaces, their rights and the incorporation and sound understanding of religious faith and imposed subordination in the name of faith. I believe my study will widen the possibilities of future research that will problematize religion, women, stigmas, discriminations, imposed stereotypes and human rights. I want to continue my future research in this area keeping in mind that change takes time and my challenges will be harder in future.

The narratives of coping with and overcoming the most adverse situations are in themselves empowering.

My research has limitations. As I have a small sample size, my findings cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, qualitative research does not aim to generalize. Also, because of the limitations of my time and sample size I had to make purposeful choices in order for me to be focused and on the topic. Many times as my research proceeded I was tempted to analyse how these women negotiated sexuality (talking about sexuality is a taboo in Bangladeshi society), especially women who had a problematic relationship with their husbands. But this was beyond the scope of the current study and possibly beyond the ability of my participants to discuss. The topic was avoided in all interviews. This may be a prospective topic for future research. Time and again during the analysis, the topic of class emerged. Being an insider and an educator, I know higher education places women in a middle class situation (whether that is the reality that is irrelevant but that is how it is culturally perceived). Exploring this issue also seems to be an interesting pathway for future study.

My study is exploratory in nature where I made an honest and passionate attempt to initiate a platform on an issue that I consider to be closely related to my sense of 'being' and 'becoming' and extremely topical.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICS



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 2 May 2013

Project Number: CF13/946 – 2013000457

Project Title: Purdah, Globalization and Tradition: Resistance and dis/empowerment of University Graduate Women in Bangladesh

Chief Investigator: Dr Jane Southcott

Approved: From: 2 May 2013

To: 2 May 2018

Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Ben
Canny Chair,
MUHREC

cc: Ms Farzana Zebeen Khan

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton



www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html ABN 12 377 614 012
CRICOS Provider #00008C

APPENDIX B: Explanatory Statement

1st February 2013

Title: Negotiation the silenced ‘self’

Purdah, Globalization and Tradition: Resistance and agency among University Graduate Muslim Women in Bangladesh

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Student research project

My name is Farzana Zebeen Khan and I am conducting a research project towards a PhD at Monash University, Australia, with Dr Jane Southcott who is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

The aim/purpose of the research

The aim of this study is to attempt to understand how Bangladeshi female graduates construct their sense of self against the backdrop of Purdah, globalization and tradition in Bangladeshi context. There has been little research in the context of educated women and the cultural aspect of veiling/purdah in the Bangladeshi society.

I am conducting this research to find out the complexities and the possible power play that might exist in the society and also to understand how educated women deal with the issues in their everyday life. I hope through your participation I would be able to give voice to educated women's experiences and their perceptions.

Possible benefits

The participants may obtain a greater sense of self-awareness of themselves and their identities. In terms of benefits to the society, this study addresses Bangladeshi society and young university graduates and the findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the cultural, traditional and religious dynamics shaping the identity practices and life's pathways of young educated women. These insights are necessary to the future change of the Bangladeshi society.

What does the research involve?

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. There are three phases in this study. The first phase of the study involves 40-60 minutes face to face interview. I will ask you to collect photographs of women who according to you are educated and modern. You are asked to collect these photographs from different magazines and public sites. In the very first stage of our face to face interview I will ask about your personal details (names, educational background, age etc.). Then I will ask you to describe the photograph you have picked and explain the reason behind choosing the photograph. I will be using a digital recorder to record our interview.

The second phase involves an audio journal. This means, I will email you four theme based questions and you will record the answer in your convenient time and email the file to me.

The third phase involves another round of face to face follow-up interview. The time duration will be again 40-60 mins and questions will be based on your previous responses.

How much time will the research take?

The interview sessions are expected to take 40-60 minutes each. The two interviews will be at least one month apart. For the audio journal you can give it back to me any time within three months from the time of email.

Inconvenience/discomfort

The level of inconvenience to you as the participant will be kept to the minimum. The time and place of interviews will be arranged as far as reasonably possible to be convenient to the participants. Participants may experience some minor discomfort when talking about their own identities but they have the full discretion as to what they wish to talk or not talk about. There is no reasonable foreseeable risk of harm or side-effects to the potential participants.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You do not need to answer all the questions. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage but you will only be able to withdraw prior to your approval of the interview transcript.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be used to maintain anonymity. Pseudonyms of either the researcher's or your choice will be used instead throughout the documents used in the research. Only the researchers directly involved in the research will have access to the data collected.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes

The data collected is strictly for the purpose of this study and will not be used for any other study unless permission is obtained from the organization/participant.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Farzana

[REDACTED] or

[REDACTED] The findings are accessible for once the study is completed (tentative time frame July 2015).

<p>If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:</p>	<p>If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research <insert your MUHREC project number here> is being conducted, please contact:</p>
<p>Jane Southcott Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Clayton Campus, Monash University, Wellington Road, Clayton Victoria 3800. Australia</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	<p>Professor Shafi Ahmed Department of English Jahangirnagar University Savar, Dhaka-1342</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>

Thank you

Farzana Zebeen Khan

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Title: Negotiation the silenced 'self'

Purdah, Globalization and Tradition: Resistance and agency among University Graduate Muslim Women in Bangladesh

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

I understand I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

I understand that:	YES	NO
- I will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- unless I otherwise inform the researcher before the interview I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- I will be asked to answer interview questions regarding my identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- I understand that I have to audio record the journal and email the recording to the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

and

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage up until the transcript is done of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

and

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances.

and

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

and

I understand that no information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party

and

I understand that data from the interview will be kept in secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE PROFILE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATE MUSLIMS WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

The semi-structured interview questions used in this thesis were the following:

1. Background information: age, where born, where family lives, occupation of parents and siblings, formal schooling (primary and secondary schooling), University education, job, marriage, children?
2. What does Purdah mean to you?
3. Is Purdah important to you as a young woman? How and why? Can you give some examples?
4. Do you think Purdah is important to your family? Why?
5. Do you think Purdah is important to society in Bangladesh? Why? How?
6. How is Purdah part of Islam? Can you give me some examples?
7. When did you first know about Purdah? Where did you learn about Purdah?
8. What do your friends think about Purdah? Do they have same understanding as you? How and why?
9. Is religion (Islam) important to you? Why? Can you give me some examples?
10. Can you give me some examples of what it is for you to be a Muslim Bangladeshi woman? In your home and family? In the University? In your workplace?
11. What are some of the best times you had as a university student?
12. What are some of the challenges (difficult times) you had as a university student?
13. What are your future aspirations/ambitions/ In terms of your work? Social? Family life?
14. Do you think women in Bangladesh have opportunities to develop their education to pursue further education?) Why?
15. What are some of the factors that have contributed to you obtaining a University education?
16. Who are some of your role models in terms of education and career?

Semi-structured interview questions in Bangla are the following:

১. নাম, বয়স, কোথায় জন্ম, বাবা, মা, এবং ভাই বোনদের পেশা, নিজের পেশা, স্কুল ইতিহাস, উনিভার্সিটি শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, বিয়ে, সন্তান ?
২. পর্দা সম্পর্কে আপনি কি ভাবেন? আপনার কাছে পর্দা করা মানে কি?
৩. একজন তরুণী হিসেবে আপনার কাছে কি পর্দা জরুরি? কিভাবে এবং কেনো? কিছু উদাহরণ দেবেন কি?
৪. আপনার কি মনে হয় আপনার পরিবারের কাছে পর্দা জরুরি? কেন?
৫. আপনার কি মনে হয় বাংলাদেশের সমাজে পর্দা জরুরি? কেন? কিভাবে?
৬. আপনার মতে পর্দা কিভাবে ইসলামের একটি অংশ? কিছু উদাহরণ দিতে পারেন?
৭. আপনি কবে পর্দার কথা প্রথম জানতে পারেন? কোথেকে বা কার কাছ থেকে জানতে পারেন?
৮. আপনার বন্ধুরা পর্দা সম্পর্কে কি ভাবে? তাদের কি পর্দা সম্পর্কে আপনার মতই ধারণা? কেন এবং কিভাবে?
৯. আপনার কাছে কি ইসলাম বা আপনার ধর্ম জরুরি? কেন? কিছু উদাহরণ দেবেন কি?
১০. আপনিকি আমাকে কিছু উদাহরণ দিয়ে বোঝাতে পারেন আপনার কাছে বাংলাদেশে একজন মুসলমান নারী হওয়া মানে কি? আপনার পরিবারের বা আপনার বাসায় এটা কি আলাদা কোনো অর্থ বহন করে? অথবা আপনার ইউনিভার্সিটিতে বা আপনার অফিসে?
১১. একজন ইউনিভার্সিটি ছাত্রী হিসেবে আপনার ইউনিভার্সিটি জীবনের সবচেয়ে সুন্দর অভিজ্ঞতা কি এবং কেনো?
১২. ইউনিভার্সিটিতে অধ্যয়নরত সময়ে আপনি কি কি অসবিধার সম্মুখীন হয়েছিলেন?
১৩. চাকুরী বা পারিবারিক বা সামাজিক দিক বিচার করে -আপনার ভবিষ্যত পরিকল্পনা কি?
১৪. আপনার কি মনে হয়ে বাংলাদেশের মেয়েদের উচ্চশিক্ষার সুবিধা রয়েছে? কেন?
১৫. আপনার উচ্চশিক্ষার ক্ষেত্রে কি কি বিষয় কাজ করেছে?
১৬. শিক্ষা এবং পেশার ক্ষেত্রে আপনি কাদের কে আদর্শ হিসেবে দেখেন?

APPENDIX E: ZUNIA (THE LINK OF THIS ARTICLE WAS REMOVED)

Women's access to education in Bangladesh: How far is equality?

A Zunia.org original post



Introduction:

Since the last 100 years, International Women's Day has been celebrated around the world with much pomp and gaiety. This year's global United Nation theme used for International Women's Day is "**Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women**". This paper in particular, will focus on the first part of the above theme – 'equal access to education'.

History is likely to evaluate and judge the progress of 21st century by one yard stitch and that is human development, particularly the development of women in the developing countries (Huque 2003:03). It is shocking to note that women still constitute 70% of the world's poor and two thirds of the world's illiterate. They occupy only 14% of the managerial and administrative jobs. 10% of parliamentary seats, and 6% of cabinet positions.

In Bangladesh, out of the total population, 48.9 percent is women of whom nearly 86 percent live in rural areas and only about 16 percent women are literate compared to a 30 percent rate of literate men (Islam and Sultana 2006:57).

Education is considered to be one of the most powerful measures of bringing women out of the disempowered cycle. Beijing platform for action and the Beijing declaration stated, 'education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace'. Non discriminative education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualification is necessary if more women are to become agents of change (PFA: 146-47).

Women and Formal Education:

The decade of the 1990s was significant in the history of educational development in Bangladesh, with respect to primary and mass education, particularly for girls and women. The following table shows the present status of female students and teachers in different tiers of education:

Types of Education	Female students %	Female teacher %
Primary	50.1	36.3
Secondary	52.3	20.3
Higher secondary	41.6	19.2
Tertiary	24.0	17.7
Vocational	25.9	17.6
Professional	35.0	17.7
Teachers Training Institutes	37.3	24.6

Source: NARI- 2009

Special measures have been taken to ensure primary education for all girls. Financial and other incentives are being provided for girls of secondary school age. Prejudice to female education is rapidly breaking down due to media exposure, activities of NGO and government measures. Recent data indicate towards considerable improvement in this arena with increased enrollment and involvement of women at all levels. Some of the key achievements in women's education are as following -



- Net enrollment at primary level has reached 87.2 percent with 84.4 percent for male and 90.1 percent for female. This success is the outcome of multiple initiatives i.e. food for education scheme, stipend scheme, social mobilization program, increased number of physical facilities etc.
- In 2005, around 241,336 students enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) certificate level course of which 25.6 percent were female. TVET is now running with the target to increase women enrollment to 50% by 2011.
- Enrollment of girls in Tertiary Education level has increased. An international university for women only was recently established in the port city of Chittagong.
- Government of Bangladesh in trying to provide information and communication technology (ICT) based education at different levels of education system. Apart from Government, NGOs and other development organizations have taken initiative to ensure ICT facilities for women in both rural and urban areas; Local NGOs are trying to create favorable IT environment for women (NARI- 2009: 16-18)



Women and Vocational Education:

In the government's Nursing Training Institutions, almost 100% of the trainees are female which reflect the traditional role of women. In the service sector, Bangladesh government has taken initiatives to train up disadvantaged people especially women living at the bottom line of poverty. These trainings are basically Income Generating Activities (IGA) and are implemented at the Upazila level throughout the country from different government departments.



Different government departments and non-government agencies have specialized technical training facilities for semi-literate and literate women which have contributed in accelerating their competence and earnings. These vocational trainings range from IT to handicraft making, food processing, sewing etc.

Still to achieve in Education:

- The net enrollment rate of girls is higher than the boys in primary level but there are still some social practices (i.e. behavioral treatment) which favor boy learners over girls in many educational institutes. Moreover, basic infrastructural facilities in educational institutions for girls (i.e. girls' toilets, science labs) are not sufficient either. Another great concern is the dropout rate which is high among rural girls. The typical drop out ratio at secondary level is male - 65.7% and female - 73.5% (NARI-2009:19)
- Although 85.6 percent of primary school age girls are enrolled in school, the remaining 14.4 percent represent some 1.5 million girls (NARI 2009:19).

Future challenges in Education:

- The gender gap in the upper echelons of secondary school and an increasing trend of dropout rate pose key challenges to equitable education in Bangladesh.
- According to a baseline survey on primary education conducted by the directorate of primary education (DPE), the dropout rate for both boys and girls increased from 33 percent in 2002 to 47 percent in 2006.
- The situation is worse in slum areas where enrollment rates are only 61 percent and 26 percent of primary school age girls have never enrolled in a school.
- Inadequacy of trained teachers and also of female teachers, unfavorable classroom environment not conducive to girls and lack of security adds up to the problems. The social perception of girls being of less value and parents consequently having limited ambitions for them; child trafficking entreats are some of the crucial barriers to girls education. There are also some other broader structural factors which could be treated as threats for girls access to education, information technology and training. These include -

- Poverty
- Early marriage
- Religions superstition and social stigma
- Son preference in patriarchal society
- Insecurity of girls mobility

(NARI 2009: 19-20)

Women in Education: At a Glance

Primary Level:

- Bangladesh has already attained gender parity in primary enrollment by 2005.
- The overall annual rate of primary school enrollment between 1990s and 2000 shows relatively high rate for girls as compared to that of boys, 8.46 percent vs 6.48 percent.

Secondary level

- The target to achieve gender parity in secondary enrollment was set for 2005. The country reached desired goal by 1999.
- Between 1991 and 2000, the secondary education enrollment for female students depicts sharp increase (34% in 1991, 45% in 1995) whereas the enrollment of boy students substantially decreased (from 66% in 1991 to 55% in 1995)
- In 2000, girls enrollment surpassed boys (51% for girls and 49% for boys). The similar pattern of enrollment for both sexes could be seen in 2005.
- Enrollment of girls (rural) increased from 46% to 53% (1995-2000), boys declined from 52% to 47% (1995-2000).
- Enrollment of girls (urban) increased from 49% to 52% (1995-2005), boys declined from 51% to 48% (1995-2000).

Tertiary level

- The target was set to achieve no later than 2015, only 21% was achieved by 2005.
- During the last ten years, the enrollment of students in tertiary level has increased significantly from 280,516 in 1997 to 621,265 in 2006.
- During (1997 -2005), female enrollment in tertiary level has increased 2.6 times and male 3.6 times.

Adult level

- By 2015 equal male-female ratio is supposed to be achieved. In 2005 the ratio was adult male - 58% and adult female - 48%.
- The adult literacy rate (15+) has increased from 35.3% in 1991 to 52% in 2006.
- The literacy rate of 15 years of age and over shows substantial increase with male at 66% to 68% between 2002-2006 and female 43% to 48%.

Source: Halim (2010) and NARI (2009)

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, not much satisfactory result has been achieved so far. Due to positive actions undertaken in the national budget during the last few years, gender gap is apparently eliminated from the primary and secondary education. However, this gap remains very wide in the tertiary level education system, where no gender focused budgetary measures has been undertaken so far. For the same reason, women could not yet occupy 10 percent of the gazette and 15 percent of non-gazette government service positions fixed for them.

Also, during the last few years, women have reached a certain level in the labor market where they need higher level skills training. But apart from a few unorganized initiatives, no such vocational education strategy has been imparted so far.

Lack of social security also restricts women's mobility which is an essential requirement for developing one's professional life.

Very limited access to predicative resources is perhaps the biggest challenge women in Bangladesh face in their effort to develop their economic condition.

Women have little access to information technology education and are barely equipped with business education. Therefore, they lag far behind in all professions requiring IT and business knowledge.

Violence against women within the family and outside is a great challenge for women's education. Sexual harassment, also known as eve teasing has become a major constraint for female students.

Twenty first century is ushering in an era of new hopes and aspirations for the women folk, as the women of Bangladesh can now look forward with pride and hope for achieving significant improvements in education. So, the active co-operation between men and women is a must to clear the pathway to decent work for women.

